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COUNTRY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo) 1/2004

23 March 2004

1.1. This Bulletin has been produced by the Country Information & Policy Unit, Immigration & Nationality Directorate, Home Office from information about Kosovo obtained from a wide variety of recognised sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.

1.2. This Bulletin has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum / human rights determination process. The information it identifies is not exhaustive. It concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum / human rights claims made in the United Kingdom.

1.3. The Bulletin is sourced throughout. It is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain.

1.4. This Bulletin is intended to cover events during ethnic unrest that has taken place recently in Kosovo.

Ethnic Conflict, March 2004

2.1. Since Wednesday 17 March 2004, Kosovo has, according to BBC News, seen the worst ethnic clashes since the Kosovan War of 1999. [A2] There has been tension between the Serbian minority and the Albanian majority in a number of key hotspots since the murder of two Serbian youths in late August 2003, as reported in the Balkan News Reports of the Institute of War and Peace Reporting. [F1] There was a drive-by wounding of a Serb in the village of Caglavica on Monday 15 March 2004, which most reports such as the BBC reports have held to be a contributing factor. [A4]

2.2. Wednesday's series of clashes began in Mitrovica, an ethnically divided city (see annex 1, section from the CIPU SaM country report, October 2003.) Initial reports from the BBC and CNN (and other news agencies) indicated that three Albanian children were run into the river Ibar by Serbian youths, and two bodies were recovered on Wednesday morning, 17 March 2004. [A4][B1] Later reports, such as the Washington Post account, note that four children were involved,

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with two children drowned one missing and one survivor, and that the only account available is from the survivor. [G1] The funeral of the two dead children was held on Sunday 21 March 2004, with seven thousand mourners, and tight security that ensured it proceeded peacefully, according to a Yahoo! News report. [C3]

2.3. In Mitrovica, the BBC reported that there were confrontations between the Serb and Albanian populations at key border points, particularly the bridges over the Ibar and in northern Mitrovica. [A4] As UNMIK CIVPOL (the UN Police) and the KPS (the Kosovan Police Service) intervened, disorder extended to the ethnic groups clashing with the police, again as reported by the BBC and CNN. [A4][B1]

2.4. By Wednesday noon, 17 March 2004, various acts of disorder were mentioned in BBC reports, mainly perpetrated against the Serb minority and typically being acts of arson throughout Kosovo, including in Pristina. [A3] By Thursday 18 March 2004, Serb churches were being targeted for arson by Albanian rioters, again according to BBC news reports. [A3] The UNMIK webpage carried that UN General secretary, Kofi Anan, condemned the practice of deliberately targeting homes and religious properties. [E1]

2.5. By the end of Wednesday 17 March 2004, 7 people were killed and over 200 people had been injured, according to the BBC. [A3] CCN carried a report that KFOR announced and enforced a curfew at 19:00hrs local time. [B2]

2.6. On Thursday 18 March 2004, it was reported by the BBC that acts of revenge had been perpetrated by Serbs during the Wednesday / Thursday night, including the attempted burning of the oldest mosque in Belgrade, reportedly by Serb militants. [A3]

2.7. By 10:30 pm GMT, it was widely reported by CNN and other news agencies that at least 22 people had been killed around Kosovo province, and over 500 people injured, including 55 KFOR soldiers and 61 police officers. [B3] Pristina airport was closed to all flights, according to CNN. [B3] By 11:30 pm, it was reported by the BBC that UN Staff had been withdrawn from Mitrovica. [A3]

2.8. CNN reported that the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Bajram Rexhepi, held three "extraordinary meetings" on Thursday 18 March 2004, calling on all citizens to clear the streets and to stop all protests. [B3]

2.9. Late on Thursday 18 March 2004, according to BBC reports, Obilic, the largest Serb enclave near to Pristina was evacuated by UNMIK. [A3] Areas reported by CCN and other news agencies to have been hit by violence against Serbs in addition to Mitrovica and Pristina reportedly included Lipjan, Gnjilane and Pec: one source, CNN News, stated that half the province was affected. [B2] Serbian Government sources said, and CNN reported, that every Serb enclave had been attacked, alleging an orchestrated plan of attack. [B3]

2.10. On Thursday 18 March 2004, NATO announced that the NATO Operational Reserve Force (ORF) would supplement KFOR:- "A spokeswoman for Kosovo's prime minister said the reinforcements will number about 1,000 and will include 500 British troops, 150 British and US troops from neighbouring Bosnia, and up to 300 other troops," according to CNN. [B3] "The first group of an extra 750 UK soldiers being sent by the Ministry of Defence to Kosovo for peacekeeping duties have arrived" announced a BBC report, marked 09:19 GMT 19 March 2004. [A1] Yahoo! News announced, "Germany will send 600

additional troops to Kosovo to help quell an outbreak of violence there, Defense Minister Peter Struck said Friday." [C2]

2.11. According to Yahoo! News, the current strength of KFOR, the UN military presence in Kosovo, is 18,500 troops, which had been scaled down from an initial peace-keeping force of 50,000. [C1] UNMIK CIVPOL and KPS number 9,000 officers, the Economist added. [D1]

2.12. On Friday 19 March, 31 people were reported (by the BBC and other news agencies) killed and over 500 people injured. [A3] By Monday 22 March 2004, the death toll had been revised by news agencies such as Yahoo! News down to 28 people. [C3] Monday 22 March 2004 has been declared a national day of mourning by the Government, so reported the CNN. [C3]

2.13. The Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) reported that '...fears were growing that most of the remaining Serb enclaves had been effectively wiped out.' [F2] Damage reported by the BBC included the destruction of 22 churches and monasteries between 17 and 19 March 2004. [A5] 4,000 people have been left homeless, according to Yahoo! News. [C3]

2.14. The BBC reported that mosques have been targeted by Serb arsonists over the border in Serbia, such as the burning of the mosque in Nis on 18 March 2004 [A2] CIPU has been unable to find any reports as of 22 March 2004 regarding any damage or targeting of ethnic Albanians in Serbia's Presevo Valley as a result of the Kosovo disturbances.

Country Information and Policy Unit

23 March 2004

References to Sources**[A] BBC NEWS Website (news.bbc.co.uk)**

[A1] 19 March 2004, 09:19hrs 'British Troops arrive in Kosovo' (accessed 19/3/04)

[A2] 18 March 2004, 09:37hrs 'NATO sends more troops to Kosovo' (accessed 18/3/04)

[A3] 18 March 2004, 23:28hrs 'UN pulls out of Kosovo flashpoint' (accessed 19/3/04)

[A4] 17 March 2004, 14:21hrs 'Seven die in riot-hit Kosovo town' (accessed 17/3/04)

[A5] 22 March 2004, 10:46hrs 'Fearful Serbs hope for peace' (accessed 22/3/04)

**[B] CNN.Com NEWS Website
(edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/)**

[B1] 17 March 2004, 14:49hrs GMT 'Five killed in Kosovo clash' (accessed 17/3/04)

[B2] 18 March 2004, 09:48hrs GMT 'Kosovo violence "worst since 1999"' (accessed 18/3/04)

[B3] 18 March 2004, 22:36hrs GMT 'NATO rushes troops to Kosovo' (accessed 18/3/04)

[C] Yahoo! News (news.yahoo.com)

[C1] 19 March 2004, 'Questions and Answers about Kosovo' (accessed 19/3/04)

[C2] 19 March 2004, 'Germany sending 600 troops to Kosovo after clashes' (accessed 19/3/04)

[C3] 22 March 2004, 'Kosovo Declares Day of Mourning' (accessed 22/3/04)

[D] The Economist (Economist.com)

[D1] 18 March 2004, 'peace hopes go up in flames' (accessed 19/3/04)

[E] UNMIK - News (www.unmikonline.org/news.htm)

[E1] New coverage 17 & 18 March (accessed 19/3/04)

[F] Institute of War and Peace Reporting (website www.iwpr.net)

[F1] Balkan Crisis Report 454 "Kosovo violence escalates" 19 August 2003

[F2] Balkan Crisis Report 487 "Serbs Abandon Homes" 18 March

2004

[G] The Washington Post

[G1] 22 March 2004, 'In Kosovo, Two Worlds Divided by One River'
via Novinite.com (accessed 22 March 2004)

Annex A: Mitrovica (from the CIPU SaM Country Report, October 2003)

Mitrovica

K.5.33 The area of greatest ethnic tension and hostility in Kosovo is the city of Mitrovica. Divided by the river Ibar, the city has about 9,000 Serbs controlling the north bank and more than 90,000 ethnic Albanians living on the south side. The presence of 2,000 Albanians in the north, living under great pressure to leave from extremist Serbs, adds to the tension. [2b]

K.5.34 Violence first swept the city after a rocket attack on a UNHCR bus killed 2 elderly Serbs in the south of the city on 2 February 2000. Revenge attacks left 2 ethnic Albanians dead and soon afterwards grenades at two Serb cafes injured 25. Others died in a series of clashes and shootings across the city. [1] [15a] [15c] [18a] [17a]

K.5.35 A curfew was introduced in the city and a large KFOR presence installed at the main bridge across the Ibar. Ethnic Albanians held a series of mass protests against the partition of the city. The most dramatic of these was a march from Pristina to Mitrovica by a crowd estimated at about 70,000 people, which had to be kept at bay by KFOR using tear gas. Demonstrations by both ethnic Albanians and by Serbs required the intervention of KFOR troops with several injuries sustained. [1] [15a] [15c]

K.5.36 In August 2000, UNMIK assumed responsibility for and subsequently shut down the Zvecan lead smelter, (part of the Trepca mining complex, once the main source of Yugoslavia's mineral wealth) because of concerns about high levels of lead pollution. [1] [15a] [15c]

K.5.37 After 9 months of relative calm, riots erupted in April 2002 after the arrest of one of the Serb "bridge watchers" (para militaries who monitored people crossing the bridge) for a traffic violation. Over 300 Serbs confronted UNMIK police armed with stones and hand grenades, resulting in injuries to 22 UNMIK policemen. UNMIK responded by doubling the number of UNMIK police in northern Mitrovica. [15e] [15f]

K.5.38 In November 2002 UNMIK established its administration in northern Mitrovica, thus extending its authority throughout the whole of Kosovo for the first time. This was made possible by agreement with the (then) FRY authorities to discontinue financing parallel Serb structures and to support UNMIK in assuming control of the administrative functions and developing the KPS in northern Mitrovica. [15i]

K.5.39 By early 2003, KFOR and UNMIK police were manning the bridge instead of the "bridge-watchers" and 20 Serb KPS officers were patrolling the streets. 60 Serbs had been recruited to work for the UNMIK administration and Serb teachers had signed contracts with UNMIK. Nine "quick impact" projects were initiated to help with regenerating the north of the city, including relocation of the Kosovo Trust Agency HQ to northern Mitrovica, the installation of traffic lights and the refurbishment of schools. [15i] [43w]

K.5.40. Before 1999, there was a one-kilometer stretch of habitation that ran along the northern bank of the river Ibar, and in turn, formed the Roma Mahala, or district, in Mitrovica. [83e] It had a population of

7,000 people, living in approximately 1,400 dwellings. It was held to be one of the largest Roma districts in Kosovo. [83e] The entire district was destroyed in the Kosovo War, with the population displaced, mainly, to three refugee camps, one of which, Cesmin Lug, houses 256 Roma and Ashkaeli refugees in the Serbian north of Mitrovica. [83e] Remaining Roma have been caught in tensions between Serb and Albanian populations, and have been harassed by both. [83e]

[end]

