

**KOSOVO MISSION REPORT - MARCH 2002
to Canada's Department of National Defence (DND)**

by

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Overview

This report follows a DND travel grant allowing me to conduct field research in Kosovo as part of a study called: "*EDUCATION, MULTILATERALISM AND HUMAN SECURITY IN THE BALKANS*" while a DFAIT Human Security Fellow. The DND grant was smaller than expected, so the Mission (February 15th to 26th 2002) was shorter and more narrowly focused than planned. Because the cheapest available air ticket with connecting return flight forced an overnight stopover in London, I extended one day to facilitate meetings with the head office of the British Department For International Development (DFID). The London visit included meetings with officials in DFID's Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department, the Balkans Unit, as well as those working specifically on education. The Kosovo visit and London meetings provided me a good introduction to the principal education and related human security challenges facing Kosovo and the Balkans more broadly. One academic article is now being revised, another is under preparation, 2 conference presentations have already been done, and 2 others are planned this year, incorporating findings from my DND supported field research.

Official Meetings in Kosovo

My visit to Kosovo included meetings at the following international agencies in Pristina: the European Agency for Reconstruction (EU); the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); the United Nations Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) particularly in its Administrative Department of Education and Science; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); and the World Bank (WB). Meetings with Canadian projects, offices and other bilateral agencies included the Canadian Cooperation Support office; Liaison Office of the Government of Canada; the Kosovo Education Development Project (KEDP) supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); and the Kosovo office for British Department for International Development (DFID). I also observed a teacher training session with KEDP, Canada's/CIDA's flagship programme in Kosovo. Meetings with local Educational NGOs included the Kosova Education Center (KEC) at the University of Pristina; and the Union of Education, Science and Culture (SBASHIK) -- the teacher's professional association. Outside Pristina I participated in meetings with the UNMIK administrator of Malisheve joining a UNDP evaluation team on a tour of educational reconstruction projects. This gave me a good insight into how new schools (in Albanian areas at least) were being rebuilt, and the types of programmes implemented to replace the some 800 schools destroyed or severely damaged by the war.

During meetings and field visits I was able to gather documents otherwise not widely available, and a wealth of useful information while conducting informal interviews with senior officials. Both official meetings and unescorted tours showed me just how ethnically divided Kosovo remains. Although there appears to be good progress on physical reconstruction, multi-ethnic integration and cooperation remains a goal of the international community in principle but not much in practice. Concerning how this manifests itself in education one UNMIK official from Pristina lamented (off the record) to me that he no longer attends school openings. He said many children (supported by their teachers and parents) proudly sing powerful nationalist songs that portray Serbs with hate and vindictiveness and that some curriculum materials including textbooks still reinforce this. When I asked a second official about the problem he did not view it with the same concern. But this issue needs to be better assessed (examining similar or counter tendencies in Serb schools as well) through more formal, comprehensive and systematic research, particularly for its long term security implications.

Meetings Postponed for Security Reasons

Beyond official meetings and field tours I attempted unsuccessfully (for security reasons) to visit the town of Lipljan, but still hope to in future. Prior to departure from Canada I had arranged with the Serb-Canadian Society of Vancouver to visit a mainly Serb area and schools within Lipljan, to get a Serb view of the situation. But I was not able to publicly meet or travel with that English speaking contact (also an interpreter for UNMIK who worked daily until 4:00 PM). I could have gone separately and alone by bus after he had finished work at night but this would have been unwise. Civilians traveling with or meeting a Serb in public are vulnerable, could easily be identified as Serb sympathizer, and might be endangered.

Three years after the NATO intervention Serbs continue to feel insecure, unable to walk safely alone in Pristina and many other parts of Kosovo. Police or armed KFOR guards still must accompany Serbs attending official meetings or if they are transported on business through Albanian areas, according to UNMIK policy, a senior official informed me. There is still a real danger Serbs could be killed or hurt by Albanian criminal gangs or vigilantes even in downtown Pristina where none dare walk freely. In speaking with some Albanians (now the largely safe and NATO-KFOR protected majority) about this several people dismissed such fears as irrational. Some intimated only those guilty of past atrocities should worry. Other Albanians appear to be seeking a peaceful existence just wanting to carry on with their lives after the war. But as recently as early February 2002 local news reports documented hundreds of Albanians who rioted violently on Pristina's streets protesting UNMIK police arrests of suspected Albanian war criminals. They threw bricks damaging police vehicles and hotel windows, and intimidated others not joining the protest. Yet during my mission to Kosovo, following just one week after, all seemed relatively calm on the surface.

Unescorted Mitrovica Visit - Personal Experiences

While Serbs are still at risk in Pristina and many other Albanian areas, in some Serb dominated areas significant personal/human security threats exist for Albanians, those perceived to be pro-Albanian, or those working for UNMIK. I learned this first hand during an unescorted personal visit by public bus and walking tour to the ethnically divided city of Mitrovica where I (graphically) experienced the lingering effects of the 1999 Kosovo war, and its implications for long term human security.

Reaching Mitrovica from Pristina is only possible by crossing a bridge through a heavily guarded KFOR checkpoint dividing the Serb North and the Albanian South. On the Serb side about a dozen so-called “bridge-watchers” (mid 40s and 50s apparently ex-Serb police an UNMIK official later told me) wait and stare down all passers by. Just a hundred yards past the bridge, out of sight from KFOR, I was stopped on the sidewalk and intimidated by a man of about 30 with a walky-talky, in a small group. He claimed to be Serb police saying that I must show him my identification demanding that I go back across the bridge immediately. I refused asking him to show me his ID instead, but he would not. I told him I entered the country legally and was not engaged in criminal activity so he had no right to detain or interrogate me. After about 15 minutes of jostling (where I felt quite vulnerable) he and his compatriots suggested we “go for coffee” down a small alleyway. I declined, negotiating my way out by talking about the research I was doing, that I just wanted to learn more about Serb education activities and wanted to see the town to begin. While on my walkabout I observed French KFOR street patrols on a sweep and later doing emergency planning exercises on the bridge. A young Serb man of about 18 (who observed my altercation earlier) approached me warning me to stay clear of the “bridge-watchers” and to go back right away because I could be in trouble. Things were tense I later learned from an UNMIK policeman who said they recently arrested a couple of Serbs. In retaliation others warned they might kidnap an UNMIK official (I might have been a good mark instead on officer told me).

Initial Reflections and Conclusions

What initial conclusions can I make from my Mission? Given the limited time of one week for this visit I was just able to scratch the surface for my research purposes, but I hope to return later for more in depth work. However, my initial impressions from official meetings, general observations and personal experiences suggest that the effects of the 1999 NATO intervention still run very deep for both Serbs and Albanians.

Now despite the veneer of some normalcy in Pristina, conditions in Kosovo remain tense with potentially volatile human security threats in certain areas. Future security arrangements and aid programmes must better address long-term social, economic and psychological effects and impacts of the war. Formal education programmes in schools and universities have an important role to play. As do non-formal community education programmes and teacher training. Despite some international initiatives these have just scratched the surface in relation to need. Much more needs to be done to reconcile divisions and mitigate systemic conflict among ethnic groups.

Given that many Serbs (especially in Mitrovica) are hostile to UNMIK and KFOR, nonformal or continuing education and training sessions for local police (some of which the OSCE and UNMIK police are already doing I learned) as well as international peace-keepers might better deal with such issues. Even basic understanding of democracy, human rights, law and justice is still lacking as one UNMIK senior police officer informed me of his experience conducting training sessions for new Albanian and other police. Genuine community building and education programmes that create trust among Albanians, Serbs and internationals are also essential to overcome the enmity that produces the kind of intimidation I experienced in Mitrovica, and that many Serbs and Albanians face every day. Such situations can also quickly escalate into violent incidents or full-blown crisis. New efforts and models for training might help also improve civilian-military relations and de-escalate violent tendencies beyond just separating Serbs and Albanians. Helping communities to better coexist and collaborate ought to be a clearer goal.

Summary and Canadian Policy Implications

Kosovo remains a province of ethnically divided enclaves. The international community (peace-keepers, police and aid agencies) can be expected to remain in various roles over an extended period, perhaps for many years or decades, particularly as the political future of Kosovo remains unresolved. But even if independence comes, the Albanian majority alone may lack sufficient governance skills to stem future conflict, and properly integrate Serb dominated areas. There is also an illegal underground Albanian economy, corruption and a small arms culture that will continue to distort social relationships. Better collaboration among military, police and aid agencies is essential for eliminating this. Meanwhile Serbs in some areas believe they do not have the same access to aid resources, jobs and educational opportunities and see the international community favouring Albanians.

What are some implications for Canada's Human Security Agenda? Canada's role in Kosovo has so far has been strategic and limited. Its peace-keeping forces have withdrawn with mainly British, French, American and Russian forces remaining. Yet existing troops seem insufficiently equipped to some tasks. So more attention to, and dialogue about, civilian-military relations involving international and local partners might be useful. Canada could help facilitate. CIDA's education program, KEDP, focuses mainly on teacher training, but despite its obviously important contribution much more also needs to be done to address the problem of Serb-Albanian reconciliation and integration, school and curriculum reform, and education's role in conflict prevention or human security in the broadest sense.

Hopefully CIDA will take this issue seriously applying a "conflict prevention lens" in evaluating its current Kosovo program and future planning. This is called for in OEDC-DAC guidelines and in a recent CIDA Policy Branch paper. But so far this is only in a preliminary discussion phase and could take years to implement. To be most effective discussions ought to include more coordinated dialogue with DND, DFAIT, and CIDA bringing in field officers from each department, as well as executing agencies and policy researchers that work with them. There may be room for joint programming benefiting each department while improving field operations. The British Department for International Development (DFID), by comparison, is further along in interdepartmental collaboration beginning to address questions of "policy coherence" in new programming while cooperating with the British Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office. There is much to learn applying similar aims to Canadian foreign, defence and aid policy. It is a model Canada certainly can build on in its Balkan programming.

Finally, and more specifically with respect to education. There are clearly some useful peace and reconciliation programmes underway (some by NGOs and others that I did not have time to visit), but comments by several international officials, Albanians and Serbs as well as my personal observations demonstrate how education issues reflect significant human security challenges. Visceral hate and vindictiveness in school settings could be one important indicator of tangible future physical threats to individuals or communities, and a contributor to regional instability. This is a very real and significant concern – a situation that needs first to be better analyzed, then more effectively addressed. Surprisingly little academic or policy work has been done to carefully and comprehensively evaluate this or systematically respond to it.

In light of the above my thanks go to DND for a very productive Mission to Kosovo. I have enough contacts and information now to better plan future visits for more in depth and focused research. But I am happy to respond to any questions arising from this report. Some academic papers arising from my field research will also address some issues more formally.