

# **SOUTHERN SERBIA'S FRAGILE PEACE**

9 December 2003



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## SOUTHERN SERBIA'S FRAGILE PEACE

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Albanian-majority Presevo Valley in southern Serbia is one of the few conflict resolution success stories in the former Yugoslavia. Yet tensions linger, and a series of violent incidents in August and September 2003 demonstrated that the peace can still unravel. Serbia's stalled reform process is preventing the political and economic changes that are needed to move forward on many critical issues in the area, and there is a general sense among local Albanians that peace has not delivered what it promised: an end to tensions with Serb security forces and prosperity.

In 2001 the international community – NATO, the U.S. and the OSCE in particular – working in close cooperation with Belgrade authorities, successfully negotiated an end to an armed Albanian uprising in the valley. Sporadic incidents still occurred there until March 2003. Then in August 2003 eight separate attacks, many against the army and moderate Albanians, broke five months of relative calm. The following month, Albanian guerrillas a short distance away in neighbouring northern Macedonia – some of whom may have crossed from Presevo – fought two separate actions against Macedonian security forces, while yet another attack was launched against the army inside southern Serbia. Cross-border flows of refugees and possibly also fighters, combined with claims from the shadowy Albanian National Army (AKSH) of responsibility for two of the attacks in Serbia and both incidents in Macedonia, refocused attention on the valley.

The attacks appear to have been carried out by very few people, not all necessarily Albanians. Southern Serbia's Albanian population as a whole does not seem to support either the AKSH or renewed violence. Several factors have been at work. First was the announcement of initial official talks between Belgrade and the Provisional Institutions of

Self Government (PISG) in Kosovo, which got off to a halting start on 14 October 2003. In spite of the fact that official contacts have begun, extremists on both sides are already staking out maximum demands: Serbs for a partition of Kosovo, and Albanians for territorial expansion or "compensation" in the Presevo Valley, called "eastern Kosovo". A second factor was the Belgrade parliament's August declaration proclaiming Kosovo an integral part of Serbia. Thirdly, Albanians of the area are deeply unhappy at extremely high levels of unemployment and lack of economic prospects. Finally, certain Albanian political factions within the valley appear interested in weakening the hold Presevo Mayor Riza Halimi has on government and the ensuing patronage.

The attacks gave impetus to the demand of Presevo's politicians to be included in the Pristina-Belgrade dialogue. They emphasised the region's continuing problems, as well as failures in implementing specific portions of the understandings that apparently ended the troubles in 2001 (the Konculj Agreement and the Covic Plan). They sent a clear message that both Belgrade and the international community will have to keep paying attention to the valley in order to maintain peace and reduce tensions. Local politics have become more nationalistic, with less room for political manoeuvre and cooperation or compromise with Belgrade available to moderate Albanian politicians such as Halimi.

Significant progress has been achieved in the past two years, including the formation of new multiethnic local governments according to fairer rules, joint Albanian-Serb police patrols, and improvements in the Albanian language media. At the same time, promised education reform and the integration of Albanians into the judiciary and other public organs remain disappointing. The recent violence suggests that former Albanian rebel

commanders, some elements in Belgrade's army and ministry of interior, organised crime figures, and others may retain interests in keeping southern Serbia a crisis zone.

The incomplete peace in southern Serbia is further weakened by the continuing uncertainty over Kosovo's final status. The international community will need to remain engaged, pressing both Belgrade and Albanian politicians to fulfil all aspects of the Konculj Agreement, while focusing more attention on economic development. The UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the NATO troops there (KFOR) – particularly the U.S. contingent – and the Serbian government all need to reassess their performance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **To the Serbian Government:**

1. Reconstruct the Coordination Body for Southern Serbia according to the OSCE's proposal to include permanent members representing all relevant ministries, members of the community, mayors of the three Presevo Valley municipalities and a president appointed by the Serbian government.
2. Rein in extremist elements in the security forces.
3. Tighten customs controls along the Administrative Boundary with Kosovo, and crack down on MUP employees at border crossings who are assisting organised crime.
4. Crack down on organised crime in the Vranje region.
5. Transfer more security responsibilities from the Gendarmerie (paramilitary police) to the uniformed police.
6. Stop making exaggerated statements about Albanian guerrillas that needlessly frighten the Serbs and alienate the Albanians in southern Serbia.
7. Proceed with economic reform, in particular by removing tax and other unreasonable burdens on small and medium-sized businesses, and make credits available to such businesses.

### **To UNMIK and KFOR:**

8. Station KFOR troops and Kosovo Customs and Border Service officers at all crossing points between Kosovo and southern Serbia.

9. Step up its patrols along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with southern Serbia and emphasise controlling the cross-border illegal commercial traffic.

### **To the U.S., EU, Russia and Other Members of the International Community:**

10. Explicitly tell Belgrade, Pristina, and all others, including nationalist politicians like Jonuz Musliu in Bujanovac, that changing boundaries by violence is unacceptable under any circumstances, including any suggestion of partition of Kosovo or southern Serbia.
11. Maintain an international donor presence in southern Serbia and ensure that the OSCE office stays in the Presevo Valley.
12. Re-examine assistance efforts in the Presevo Valley with the aim of giving a new emphasis to economic development.
13. Institute guest-worker programs, especially in the EU and Russia, to relieve the pent-up political pressures caused by large numbers of unemployed young men in the Balkans, particularly southern Serbia.

### **To the Albanian Leadership in Southern Serbia:**

14. Publicly disavow and discourage separatism, including by dropping (and persuading Albanian language electronic media in Serbia to drop) references to "eastern Kosovo", and distance ethnic Albanians from the AKSH.
15. Make the tendering processes associated with disbursement of public funds more transparent and hold annual public reviews of expenditures of public funds in the municipal councils.

### **To the Kosovo Albanian Leadership:**

16. Condemn the AKSH, including its fundraising and extortion, and deter members of the KPC from maintaining links with it.
17. Encourage Presevo Valley Albanians to participate in Serbian institutions and elections and publicly disavow all territorial aspirations in southern Serbia.

**Belgrade/Brussels, 9 December 2003**



## SOUTHERN SERBIA'S FRAGILE PEACE

### I. INTRODUCTION

In May 2001 the Serbian government and what was then still the Yugoslav government – helped by strong NATO mediation – reached a settlement with commanders of the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac (UCPMB), thus ending a seventeen-month low-grade insurgency by ethnic Albanians in the three Serbian municipalities east of the Kosovo boundary line.<sup>1</sup> The Albanians pledged to “demilitarise, demobilise, disarm and disband” the UCPMB in exchange for guarantees that Albanian fighters would be amnestied, refugees allowed to return, a multiethnic police force formed and Albanians integrated into public institutions from which they had been excluded for decades.<sup>2</sup> A detailed blueprint, complete with goals and timelines, was drawn up by Serbia's Deputy Prime Minister, Nebojsa Covic (the “Covic Plan”).<sup>3</sup>

The first step was relaxation of the so-called Ground Safety Zone (GSZ), a horseshoe-shaped strip of land around Kosovo's western, northern and eastern boundary with the rest of Serbia that had been established by NATO following the air campaign against Yugoslavia and the withdrawal of Belgrade's

forces from Kosovo in 1999.<sup>4</sup> Serbia had been prohibited from deploying troops and heavy armour in the zone, a large portion of which was located in the municipalities of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac.

Albanians are a majority in Presevo and Bujanovac, and a sizeable minority in Medvedja. They had been subjected to decades of institutionalised discrimination, stepped up by Slobodan Milosevic in the late 1980s. In an unofficial referendum organised by their leaders in 1992, a majority of ethnic Albanians in the Presevo Valley had expressed the desire that their part of southern Serbia become part of Kosovo. During and after the Kosovo conflict, state security forces and police harassed the local Albanian population, in some cases torturing and executing civilians. This history of abuse, combined with the 1999 success of their ethnic kin in Kosovo, gave many reason to support the small groups of Albanian fighters who began to organise under the banner of the UCPMB in 2000 and exploit Belgrade's light security presence in the GSZ to attack police and army units.

After just under a year and a half of fighting in which about 100 people were killed, and 12,500 Albanians left the area, NATO convinced UCPMB commanders to lay down their arms in exchange for Serbian government guarantees that human rights violations would end and the process of undoing years of discrimination would begin. In May 2001, the Yugoslav Army (VJ) and police units began a phased re-occupation of the GSZ, in which the new post-Milosevic government demonstrated that it had largely abandoned the heavy-handed tactics of the former regime. Since that time, approximately 10,000 of the Albanian refugees have returned.

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<sup>1</sup> For details concerning the conflict and the UCPMB, see ICG Balkans Report N°116, “Peace In Presevo: Quick Fix Or Long Term Solution?”, 10 August 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the Konculj Agreement, the Demilitarisation Statement was signed by Shefqet Musliu and Shawn F. Sullivan, NATO head of Office in the FRY, in Konculj, 20 May 2001.

<sup>3</sup> The pledges of the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities were outlined in a May 2001 joint statement of the government Coordination Body for Southern Serbia, and the Republican and Federal governments in May 2001. The complete Covic Plan was publicly released as a small booklet, “Program for the Solution of the Crisis in the Pcinja District”, 2001.

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<sup>4</sup> See the “Military-Technical Agreement”, also known as the Kumanovo Agreement, <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/a990609a.htm>.

The joint Yugoslav Federal and Serbian Republic Coordination Body, formed in December 2000 to manage the anti-insurgency effort, shifted focus and became the lead government institution for overseeing the Covic Plan, with Covic himself at its head. The most important guarantors of this settlement were NATO and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which appointed a special representative and opened an office in Bujanovac in November 2001.

This report assesses the security and political situation, including continuing destabilising factors, in southern Serbia and progress on the Covic Plan. It also addresses economic development, which all observers consider the single most important factor impacting on long-term stability.

## **II. THE BACKGROUND**

### **A. GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL IMPERATIVES**

The municipalities of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac are situated in southern Serbia on the boundary with Kosovo. As part of the north-south corridor formed by the Morava and Vardar rivers and their tributaries, the Presevo Valley sits on the main historical trade and invasion route between Western Europe and the Levant. Today that corridor connects Central Europe and the northern Greek port of Thessaloniki on the Aegean Sea, via the Serbian city of Nis and the Macedonian capital of Skopje. Serbia's main north-south motorway begins in Belgrade and ends near Nis, just north of the Presevo Valley, where it gives way to a potholed two-lane road leading to the Macedonian border. Together with an adjacent railway line, this road is Serbia's main link to Macedonia and Greece, two states with Orthodox majorities that sympathised with the Serbs throughout the 1990s.

Since the late fourteenth century, Kosovo, southern Serbia and Macedonia have almost always lain within common borders, be they of the Ottoman Turkish Empire (1389-1912), the Kingdom of Serbia (1912-1915), or the various Yugoslav successor states (1918-1992).<sup>5</sup> There were always significant commercial and population movements across what have only recently become de jure or de facto borders (Macedonia 1992 and Kosovo 1999). Commercial and family ties among the three regions remain strong. Many residents of southern Serbia, Albanian and Serb alike, have family links to Kosovo and northern Macedonia. The region, characterised by the mountains that separate Kosovo from Macedonia and southern Serbia, has always been relatively impoverished, with a long tradition of banditry.

Part of the current instability in this region can be traced back to the border settlements imposed in the decade after 1912, which divided territories inhabited by ethnic Albanians so that more were outside than

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<sup>5</sup> The only exceptions were a brief period from 1878 to 1912, after the Congress of Berlin awarded Medvedja to Serbia while leaving Bujanovac and Presevo in the Ottoman Empire, and the even briefer period of rearranged borders during Italian and German occupation from 1940 to 1945, when Macedonia was partitioned between Bulgaria and an expanded Albania which also included most of Kosovo.

inside the new state of Albania. Serbian entry into Kosovo and Macedonia in the First Balkan War (1912) was followed by what would now be termed ethnic cleansing of Albanians.<sup>6</sup> Many survivors retreated into the hills above the Presevo Valley, where they nursed bitter memories. In Presevo and Bujanovac the invasions left deep scars, the more so since neighbours in Medvedja had been subjected to the same process in 1878, following transfer to Serbia at the Conference of Berlin. Oral histories of expulsion and atrocity can readily be found in households throughout the area on both sides of the administrative boundary line the Serbian government drew in 1947, splitting these municipalities from Kosovo.

But the question of southern Serbia goes beyond that of a strategically important route. The potential for wider regional instability stemming from events in and around Presevo should not be ignored. In a 15 January 2001 report, the UN Special Envoy for the Balkans, Carl Bildt, warned that any escalation in fighting in the valley could lead to renewed ethnic cleansing of non-Albanians from Kosovo, as well as drag in the ethnic Albanian regions of northern Macedonia.<sup>7</sup> It is generally accepted that spillover from the southern Serbia conflict was a key factor in the outbreak of the 2001 crisis in Macedonia.<sup>8</sup> The southern Serbia question can affect the security of Kosovo's non-Albanian population and has implications for relations between Belgrade and Pristina and associated international efforts in Kosovo.

## B. ADMINISTRATIVE AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION

The municipalities of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac are located in the Republic of Serbia, bounded by Kosovo to the west and Macedonia to the south, part of the Pcinje administrative district (Pcinjski Okrug) centred in Vranje. They have

Serbia's largest concentration of ethnic Albanians. According to the 2002 census, the ethnic composition is as follows:<sup>9</sup>

	<u>Serbs</u>	<u>Albanians</u>	<u>Roma</u>
<u>Presevo</u>	2984 (8.55%)	31098 (89.09%)	322 (0.92%)
<u>Bujanovac</u>	14782 (34.14%)	23681 (54.69%)	3867 (8.93%)
<u>Medvedja</u>	7163 (66.57%)	2816 (26.17%)	109 (1.0%)

Medvedja, completely rural, has only about 10,000 residents. Prior to the recent conflict, some 70 per cent were Serbs, the remainder Albanians. However, almost all the Albanians fled, and only some 800 have returned. Presevo is over 90 per cent Albanian. Bujanovac has the most complex ethnic balance, approximately 55.9 per cent Albanian, 34.9 per cent Serb and 9.1 per cent Roma. In the town centre, the three groups live in almost equal numbers, though the large settlement of Veliki Trnovac (around 10,000) is almost entirely Albanian. Each municipality also has a statistically insignificant number of other ethnicities.

In contrast, the administrative centre in Vranje is dominated by Serbs, most of whom continue to support extreme nationalist political parties. Its government is still controlled by the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), whose leaders – Slobodan Milosevic and Vojislav Seselj respectively – are facing war crimes charges at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague.<sup>10</sup> Vranje is dominated politically by one-time Milosevic crony Dragan Tomic, who controls the city's most significant employer, the Simpo Company.

<sup>6</sup> See "Report of the International Commission To Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of Intercourse and Education, Publication N°4, Washington, D.C., 1914.

<sup>7</sup> ICG Europe Report N°149, *Macedonia: No Room For Complacency*, 23 October 2003.

<sup>8</sup> The best analysis of the links between southern Serbia and the Macedonia conflict of 2001 is Ethnobarometer's "Crisis in Macedonia: Minority Politics in Southeast Europe, Working Paper 6", Rome, January 2002.

<sup>9</sup> See the Republic of Serbia, Zavod za statistiku "Saopštenje CH31", Br. 295, god.LII, 24 December 2002.

<sup>10</sup> In the December 2002 Serbian presidential elections, Seselj received 73 per cent of the vote in Vranje. B92 web site, 26 December 2003.

### **III. SECURITY AND STABILITY**

The first half of 2002 witnessed attacks against Albanian members of the newly integrated multiethnic police, police facilities and the home of a prominent recently-elected Albanian councillor, as well as bombings, kidnappings and shootings with no clear motive or target. Following a lull in the second half of the year, there was violence in 2003, at first primarily in the Bujanovac municipality.

#### **A. INCIDENTS IN 2003**

The incidents in January involved former UCPMB members associated with an ex-commander, Shefqet Musliu,<sup>11</sup> beating up Albanian members of the multiethnic police, presumably in order to intimidate them. Matters turned more violent on 4 February when two masked men shot and killed an ethnic Albanian, Selver Fazliu, who worked for Serbian state security (the Security Information Agency, BIA) in the centre of Bujanovac in front of several witnesses. The same day unknown assailants threw a hand grenade into the courtyard of the home of a Serb police officer in the Serb settlement of Levosoje, also in the Bujanovac municipality.

On 8 February the police arrested twelve Albanians in the Bujanovac townships of Konculj and Veliki Trnovac and seized contraband, including weapons.<sup>12</sup> Albanian sources complained that the operation was excessive – 250 Gendarmerie searched private homes – for the amount of weaponry found. The Gendarmerie also removed the Albanian flag from a new monument to two slain UCPMB commanders at the entrance to Veliki Trnovac. The flag had already been a source of contention between Serbs and Albanians: the Federal Constitutional Court had refused to hear a case filed under a law prohibiting minorities from displaying national symbols of other countries.

Five suspects were soon released, while seven were indicted on offences related to weapons possession and “enemy activity”.<sup>13</sup> Shefqet Musliu had reportedly met with some of the suspects only a few hours before their arrest, but fled to Kosovo prior to the operation. Local Albanians protested the operation peacefully, including a demonstration in Presevo, which the Coordination Body claimed was attended by 1,000.<sup>14</sup> There was also a protest in Veliki Trnovac.

On 14 February, the Bujanovac municipal assembly convened an emergency meeting to address the violence. While Serb members urged a special resolution condemning “Albanian terrorism”, the Albanian councillors objected. The council finally issued a collective statement condemning all acts of violence, calling for calm, urging the authorities to find and punish the perpetrators, pledging support in the fight against organised crime, and calling for continued implementation of the Covic Plan.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the violence continued. On 23 February, a Gendarmerie vehicle hit an anti-tank mine on the Breznica-Muhovac road in Bujanovac, killing the driver and seriously wounding the two passengers. Covic accused Musliu and two other former commanders of responsibility for this and the murder of the BIA agent. Although Musliu publicly denied involvement, he warned that if the authorities did not release those arrested on 8 February, “the situation can escalate”.<sup>16</sup>

The Presevo police narrowly averted tragedy on the morning of 1 March, when they discovered a bag containing 2.5 kilograms of explosives, set to a timing device and laid against a wall between the courtyard of the high school and the police station. The Gendarmerie eventually arrested seven men on 29 September in the Bujanovac community of Veliki Trnovac, whom it claimed were responsible for placing the bomb near the school and murdering the BIA agent.

<sup>11</sup> ICG interviews with Albanian politicians and representatives of Serbian security forces.

<sup>12</sup> This included two machine guns, two hand grenades, an anti-tank mine and detonator, a hunting rifle, two revolvers, ammunition, three radios, a metal detector and equipment for night surveillance, as well as an Albanian flag. Coordination Body, Privremeno oduzetu predmeti prilikom pretresa dana 08.02.2003.g.

<sup>13</sup> ICG interview with Serbian MUP.

<sup>14</sup> Coordination Body, Pregled “Komemorativnih” i Protestnih Skupova u 2003. Godina (Review of “Commemorative” and Protest Gatherings in 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Zaključci sa prve vanredne sednice skupstine opštine Bujanovac (14.02.2003 godine u 11.00 casova).

<sup>16</sup> “Ex-rebel chief denies south Serbia Presevo attack”, Reuters, 28 February 2003.



On 7 March, the same day that local politicians and international donors gathered for a donors conference for southern Serbia, the Gendarmerie shot and killed two Albanians in a car on the road between the Kosovo and Serbian checkpoints at the Administrative Boundary Line near Konculj. According to the police, the men had laid twenty kilograms of explosive near the road, connected by wire to a battery on the Kosovo side. When the men went back to check the device, and the police attempted to arrest them, they fled. The Coordination Body's report states that they were shot when they drew weapons and started to fire on police. The Albanian National Army (AKSH) claimed the two slain men as its members.

The incidents ceased following the arrest and detention of Musliu by KFOR in March, and the situation remained calm until shortly after his mid-July transfer from the military prison at the U.S. Army's Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo to a Kosovo prison.

On 10 August the first of a series of attacks occurred when unknown assailants fired three projectiles from a grenade launcher at an army post at Dobrosin. The AKSH claimed responsibility. On 12 August unknown assailants shot at an army patrol near Kursumlija. On 15 August unknown assailants fired at the Konculj border post, and AKSH again claimed responsibility. On 18 August in Lucane, a bomb was thrown into the courtyard of Ramiz Ramizija, an ethnic Albanian known for moderate political views. On 21 August another army patrol came under fire near Kursumlija. On 23 August three projectiles were fired from a grenade launcher at the cultural centre in Presevo. On the night of 27-28 August the border point at Konculj came under fire again, and on 28 August a grenade was thrown in the centre of Presevo, between the main mosque, the town hall and court building.

In the same period, there were several high profile attacks against Serbs in Kosovo. Two youths, twelve and twenty, were killed, and four wounded, while swimming in a river by their village, Gorazdevac, on 13 August; a fisherman died on 18 August a week after being shot in Ljipljan, and a grenade attack in Cernica village near Gjiljan on 31 August killed one man and wounded four. These were conflated with the Presevo violence in the Serbian press, implying a single pattern of violence against Serbs.

In early September, Presevo took in several dozen refugees from the neighbouring village of Vaksince in northern Macedonia,<sup>17</sup> who had fled in anticipation of a confrontation between ethnic Albanian guerrillas and Macedonian security forces. At least some of the guerrillas may have been former UCPMB fighters who crossed into Macedonia from Presevo.<sup>18</sup> This was followed by another Macedonian police action in the village of Brest, while in the Presevo Valley, an army vehicle came under fire on 24 September near Bujanovac, and one officer was wounded.

The suddenness and multiplicity of incidents in such a short period of time suggested that a new guerrilla movement might be taking shape and that Presevo's peace was eroding. The discovery on 26 October of two caches of buried weapons between Veliki Trnovac and the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) underscored the ease with which potential troublemakers can gain access to weapons.

## **B. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE INCIDENTS**

The majority of violent incidents in the Presevo Valley in 2002 and 2003 fall into several categories. First are attacks against Albanian members of the multiethnic police and municipal government. Second are attacks against the Gendarmerie, Serbian police and army. These two categories appear, or are designed to appear, to be the work of ethnic Albanian extremists, who oppose integration with Serbia and the "occupation" of the Presevo Valley by Serbian security forces. Third, a number of grenade attacks and attempted bombings against Albanian and Serb homes and businesses have no clear motive, except to enhance a sense of instability and ethnic tension. Only a small number of incidents appear to be the result of genuine inter-ethnic animosity, such as the brief kidnapping and abuse of an Albanian in Vranje in January 2003.

Since the disbanding of the UCPMB in 2001, there has yet to be a single fire-fight or sustained military engagement between Serbian security forces and armed extremists. Upon closer examination of the incidents of August and September 2003, as well as those earlier in the year, it is evident that all could have been carried out by a very few individuals. ICG

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<sup>17</sup> ICG interview with Razim Halimi.

<sup>18</sup> ICG interview with former UCPMB commander. The AKSH also claimed to have been involved in the Vaksince affair, though this is not backed up by reports from the ground.

interviews in the Presevo Valley found little sympathy or support among ethnic Albanians for armed insurrection against the Serbian government. In addition, there are indications that a Serbian soldier may have been associated with one of the incidents. To understand who and what is behind the incidents, we must examine the various interested parties and seek to ascertain which groups or factions have an interest in maintaining instability in the Presevo Valley.

### 1. Guerrillas in the Mist: the AKSH

One of the biggest question marks in the southern Balkans today concerns the shadowy Albanian National Army (AKSH). It has been difficult to pin down, though it has claimed responsibility for incidents in Macedonia in 2002 and southern Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo in 2003. The AKSH web site<sup>19</sup> espouses a program of pan-Albanian nationalism that calls for a greater Albania encompassing Albania, Kosovo, southern Serbia, the western and northern portions of Macedonia, and Greece's Epirus region, created through resistance to "occupiers" and violent struggle.

In late January 2003 in the former UCPMB stronghold of Lucane, extremists punished a local Albanian for cleaning AKSH graffiti from his house. A hand grenade was thrown into the courtyard of the home, and he was allegedly forced to pay a large sum of money.<sup>20</sup> The AKSH claimed responsibility for the anti-tank mine on 23 February that killed one Serb and wounded two, and stated that the two men killed by Serbian security forces on 7 March were members of its "Adem Jashari Division". It claimed the bombing of the Lozista railroad bridge in northern Kosovo on 18 April and two of the nine August incidents in the Presevo Valley, as well as the actions in northern Macedonia in early September. In response to the April bomb attack in Kosovo, UNMIK chief Michael Steiner officially declared AKSH a terrorist organisation,<sup>21</sup> and UNMIK police established a specialised counter-terrorism investigation unit.<sup>22</sup>

Serbian media and politicians alike have portrayed the AKSH as a large, well-coordinated terrorist group with numerous training camps in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia, four divisions and at least 50,000 members, that finances itself through organised crime, drug smuggling, and other illegal activities, including trafficking of women.<sup>23</sup> The Serbian government officially claims that the AKSH in Kosovo and southern Serbia has an operational strength of approximately 650 members, with training camps inside Kosovo near Gnjilane and Kosovska Kamenica.<sup>24</sup>

Ethnic Albanian sources in the Presevo Valley have told ICG that the AKSH has no real structure but operates loosely through "exiled" former UCPMB commanders in Kosovo and their former fighters in southern Serbia, who are recruited ad hoc to carry out acts of violence in Bujanovac and Presevo. According to the Coordination Body, AKSH has called publicly for all Albanians to oppose oppression with violence, and some Albanians in Bujanovac reportedly approached Bujanovac mayor Nagib Arifi to ask whether the Albanian establishment supported this.

ICG discussed the AKSH with numerous interlocutors – former UCPMB commanders, an individual who claims to speak for the group and runs its web site in Belgium, former UCK members, ethnic Albanian politicians, Serbian security forces, Macedonian security forces, KFOR and U.S. Army representatives, UNMIK and others – in an attempt to assess its exact nature and the level of threat it poses to regional security.

These interviews indicated that at this point in time there is no formal AKSH organisation or structure on the ground in the Presevo Valley. Rather, local guerrilla commanders, fighters or disgruntled politicians often use the AKSH name opportunistically, hoping to enhance what are often merely local grievances. AKSH "membership" appears completely ad hoc, with some local commanders declaring themselves AKSH on the spur of the moment. ICG was unable to find any indications of a larger regional organisation with formal or informal military or political structures

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ribashkimishqiperise.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> ICG interviews with Albanian interlocutors.

<sup>21</sup> "UN brands Kosovo rebels terrorists after attack", Reuters, 17 April 2003; ICG interview with UNMIK police spokesperson Derek Chappell.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> A typical example may be found in "Siptarska armija od 50.000 terorista", *Glas Javnosti*, 25 April 2003.

<sup>24</sup> See the Serbian government White Paper, "Albanski terorizam i organizovani kriminal na Kosovu I Metohiji", September 2003.

that could be seriously described as AKSH. It is questionable if AKSH exists as much more than a Belgian-based web site. In the words of the Macedonian interior ministry spokesperson, Mirjana Kontevska, "ANA [AKSH] does not exist, because it has no clear conception and policy, and it cannot have the serious support of residents".<sup>25</sup>

One interlocutor with ties to AKSH indicated that it would like to continue to carry out small IRA-style attacks against Serbian security forces. However, given the lack of popular support, the lack of a formal organisation, and the continued incarceration of Shefqet Musliu, it is doubtful that, in the security sense, these will be anything more than a nuisance.

To date none of southern Serbia's ethnic Albanian politicians have publicly supported the AKSH. ICG interviews with Albanians in the Presevo Valley have found no support for the AKSH among anyone other than disgruntled former UCPMB commanders and their associates.

Nevertheless, in spite of its weakness, the AKSH is playing a significant destabilising role in the valley by causing Albanian politicians to adopt a more nationalist idiom and the political spectrum to narrow. Moderate Albanian politicians there have told ICG that it has become more difficult for them to cooperate with Belgrade and the international community. At the same time, Serbian politicians increasingly feel that they must speak and act less moderately in order to respond to their constituency, which fears an extremist Albanian threat – whether real or not.

## **2. The Kosovo Connection**

According to Serbian press accounts, many of the attacks have been carried out by armed Albanians who crossed into the Presevo Valley from Kosovo. The Serbian Ministry of Interior has issued indictments against six former UCPMB commanders based in Kosovo, including Musliu, Lirim Jakupi, and Tahir Beshim, accusing them of maintaining links to AKSH and organising the majority of attacks in the valley.<sup>26</sup>

Covic has stated publicly and privately that the AKSH is simply another name for the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC).<sup>27</sup> That organisation is comprised almost exclusively of former UCK members and is commanded by General Agim Ceku, who rejects Covic's accusations as propaganda, aimed at the disbandment of an institution vital to Kosovo's prospects for independence. He argues that by absorbing, training, and giving a role to UCK members unable otherwise to re-integrate into civilian society, the KPC has played a stabilising role in Kosovo.<sup>28</sup>

The KPC was formed on the basis of the old UCK command areas, and it has had difficulty in establishing centralised command and control. Much of the rank and file gives its first loyalty to the local command structure, which is still composed of "too many famous names with too little training".<sup>29</sup> While UNMIK, KFOR and the international community have restricted it to a civil defence/search and rescue function, Kosovo's Albanians, Serbs and especially the KPC members themselves view it as being the nucleus of an independent Kosovo's army. A possible defence role is foreseen in the 20 June 1999 "Undertaking of demilitarisation and transformation by the UCK"<sup>30</sup> and the Albanian name, *Trupat Mbrotjese të Kosovës*, explicitly refers to "defence" rather than "protection".

Two individuals that the AKSH claimed as members were blown up by their own bomb in the 18 April attack on the Lozista bridge. As one was the KPC spokesperson in Mitrovica,<sup>31</sup> the AKSH had at the least recruited some members of that organisation. Under international pressure, General

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<sup>25</sup> "ANA ne postoji I nema podrsku stanovnistva", B92 web site, 5 May 2003.

<sup>26</sup> ICG interview with Colonel Bozovic, MUP commander for Peinje District. Democratic Alternative Press Conference, 25 February 2003.

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<sup>27</sup> ICG interview with Covic.

<sup>28</sup> ICG interview with General Agim Ceku, 23 September 2003.

<sup>29</sup> ICG interview with UNMIK source.

<sup>30</sup> The agreement was concluded between KFOR commander General Michael Jackson and UCK general Agim Ceku. It leaves open the following option: "the international community should take due and full account of the contribution of the UCK during the Kosovo crisis and accordingly give due consideration to...the formation of an Army in Kosovo on the lines of the U.S. National Guard in due course as part of a political process designed to determine Kosovo's future status, taking into account the Rambouillet Accord". Online at: <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/a990620a.htm>. The two generals' later agreement governing the role and composition of the KPC refers back to the Undertaking ([http://www.nato.int/kfor/kfor/kpc/stmt\\_principles.htm](http://www.nato.int/kfor/kfor/kpc/stmt_principles.htm)).

<sup>31</sup> ICG interview with UNMIK police spokesperson Derek Chappell, 30 October 2003.

Ceku sent a strong message instructing all KPC members either to have nothing to do with AKSH or leave the KPC. After this, 70 left, and another sixteen were recommended for dismissal.<sup>32</sup> UNMIK suspended a further twelve on 4 December 2003.

Earlier in 2003, KFOR conducted raids to seize weapons in nearby Gnjilane and Kosovoska Kamenica.<sup>33</sup> While Serbian tales of vast numbers of insurgents training in Kosovo are implausible, international sources agree that small groups of Albanians from southern Serbia may occasionally cross the boundary for “weekend target practice”. In large measure, they attribute the March-July 2003 lull in incidents to KFOR’s augmented electronic monitoring of the boundary and the imprisonment of Shefqet Musliu.

Both U.S. Army and KFOR sources told ICG that during August 2003 there was no cross-border movement of armed guerrilla groups, and that if there was any transit, it involved no more than a few individuals in a private vehicle. These and other NATO sources also indicated that ethnic Albanian “commanders” in northern Macedonia have requested weapons from former UCK commanders in Kosovo but were refused.<sup>34</sup> Given the lack of a physical KFOR presence – U.S. in particular – along the boundary with the Presevo Valley, the certitude is surprising. U.S. forces appear to be concentrating their intelligence resources on monitoring Islamic religious and charitable organisations, while largely ignoring cross-border criminal activity and the possible movements of armed ethnic extremists.

There is no question that former UCK and UCPMB commanders still maintain informal ties<sup>35</sup> and that many of them and their associates in Kosovo, the Presevo Valley and northern Macedonia offer each other ad hoc support. Six of his associates fled the valley at the same time as Musliu to take refuge in Kosovo.<sup>36</sup> Serbia has issued arrest warrants but it seems that all except perhaps one are in UNMIK detention awaiting trial with Musliu for crimes

committed in Kosovo.<sup>37</sup> There is also significant evidence that many of these individuals maintain commercial relationships across the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL), some of which appear to be less than transparent or legal.<sup>38</sup>

As described below, Kosovo Border Service and Customs are barely visible – and in some cases non-existent – along crucial parts of the ABL. So, too, KFOR is rarely visible. Until such time as it establishes a more credible physical presence along the ABL and works with Kosovo Customs and Border Police to tighten control, troublemakers will remain able to cross at will.

### **3. Former UCPMB Commanders**

Serbian, Presevo Albanian and international community officials agree that former UCPMB commanders have played a key role in the current unrest. Perhaps none is more visible than Musliu. International, Serbian government and Presevo Albanian sources have confirmed to ICG his involvement in some of the attacks of 2002 and 2003.

In late 2001, Musliu and other former commanders complained that the Albanian political leadership in the Presevo Valley was moving too slowly and called for armed struggle. NATO and OSCE officials met with the commanders and the Albanian political establishment to reiterate that neither violence nor boundary changes would be tolerated.<sup>39</sup>

KFOR twice arrested Musliu in Kosovo in 2002, including just before the July municipal elections in the valley. Since then, he has made increasingly vocal complaints that the local leadership was cheated in the peace deal. In early 2003, he and his bodyguards beat up two off-duty Albanian officers in Bujanovac. It is unclear whether this was intended as a message to moderate Albanians or to intimidate the police and keep them from cracking down on criminality.

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<sup>32</sup> ICG interviews with Brigadier Andrew Cumming (UNMIK advisor to the KPC) and Agim Ceku.

<sup>33</sup> ICG interviews with Serbian MUP.

<sup>34</sup> ICG interviews with NATO member state intelligence sources.

<sup>35</sup> ICG interviews with former UCPMB commanders, NATO intelligence sources, KFOR, and a TMK member.

<sup>36</sup> ICG interview with MUP Serbia.

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<sup>37</sup> The charges are: organised crime, kidnapping, unlawful detention, serious bodily harm, extortion, violent behaviour, and unauthorised possession of weapons. Musliu’s brother Xhevdet Musliu was arrested by UNMIK in late October 2003 for attempting to intimidate witnesses in the case. ICG interviews with UNMIK.

<sup>38</sup> ICG interviews with NATO intelligence sources, KFOR, U.S. Army, Serbian MUP, and Albanian politicians in the Presevo Valley.

<sup>39</sup> ICG interviews with OSCE and KFOR officials.

The Serbian government and local Albanian politicians have both told ICG that ten to fifteen former bodyguards of commanders in the ex-UCPMB stronghold of Lucane support themselves through local rackets.<sup>40</sup> During the fighting in 2001 UCPMB commanders – Musliu in particular – notoriously took a cut from traffic along the Gnjilane-Bujanovac road and other routes between Kosovo and southern Serbia, with well-established tariffs for different classes of vehicle.<sup>41</sup> They also appeared to have been active in running some of the cross-border smuggling.

Musliu and other commanders have several motives for destabilising the Presevo Valley. Members of the Serbian and local Albanian governments have criticised NATO for negotiating with these commanders in 2001, rather than with politicians, charging that this increased their legitimacy and political relevance without any benefit for stability. The commanders fielded several candidates in the July 2002 municipal elections on an unregistered citizens list who lost to Albanian moderates. They can maintain political relevance only by accusing elected Albanians of being duped by the Serbs and the international community and by organising violence. They also seem to resent the loss of revenues that came with peace.

UNMIK and KFOR demonstrated that they shared the Serbian government's concern about Musliu when on 22 April 2003 the latter arrested him on suspicion of having links to the AKSH and posing a threat to Kosovo's peace and security of Kosovo.<sup>42</sup> He was held nearly incommunicado by U.S. forces at Camp Bondsteel until 7 July,<sup>43</sup> when he was turned over to Kosovo civil authorities and placed in a prison to await trial. KFOR sources assert that from there he was able to communicate with his UCPMB associates in the valley and order attacks against Serbian military and police targets.

Veliki Trnovac – in the Bujanovac municipality – is Musliu's home, and many of the incidents of the past two and a half years took place in or near there. The September 2003 arrests of seven men from Veliki Trnovac on suspicion of planning and carrying out

some the violent incidents in the last twelve months, underscores this link. Four were members of the multiethnic police.

#### 4. Are Serbs Behind Some Incidents?

Interethnic cooperation seems to be flourishing in cross-ABL trade. In southern Serbia itself, it appears that individuals closely associated with former UCPMB commanders are involved in commercial activities – some legal, others perhaps less than transparent – with Serb businessmen in Vranje and Kosovo, who are themselves closely associated with some of the more extremist Serbian nationalist parties, such as the SPS and SRS. Many of these ties appear to involve cross-border commerce, and some appear to be linked to the agricultural industry in northern Serbia's Vojvodina region.<sup>44</sup> Others are connected to trade in construction materials and food. More lucrative items are drugs, fuel, weapons, and tobacco. Continued regional instability maintains an environment that permits illegal activities to flourish (details this smuggling are discussed below). Several of the 2003 incidents appear at least tangentially related to prominent Albanian and Serbian businessmen allied with political extremists.

Some incidents over the past several years may have been the product of multiethnic cooperation between Serb security forces and former UCPMB fighters, or perhaps even Serb forces acting alone. The Belgrade news weekly *Vreme* recently went on record questioning whether Serbian state security (DB, BIA) might have had a hand in creating the original crisis in November 2000.<sup>45</sup> Serbian government sources in Belgrade, who have told ICG that they do not have complete trust in their own security forces, say they are uncertain where all the violence is coming from but believe it may be from both sides of the ethnic divide and that criminal elements are behind many incidents.<sup>46</sup> Several Serb interlocutors in the region told ICG that some of the more extremist elements in the Serbian security forces have an interest in maintaining instability, hoping thereby to justify the presence of a large number of troops in the region, as well as the construction of a new army base south of Bujanovac. This view is

<sup>40</sup> ICG interview with local Albanian politician, confirming Serbian government statements.

<sup>41</sup> ICG interviews with Presevo Albanian sources.

<sup>42</sup> "Albanian Guerrilla Wanted by All", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 29 April 2003, www.iwpr.net.

<sup>43</sup> KFOR, Weekly CIMIC Report 1009 – 4 June 2003.

<sup>44</sup> ICG interviews with Serbian and Albanian politicians and businessmen.

<sup>45</sup> "Vecni plamen", *Vreme*, 9 October 2003.

<sup>46</sup> ICG interviews with senior Serbian government sources.

shared by a number of Albanian moderates.<sup>47</sup> Ex-UCPMB commanders denied involvement in many of the alleged 2002 incidents.

A number of Albanian, Serbian, international and NGO interlocutors pointed to the continued existence of hard-line elements in the army and Interior Ministry (MUP) who were loyal to the Milosevic regime and oppose normalisation of life in the Presevo Valley. The Pristina Corps (previously the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army) still has officers who fought in Kosovo during the 1998-1999 war. Many of these hardliners still nurse a strong hatred and animosity towards Albanians and fear that the events of Kosovo will repeat themselves in southern Serbia. Some of these individuals may be acting out of ideological conviction or ethnic prejudice. Others may be attempting to justify current troop levels in the region. Whatever the rationale, they are believed to have engaged in actions – some overt, others less so – that have increased tensions in the valley.

In a clear and clumsy example in early 2003, the army sent draft notices to some 230 Albanians who had fled Medvedja and are living in Kosovo. Since 1991 the Yugoslav Army has not called up Albanians for service, fearing they were disloyal. The one exception was during the 1999 NATO bombing campaign when notices were sent to about 1,600 Albanians in the Presevo Valley. The Coordination Body has recalled those draft notices, and Covic has stated that Albanians who had ignored them would not be punished. He also said that no new notices would be issued until an agreement was reached by Albanian and Serbian leaders.

The 23 August 2003 grenade attack on the cultural centre in Presevo may have been another incident of this kind. Shortly afterwards, a man in dark clothing sitting in the Santos café – a gathering place for former UCPMB fighters – was overheard saying into his mobile telephone in Serbian “the assignment is completed”. The police questioned the man – a Bosnian Serb from Prijedor – but were forced to release him when it became clear that he was an army officer stationed in Vranje.<sup>48</sup> Serbian officials declined to discuss this incident with ICG or to speculate on why an army officer in civilian clothing would be in such a café late in the evening in a municipality that is more than 90 per cent Albanian.

For nationalist Serbs, unrest in the Presevo Valley “proves” there is a greater Albania threat. A continued crisis in the valley maintains support for the nationalist cause and a continued large military presence. As Covic’s reaction to the draft notice affair demonstrated, this is by no means the attitude of all in the Serbian government.

### C. ORGANISED CRIME

Organised crime in the Balkans is ethnically blind. In considering stability in Presevo, both the government and the international community must remain aware of how extremists use organised crime to finance their activities; the valley’s location across the main north-south Balkan transport corridor makes it very attractive to criminals. ICG found many clear cases of cooperation between Serbian and Albanian extremists, including cross-border smuggling. There are also solid indications of cooperation between Serbian police and UNMIK and official Kosovo institutions on the one hand, and organised crime on the other. Criminal interests in the Presevo Valley, Kosovo and the wider region impact the stability of southern Serbia. While smuggling and racketeering finance extremist activity, it is also true that instability and extreme nationalism mask criminal activity for profit.

Neither UNMIK, KFOR nor the Serbs are doing much to stop smuggling. The Coordination Body claims that weapons are imported into the area from Albania and China, while local Albanian and Serb sources indicate that weapons of Serbian origin are also trafficked. KFOR denies this, and U.S. Army sources told ICG that no “contraband” (their term for weapons) was being smuggled across the ABL, although they admitted that in 2002, 40 tons of heroin transited Kosovo.<sup>49</sup> UNMIK and KFOR’s near complete lack of control over the boundary with southern Serbia and the large number of illegal truck crossings each day bring the accuracy of such claims into question. Indeed, other NATO sources confirmed that weapons of local origin, primarily from Serbia and both entities of Bosnia, make their way into Kosovo via the Presevo Valley.

The Serbian government and other Serbian sources claim that illegal narcotics are smuggled through, or

<sup>47</sup> ICG interviews with ethnic Albanian politicians.

<sup>48</sup> ICG interviews with international community representatives in Presevo, Albanian politicians, and former UCPMB figures.

<sup>49</sup> ICG interviews with U.S. Army.

perhaps even manufactured, in the Presevo Valley.<sup>50</sup> The Albanian settlement of Veliki Trnovac, just beside Bujanovac town, has a reputation dating back to the 1980s as a hotbed for drug smuggling. The head of the Veliki Trnovac community says these accusations are overblown, noting that Yugoslav and Serb forces found no laboratories in a comprehensive search during the conflict with the UCPMB.

While organised cross-border crime is clearly a problem, the Serbian authorities tend to make vague accusations about the “Albanian mafia”, while downplaying links to smugglers and organised crime in other parts of Serbia and collusion by local Serb police. As ICG discovered, Serbia’s police, UNMIK and Kosovo Customs Service officials appear to turn blind eyes to smugglers, both Albanian and Serbian. In some cases, they appear to be actively abetting them.

Several cases indicate the involvement of local Serbian police in organised crime, for example, the kidnapping of Nebi Nuhiu, the owner of a petrol station in Presevo on 2 February 2000. Vranje police officers claimed falsely to the victim’s family that they could secure his release in return for a bribe. One Vranje inspector was arrested in April 2001 but soon released. Two others were arrested on fraud charges in connection with the case, and another has fled. Although Covic has promised clarification, those ultimately responsible have not been brought to justice. A judge working on the case told ethnic Albanians it would never be resolved because the police in Bujanovac and Vranje were involved. The new head of MUP in Vranje appears to be aware that a problem exists, as MUP arrested two of its members for smuggling cigarettes in mid-2003.<sup>51</sup> On 19 October the Serbian police again arrested two of their own, a Serb and an Albanian, for involvement in attempting to smuggle 30 Kurds into Kosovo via Mucibaba. A third police officer of Albanian ethnicity charged with complicity is still at large.<sup>52</sup>

## 1. “Industrial Scale Smuggling”

ICG has found that while there is little doubt some Albanians on both sides of the ABL are involved in illegal economic activities, it would not be possible without the active cooperation of Serbian authorities and police, and Serb organised crime and business partners. The extensive cross-border illegal traffic has broader security implications, not only for the Presevo Valley, but also for Kosovo, Macedonia and the European Union.

To describe the boundary between Kosovo and southern Serbia as porous would be a compliment; functionally, it was – until improvements were made at some crossing points in mid-November – practically non-existent. There are presently four major boundary crossings between Kosovo’s eastern boundary and southern Serbia. These are (from north to south) Merdare (gate 3), Mutivoda (gate 4), Konculj (gate 5) and Mucibaba (gate 6). In addition there are numerous smaller crossing points that are essentially unsuitable for large-scale smuggling or heavy truck traffic, due to the poor roads, but can be used by smaller trucks or pack animals. The Serbian authorities have police officers on duty 24 hours a day at all these crossings, while Serbian customs officers work from 10:00 to 19:00 daily.<sup>53</sup> On the Kosovo side, until 12 November, the Kosovo Border Service and Customs Service had officers only at Gates 3 and 5 (Konculj and Merdare). All other crossing points with southern Serbia were left unattended.

ICG found no visible KFOR presence at any of the official or unofficial crossings with southern Serbia, three of which are in the U.S. Army’s zone of operations. The fourth, at Merdare, has an unoccupied KFOR camp. In addition, although the Serb police maintain patrols at the smaller border crossings, as of this writing, places such as Muhovac still had no Kosovo police presence. ICG researchers crossed the boundary between Kosovo and southern Serbia at numerous places, both during daylight hours and after dark, without seeing any evidence of KFOR control on the Kosovo side.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See the Serbian government White Paper, “Albanski terorizam i organizovani kriminal na Kosovu I Metohiji”, September 2003.

<sup>51</sup> ICG interview with high ranking MUP official.

<sup>52</sup> “Sprečen sverc 30 Kurda u Presevo”, B92 web site, 19 October 2003.

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<sup>53</sup> ICG interviews with Serbian MUP and customs officers. ICG interview with a Serbian freight forwarding company.

<sup>54</sup> Since initial research was completed for this paper, the Kosovo customs service claims to have increased its presence along the border. ICG’s interviews with travellers in the area in the last few weeks indicate that this presence

UNMIK, the Kosovo Border Service and the Kosovo Customs Service were absent from Mucibaba, the main crossing point between Presevo and Gnjilane, until 12 November. During daylight hours when the Serbian customs officer is on duty, few commercial vehicles cross this boundary between southern Serbia and Kosovo. But after dark, Mucibaba became a centre for what one KFOR interlocutor called "industrial scale smuggling". ICG observed numerous commercial vehicles crossing the boundary in both directions at Mucibaba after the Serbian customs officer had left for the day. Serbian MUP officers allowed them to pass despite the absence of customs officers. Although the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) claimed to have an officer on the hill at Mucibaba full time prior to 12 November,<sup>55</sup> ICG saw no evidence of this either in daylight or after dark in the course of numerous crossings. A source within the Kosovo Customs Service told ICG that Customs was afraid to patrol there after dark. ICG saw no KFOR presence anywhere at Mucibaba, day or night.

The presence of UNMIK organs at the border crossings does not ensure that smuggling will slow down. Even where Kosovo Customs and Police had established a full time presence, ICG observed numerous examples of illegal crossings, apparently with the knowledge, and perhaps complicity of UNMIK and other Kosovo Police and Customs personnel.

At Merdare there is little commercial truck traffic during daylight hours. But after dark, on numerous occasions, ICG observed over fifteen trucks lined up on each side of the border ready to cross. Again at Merdare, ICG witnessed Serbian police permitting trucks to cross into and out of Kosovo when there was no Serbian customs officer present. On the Kosovo side this traffic appeared to be facilitated by the compliance and cooperation of the Kosovo Border Service and Kosovo Customs Service, all under the supervision of an UNMIK uniformed police officer. All knew full well that that there was no customs official present on the Serbian side and, therefore, that the paperwork being presented to the Kosovo Customs officer could not have been validated by Serbian authorities. The only KFOR presence at Merdare is an abandoned KFOR camp.

At smaller unregulated border crossings, such as Muhovac, there is still no Kosovo police or Customs presence whatsoever.

ICG observed twenty to 30 trucks crossing illegally into Kosovo every day at Merdare and Mucibaba alone. ICG was unable to gain an accurate estimate of the traffic that passed through Mutivoda and Konculj but interlocutors in the Presevo Valley claim that the situation there is similar, particularly after the Serbian customs officer leaves for the night.

ICG interviews with KFOR personnel revealed that KFOR is well aware of the extent of the smuggling, as well as the possible connections between organised crime and former commanders of the NLA, UCK, and UCPMB. Some of these commanders appear to be using the proceeds from organised crime to finance their armed groups. The disturbing lack of concern by UNMIK and KFOR on the one hand, and Serbian MUP and Customs on the other, for securing the boundary between Kosovo and southern Serbia is certainly a contributing factor to continued instability in the Presevo Valley. As long as opportunities exist to earn money illegally, many individuals will attempt to keep the area unstable in hopes of continuing lucrative smuggling.

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has indeed improved slightly; where previously it was non-existent, it can now be described as sporadic, and there is still no regular customs presence on the Kosovo side.

<sup>55</sup> ICG interview with KPS.



#### **IV. SERBIAN SECURITY FORCES AND THE ALBANIANS**

The Republic of Serbia and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) use three institutions to carry out security functions in the Presevo Valley: 1) the interior ministry's (MUP) regional police headquarters in Vranje, which is responsible for overseeing the multiethnic and uniformed police; 2) the Army of Serbia and Montenegro (VSCG); and 3) the MUP special forces unit known as the Gendarmerie. Their relations with ethnic Albanians have always been tense, to the point of documented human rights abuses.<sup>56</sup> Most international observers, however, agree that the behaviour of Serbian security forces has improved since their re-entry into the GSZ in 2001. Nonetheless, there is room for further progress, and, as noted above, there are subtle indications that some members of the security forces are not eager for full normalisation in the Presevo Valley.

##### **A. SOURCES OF FRICTION**

The exact number of Serbian security forces in the region is unknown. Under the Konculj Agreement, Serbian forces were limited to 16,000 police and soldiers in the GSZ. Deputy Prime Minister Covic claims that number has "substantially" decreased.<sup>57</sup> The Coordination Body has told ICG that there are approximately 2,200 VSCG soldiers in the Presevo Valley: 1,200 in fortified outposts along the ABL and 1,000 in Bujanovac and Presevo. In addition, the Coordination Body claims that some 600 Gendarmes are in the valley. This does not take into account the large VSCG presence in nearby Vranje and other non-Albanian municipalities in the Peinje District. In any case, local and international observers believe that the number of security forces may actually be far higher. Still, it appeared to ICG analysts that the Serbian security presence – although still highly visible – has been reduced significantly since 2001, though there is no way to verify either Serbian or Albanian claims of numbers.

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<sup>56</sup> For a detailed overview of the human rights situation in the Presevo Valley, see the Belgrade Humanitarian Law Centre's 77-page report, "Albanci u Srbiji: Presevo, Bujanovac i Medvedja".

<sup>57</sup> Statement delivered by Dr Nebojsa Covic, head of the Coordination Body for the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja Municipalities, 7 March 2003.

One of the most common complaints by Albanians is that individuals or units which committed human rights abuses during the Kosovo conflict now are part of the MUP, Gendarmerie or VSCG. Albanians insist that the removal of all who served previously in Kosovo was a basic tenet of the demilitarisation agreement. The Coordination Body and the Serbian government vigorously deny that members of the Red Berets or other paramilitary units implicated in war crimes still serve in southern Serbia, and they contend that all units are firmly under civilian control. The Coordination Body assured ICG that at least two thirds of regular police brought in from Kosovo or other parts of Serbia have been removed from the area. Moderate Albanian politicians insist that problematic individuals remain.

The most questionable of the security forces are probably the Gendarmerie, a special forces police unit whose members are better trained and equipped than the VSCG, and whose equipment includes Hummer vehicles, armoured personnel carriers, anti-tank missiles, and various kinds of artillery, including anti-aircraft. The Gendarmerie were formed on the basis of the Special Police Unit (PJP) that saw extensive action in Kosovo during 1998-1999 and is rumoured to have committed numerous atrocities against Albanians there. Its head, General Radosavljevic, hails from the Kosovo town of Pec, and his possible role in war crimes during the Kosovo conflict remains a matter of speculation. The Gendarmerie incorporated at least 80 members of the infamous State Security Unit for Special Operations (the JSO, Red Berets, "Frankie's Boys") after it was disbanded for complicity in the assassination of Premier Zoran Djindjic on 12 March 2003. It is unknown how many are now stationed in the Presevo Valley.

The Albanian leadership and civilian population in any case would like to see a reduction in the number of army and special police units and an increase in the responsibilities of the multiethnic police, which they insist was a condition of the demilitarisation agreement.

Local Serbs, on the other hand, tend to see the security forces as their protectors from potential "terrorist" threats, and the government insists that reductions depend on the state of security. A key problem is lack of confidence in the multiethnic police; many Serbs believe that the Albanian members would give their first allegiance to ethnic kin, not law enforcement. The Gendarmerie are used

for search, seizure and arrest operations that the Coordination Body and MUP feel might otherwise be compromised.

Albanians complain about the masked, assault rifle-toting Gendarmerie based around many ethnic Albanian settlements and along the Kosovo border. Convoys of Gendarmerie armoured vehicles cause resentment when they rumble through towns and villages. A frequent contention is that in Muhovac, Dobrosin, Breznica and other villages in the GSZ the Gendarmerie prevent Albanians from working fields, cutting trees in the forest and using land close to the administrative boundary for grazing. Albanian representatives also contend that in some areas the presence of Gendarmerie discourages Albanians who fled during the conflict from returning.

Despite the Albanians' inherent distaste for the security services, stemming from past abuses, ethnic Albanian sources admit that their behaviour is improved. Nonetheless, the raids and arrests in Veliki Trnovac on 29 September demonstrated that there is still ample scope for more progress.<sup>58</sup> Provocative remarks or signals, such as the display by one Gendarmerie officer of a swastika on his uniform, rattle. Beatings and seizures of money during raids and house searches without court orders still appear to be problems. Another incident reported to ICG was a night visit by masked soldiers to the home of an ethnic Albanian. And on 23 October a soldier stopped a taxi and commandeered it, after verbally abusing the Albanian driver and four passengers.<sup>59</sup>

While the recent incidents may justify the continued Gendarmerie and army presence, the Belgrade authorities could improve public relations by disciplining or prosecuting those who commit excesses. To its credit, the army appears to be taking preliminary steps to address the 23 October incident, including a psychological evaluation of the soldier in question.<sup>60</sup>

## V. THE ECONOMY

The municipalities of southern Serbia are severely depressed and under-developed, and economic dissatisfaction contributes significantly to continued instability. According to one survey, Presevo, with an overwhelmingly Albanian population, was Serbia's most economically deprived municipality in 1998-1999, with a per capita income less than one third that of the rest of the republic.<sup>61</sup> The economic crisis stems, to some extent, from the Milosevic-era policy of abandoning Kosovo and the Albanian majority municipalities of southern Serbia but also from Serbia's largely unreformed economy, which still discriminates against private businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises. To build a lasting peace, local Albanian politicians, the international community, and Belgrade will have to work more closely together to create self-sustaining economic opportunities. In addition to continued investment in the region, this requires serious engagement on the republic level to restart the long-stalled reform process.

### A. NEGLECT AND DISCRIMINATION

Economic neglect of the Presevo Valley is most visible on the road from Nis to the Macedonian border, via the picturesque Grdelica Gorge, Bujanovac and Presevo. What should be southeast Europe's most important north-south transit route is little more than a two-lane road, with potholes, ruts and a surface so poor in some stretches that vehicles are unable to drive faster than 70 kilometres (43 miles) per hour.

Long-term discrimination against Albanians in employment in public companies, socially-owned enterprises and official institutions, as well as the dismissal of Albanians during the NATO-Milosevic confrontation, have resulted in an almost exclusively Serb public sector workforce. Serbs manage services like the electric company, post office and Telecom, as well as publicly-owned enterprises like the HEBA mineral water factory in Bujanovac, where 95 per cent of the workforce is Serb. In Presevo, where Albanians are 91 per cent of the population, Serbs still hold the majority of public sector jobs. Most

<sup>58</sup> See "Public Statement of the Council for Human Rights in Bujanovac", 30 September 2003.

<sup>59</sup> "Vojnik maltretirao taksistu Cerima Redzepija i cetvoricu njegovih putnika", Fond za humanitarno pravo, 4 November 2003.

<sup>60</sup> "Vojnik SCG na psihijatrijskom ispitivanju zbog incidenta", B92 web site, 4 November 2003.

<sup>61</sup> Study of the G17 institute, cited in "Albanians in Serbia: Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja", Humanitarian Law Center, 2002.

Albanians have turned to the private sector to survive.

Albanians frequently run small businesses such as import-export companies and wholesale or retail operations. Many own trucks and are engaged in transport. Presevo has a small bottling plant, a flour mill, several warehouses and a concrete plant. Primarily the region, which has relatively fertile soil, is devoted to small agriculture. In spite of this, ICG noticed that at least one third of cultivable land in Presevo municipality was fallow. Local interlocutors suggested this may be due to unfavourable tax rates for agricultural land. It appears that only one village in the valley has access to irrigation, even though streams are plentiful and the mountains on both sides offer ample locations for dams.

The poor economy and historic discrimination have forced most Albanians to survive by other means. In many families, one or more members work abroad, and remittances form a significant source of income. A councillor in the Presevo municipal assembly said that without some 5,000 (over 10 per cent of the population) who work abroad and send money home, most residents could not get by. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that some residents work in Kosovo, where they can find higher paying jobs. The president of Veliki Trnovac, who pointed out new and substantial but uninhabited houses, estimated that 25 to 30 per cent of the residents worked abroad, in Switzerland, Germany or elsewhere. The younger generation finds it harder to work abroad, however, since it has become more difficult to get visas for the European Union and North America. As a result, much social dissatisfaction that previously would have found an outlet through economic migration is now bottled up.

Like the rest of former Yugoslavia, southern Serbia is burdened with failing public enterprises and a slow and corrupt privatisation process that has yielded few viable enterprises. In Presevo, with 48,000 residents, the seven largest companies are publicly owned and employ a total of 667. Five of these are saddled with debt to the Development Fund.<sup>62</sup> Another large employer is the Simpo company, headquartered in Vranje and controlled by a former Milosevic crony.

The largest employer in Bujanovac, the HEBA mineral water company, has 510 workers.<sup>63</sup> Most of the ten other major enterprises are socially owned, and local sources indicated that only four or five could be viable in private hands. One of these is the Tobacco Industry Bujanovac, which is already 42.5 per cent privately owned. British American Tobacco recently purchased the cigarette factory in Vranje and Phillip Morris one in Nis. It is expected that these privatisations will increase demand for domestically grown tobacco from Presevo and Bujanovac.<sup>64</sup> How this will affect the local Albanian population is uncertain, as only thirteen of the 170 workers in the Bujanovac plant are Albanian.

Ironically, as state-owned enterprises began to collapse during the 1990s, the historically-privileged Serb population found it harder to cope with changing economic realities than Albanians, who were already forced to survive by alternative means. With public sector jobs becoming more precious, however, inter-ethnic political battles over municipal institutions have become fiercer. Seeing many Albanians doing better, local Serbs are quick to exaggerate the level of criminality in the Albanian community.

Unemployment is high in all three municipalities. In Bujanovac, 6,000 people are registered as employed, 4,400 as unemployed. One NGO estimated that the actual number of unemployed there is 10,000, 70 per cent Albanian. ICG saw many working-age men walking the streets, congregating in cafes, and generally hanging around with little to do in each municipality.

The greatest long-term security challenge is to address the unemployment of young, unemployed Albanian males in the Presevo Valley, most significantly the estimated 2,000 former UCPMB fighters. An ethnic Albanian interlocutor claimed that only 2 or 3 per cent of these have jobs and that the Civic Plan neglects them. A former UCPMB commander complained that only eight fighters had been incorporated into the multiethnic police. Until this segment of society is given a reason to abandon

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<sup>62</sup> "Enterprises in Presevo Municipality", Serbian government document summarising 7 March 2003 donors conference for Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac.

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<sup>63</sup> "Enterprises in the Bujanovac Municipality", Serbian government pamphlet from the donors conference, 7 March 2003.

<sup>64</sup> According to the Republic of Serbia's Law on Tobacco, purchasers of domestic tobacco industries must obtain the greater of 2000 tons a year or 50 per cent of their tobacco from Serbia.

political violence linked to criminal activity, UCPMB commanders, AKSH organisers and others will have a ready pool of recruits.

Some local politicians noted that while donors and the government had invested much in infrastructure, nothing concrete had been done for industry. Local politicians frequently say too much attention has been placed on security and too little on economic development. Promises to bring industry and business representatives on to the Coordination Body have yet to be fulfilled. No credits are available to small and medium-sized enterprises, and privatisation has yet to really begin. Many Albanians fear that as it moves forward, Serbs will take control of the more lucrative firms, leaving Albanians without opportunities for employment. If Serbia's privatisation process to date is any indicator, these fears are justified. The tender or auction procedures could well be fraught with illegalities, non-transparent practices and crony arrangements.

The Presevo Valley is ideal for raising livestock and growing tobacco. It has a climate similar to Macedonia's, which makes three harvests possible annually. Both Bujanovac and Presevo have tobacco processing factories. Natural springs make the bottling of mineral water and juices viable. Expanded irrigation would increase agricultural employment and growth opportunities.

Like other companies in the country, those in the Presevo Valley were hurt by sanctions, when they lost markets in Macedonia, Greece and Kosovo. Yumco, once a large textile producer that made uniforms for the German army and the UCK, can no longer compete with Asian factories. One Serbian source suggested, however, that Kosovo would provide a logical, still untapped, market for goods produced in southern Serbia.

However, as long as instability, or a perception of instability remains, private capital will be reluctant to invest in the region. And unless the economy generates new jobs, or the unemployed again find a way to work abroad, social tensions may lead to renewed troubles.

## **B. OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE**

Since the fall of Milosevic, and especially since May 2001, the Serbian government and donors have invested significant resources in the Presevo Valley,

primarily on long-neglected infrastructure, including repair of roads, public buildings and private dwellings damaged during the insurgency or by army and police habitation. Indeed, the Coordination Body estimates that more has been put into the region in two years than in the previous twenty. In the two and a half years through mid-2003, the three Presevo municipalities received more than ten times the total assistance of the eight other municipalities of southern Serbia.<sup>65</sup> At a donors conference in Bujanovac on 7 March 2003, an additional €15 million were pledged for them, mostly for infrastructure, but also for new equipment for local enterprises.

All told, since the ceasefire, approximately €46.6 million has been spent in southern Serbia, mostly from foreign donations.<sup>66</sup> In Presevo municipality donors contributed approximately €7.2 million between December 2000 and March 2003, while Bujanovac received over €8 million, and Medvedja €2.9 million.<sup>67</sup> During the same time, the Serbian government, through the Coordination Body, spent approximately €5.6 million in Presevo, €7.9 million in Bujanovac, and €9.3 million in Medvedja.

The highest Serbian government expenditures, however, have been in Medvedja, the municipality with the smallest population (less than 10,000), and the only one with a Serb majority. External aid has filled the gap for the two Albanian-majority municipalities but the extent to which Serbian government aid is rebalanced as international assistance wanes will be an important indicator of Belgrade's sincerity. If it continues to favour the only Serb-majority municipality, it will send a clear signal to the Albanian population that it is pursuing Milosevic-era politics of ethnic division.

As often with donor money, some investment priorities may have been misdirected, and not all the

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<sup>65</sup> Coordination Body pamphlet. These municipalities do not have significant Albanian populations and were not neglected during the Milosevic era as those in the Presevo Valley.

<sup>66</sup> "Počinje program pomoći za 11 opština na jugu Srbije", B92 web site, 19 October 2003.

<sup>67</sup> All figures are supplied by the Coordination Body. Foreign donors include the Austrian, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Swedish and UK embassies, Médecins sans Frontières, UNHCR, UNICEF, CARE, Mercy Corps, the European Agency for Reconstruction, UNDP (REP and SSMIRP), USAID, ASB, IOM, ISC, World Food Program, Cooperazione Italiana, and others.

resources committed under the Covic Plan were wisely used. In Presevo, reconstruction of the cultural centre was to cost 19 million dinars and last 120 days, but has cost 45 million dinars over two years and is not finished yet. In a 91 per cent Albanian majority municipality with high unemployment, the construction firm is entirely owned and operated by Serbs from Vranje. In Medvedja, government funds built a housing block for civil servants while other projects go unfunded. In Veliki Trnovac, a village of 10,000, there appears to be a significant problem with sewage and waste disposal, while the Roma in Bujanovac complain that virtually no money has been committed to improve infrastructure in their streets.

But the problem of a depressed economy is not unique to the Presevo Valley. The entire region south of Nis is economically depressed, with little investment and job creation, and the potential for economic discontent to translate into broader political or ethnic discontent is real. As a result, international and Serbian government efforts have also focused on the numerous Serbian majority municipalities in the region – Trgoviste, Bosilegrad, Vladicin Han, Surdulica, Leskovac, Lebane, Bojnik and Vranje itself. On 17 October 2003 the government and donors (EU and UNDP) pledged an additional €7.5 million to the three Presevo Valley and eight other southern Serbia municipalities under a program entitled “Mir” (peace).

But donor assistance and Serbian government aid will have little long-term impact if the Tito-era economic structures remain. Belgrade’s disappointing pace of economic reform is a significant problem, particularly regarding the laws and regulations that hamper private small and medium-sized enterprises. As long as the economic and legal framework remains essentially unchanged, growth will be difficult, and potential investors will avoid Serbia as a whole and the Presevo Valley in particular. If the economy remains poor, local Albanians will be tempted to attribute this to deliberate discrimination rather than the systemic flaws that are largely to blame. Because of this, a key lies in Belgrade with the parliament, and the region’s crisis will be resolved only when Serbia as a whole breaks its political deadlock and institutes reforms.

## VI. IMPLEMENTING THE COVIC PLAN

The Covic Plan seeks to redress years of institutionalised discrimination and convince ethnic Albanians that they have an interest in abandoning dreams of “eastern Kosovo” and becoming good citizens of Serbia. The plan is based on four pillars: 1) “elimination” of threats to “state sovereignty” and “territorial integrity”; 2) security, freedom of movement and the right to return to the Presevo Valley, through the disarmament and disbanding of “terrorists” and “demilitarisation of the region”; 3) “development of a multiethnic and multi-confessional society”; and 4) economic and social development.<sup>68</sup>

The plan foresaw a three-year implementation period and “integration of the Albanians in[to] the political, government and social system” within two years. In addition to changes in the laws on elections and self-government to ensure adequate representation in political institutions, respect for human rights and ethnically mixed police patrols, it defined integration as “the harmonisation of the ethnic structures of the employees in the civil services, in the economy and in social activities with the ethnic structure of the population.”<sup>69</sup>

In exchange for abandoning secession and armed resistance, the government offered Albanians representation on the executive boards of municipal assemblies and jobs in the police, judiciary, health services, education, municipal institutions and economy in proportion to their numbers.<sup>70</sup>

Since the Konculj Agreement was signed, the international community – particularly the OSCE, NATO and the U.S. embassy in Belgrade – has played a crucial role in keeping the peace and implementing the plan. ICG interviews with Albanians and Serbs at all levels found unanimous approval of the international role. While the OSCE has taken the lead in building civilian institutions, training police and mediating between local politicians, NATO in general and KFOR in particular have sent tough messages to the UCPMB guerrillas that border changes are not in the cards, and issues must be resolved peacefully. Many non-governmental and multilateral organisations have

<sup>68</sup> “Program for the Solution of the Crisis in the Peinja District”, op. cit., page 70.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., page 79.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, pp. 107-108.

played important supporting roles in reconstruction, refugee return, democratisation and media training. In short, the international community has been the oil that greases the wheels of the peace process.

Nevertheless, there is a sense among Albanians of the Presevo Valley that the Covic Plan is not delivering the promised end to tensions with Serbian security forces and prosperity.

## **A. POLICE**

Following decades of official discrimination and particular abuse during the 2000-2001 conflict, Albanians viewed the police with hostility and mistrust. Thus, the first essential condition for securing peace and rebuilding confidence following disbandment of the UCPMB was to establish a multiethnic police force in Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. This was also the initial step in the long process of integrating Albanians into the institutions of the Serbian state.

From May 2001 to July 2002, the OSCE oversaw a three-phase project for recruiting and training a multiethnic police force. In the first two phases, former Albanian policemen and former members of the reserve security forces, along with Serb officers from the area, were given a crash refresher course and put on the beat in June 2001. In the third phase, the Serbian MUP and OSCE advertised for applicants between 20 and 27 years of age who were citizens with no criminal record and in good physical and mental health. Given the high local unemployment, interest among young Albanians was high. Between August 2001 and July 2002, international and Serbian instructors trained 253 Albanians and 128 Serbs. In total, approximately 270 Albanians now serve on a multiethnic police force of 430 for the three municipalities.

Although the project has proven its value, most Albanians continue to perceive the Gendarmerie and the central force in Vranje as the real police. They carry out all serious security tasks, arrests and other essential work. The multiethnic police are assigned more mundane tasks of day-to-day policing and border duties. ICG has found the multiethnic police force – Serbs and Albanians alike – far more courteous than typical police in Serbia. Albanian officers seem very young and inexperienced, and often appeared to rely on their Serbian colleagues for on-the-job training.

The Albanian members of the police are presently limited to working entirely “on the beat”, as they lack sufficient experience for positions within the administration or leadership. In Bujanovac, the chief, his deputy and the heads of all departments are Serbs.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, nearly two years after the formation of the force, the president of the Bujanovac municipality complains that not a single officer has been promoted. MUP officials responded that most new recruits have only finished secondary school, making them unqualified for high-level positions, that many more senior positions require three to five years experience, and that the authorities are seeking to hire new inspectors and an Albanian deputy police chief in Bujanovac. That the Serbs responded constructively to criticisms on such a delicate matter as personnel policy is positive. The test will be what happens when the Albanian officers reach the three and five year marks and are qualified for promotion. The international community and the OSCE should follow this closely.

The OSCE organised initial training for the multiethnic police as a special project, and there is no mechanism to ensure continued recruitment of Albanians. During the first set of classes, 70 per cent of the instructors were foreign, the OSCE oversaw the process, and the government put on bi-weekly trips for cadets to Bujanovac. Even though the Covic Plan guarantees civil service representation in proportion to the population balance, this goal has not yet been met in the police. In Presevo, for instance, 91 per cent Albanian, the police are only 30 per cent Albanian. High-ranking MUP officials assured ICG that the Coordination Body intends to continue recruiting police proportionately. However, since the nearest academy is in Serb-majority Mitrovicko Polje, Albanians may feel uncomfortable training without continued international instructors.

Presevo Valley Albanians feel that some Serb police may have committed crimes against Albanians in Kosovo and at best were trained under a police regime that viewed the local population as “the enemy”. Under a process termed “systematisation”, police from Kosovo are meant to be rotated out of the force. The OSCE says this is 80 per cent complete. As the MUP rotates out officers from elsewhere, especially Kosovo, more positions should be available for Albanian recruits.

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<sup>71</sup> One inspector is Albanian. In Presevo, the chief of police and the deputy commander are Albanian.

Many Albanians believe the MUP promised to hire a significant number of ex-UCPMB members. While the Coordination Body claims 30 per cent of Albanian police are former UCPMB, Riza Halimi, the mayor of Presevo, says it is only 2 or 3 per cent. One former UCPMB commander stated that only eight former fighters had been hired.

In spite of the problems, the multiethnic police project has been positive, accustoming people to seeing joint patrols of Serbs and Albanians. Halimi and other Albanians noted that Albanians have had fewer problems with the police since the joint patrols began. Moreover, officers on the beat have worked well together. Threats and attacks against Albanian candidates and recruits, including hand-grenade attacks in 2002 and 2003, as well as against police facilities, show that some radical Albanians feel the new force is a real first step to integration, which they want to avoid at all costs.<sup>72</sup> Should the MUP continue to incorporate Albanians into the local force in keeping with their percentage of the population and then offer equal promotion opportunities, the project will go far towards healing the wounds caused by Serbian security forces during the 1990s.

## **B. SPECIAL MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

New municipal elections in Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja under revised rules were another essential step in normalising the situation and correcting years of institutionalised discrimination.

In previous elections, gerrymandered districts ensured that Albanians were grossly under-represented in municipal assemblies and governments (councils).<sup>73</sup> For example, in the 2000 municipal elections in Bujanovac, the only participating Albanian party, the Party of Democratic Action (PDD), won just eight of 37 seats, although Albanians are over 60 per cent of the population.

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<sup>72</sup> For example, in January 2003, Shefqet Musliu, the former commander of the UCPMB, beat up and threatened two off-duty Albanian officers.

<sup>73</sup> Each voting district appointed a single deputy to the municipal assembly, with districts formed from Albanian settlements containing far more voters than those in Serb areas. One human rights report cites the example of district three, covering the Albanian settlement of Veliki Trnovac, which in the 2000 elections had 2,176 voters, as opposed to district 42, in the Serb village of Petina, where 61 voters elected a municipal deputy.

Albanians were not represented at all in the nine-member executive council.

The 28 July 2002 special municipal elections were the first held under a new election law, passed the previous month. Each municipality was treated as a single district, with parties receiving seats in proportion to their municipal-wide vote. The president (mayor) of each municipality was directly elected.

The new rules had the greatest impact and elicited the greatest controversy in Bujanovac, where neither Serbs nor Albanians are an overwhelming majority. Local Serbs widely believed that they were more numerous and resented the prospect of relinquishing special privileges and exclusive control over local institutions. Nevertheless, the three Albanian parties took 23 seats in the 41-member assembly. The lion's share of the Albanian vote (thirteen seats) went to the PDD, considered to be the most moderate of the three. While it organised the 1992 referendum on union with Kosovo, its president, Riza Halimi, has been the chief negotiator with the international community and the Serbian government and now advocates Albanian rights within the Serbian state. The Party for Democratic Progress (LDP) was hastily assembled, too late to register as a party, but won eight seats as a citizens list. It is closely linked to former UCPMB commanders. The Party for the Democratic Unification of Albanians (PDSH) took two seats. Agip Arifi of the PDD beat Novica Manojlovic, whom all Serb parties supported, for the president's job.<sup>74</sup>

The Coalition for Bujanovac, five predominately Serb parties from the ruling republic-level DOS coalition and the SPS, won twelve seats. The Coalition for Survival – the Serb Radical Party (SRS) and the Serb Renewal Movement (SPO) – took five, and an independent citizens candidate, Trajko Trajkovic, was also elected. Since the elections, all Serbs on the Bujanovac municipal council have joined Covic's Democratic Alternative Party.

In Presevo, the PDD won nineteen seats, the PDSH five, the LDP five, and three Serb parties (DA, SPO, SPS) running as the Coalition for Presevo gained one seat each. Halimi became the president with nearly 60 per cent of the vote.

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<sup>74</sup> Arifi is rumoured to have closer ties with the former UCPMB commanders than his PDD colleague Riza Halimi. Shefqet Musliu allegedly made the final decision that Arifi would be the sole Albanian mayoral candidate.

The DOS-party Coalition for Medvedja took eleven seats in that municipality and its Serb candidate, Slobodan Draskovic, won the mayoral race. Four other Serb parties gained eighteen seats. The PDD was the only Albanian party to win seats (six).

The Roma have consciously stayed out of Presevo Valley politics. Of 3,000 registered Roma voters, only about 300 actually cast ballots: it appears that they viewed voting as taking sides with Serbs or Albanians and abstained. Although both Bujanovac and Presevo have significant Roma populations, low turn-out meant that the Party of Roma Unity and Roma candidates forwarded by a group of citizens won no seats.<sup>75</sup> Roma representatives have also accused both the Serbs and Albanians of courting Roma votes but failing to follow through on promises.

The OSCE exerted significant influence in all the municipal assemblies to ensure that ethnic majorities did not create mono-ethnic governments. In Bujanovac, the Serb candidate, Manojlovic, became deputy mayor after losing to Arifi. The eleven-member municipal executive council has four Serbs and six Albanians. One post – head of the department for social care and children – was left open for a Roma. However, Serb and Albanian delegates have been unable to agree on a candidate, each wary that the other is putting forward “its” Roma. The Presevo and Medvedja executive councils have two Serb and Albanian members, respectively.

Given these outcomes, the redistricting and elections, as well as the subsequent establishment of municipal councils, may be termed a success. However, as is discussed below, this does not mean that the political outcomes are either stable or in keeping with principles of good governance.

### C. INTEGRATION INTO THE JUDICIARY

While Albanian politicians acknowledge that integration into the police, municipal assemblies and governments has been largely successful, in large part thanks to the hands-on involvement of the OSCE,

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<sup>75</sup> According to the 2002 census, some 9 per cent of the Bujanovac municipality's 43,402 residents are Roma. Roma representatives contend that about one third of the population of Bujanovac town is Roma.

they say that integration into other institutions has been slow or non-existent.

The legacy of discrimination has made it difficult to find Albanian judges and prosecutors with the necessary experience. In Serbia, law students must complete an internship before they can take the legal professional exam. Many positions require additional years of experience. As a result of past discrimination, few Albanians meet the requirements. The OSCE has proposed a phased process to give Albanian candidates the necessary work experience to qualify for the exam. It has assisted the government and Albanian representatives in forming a Joint Working Group on the judiciary, with a two-year action plan. This has led to the naming of an Albanian deputy prosecutor in Presevo and an advertisement inviting Albanians to apply for the post of deputy prosecutor in Bujanovac. Ten Albanians currently work in the Presevo court administration, and one of six judges in Presevo is Albanian.

In addition to taking steps to hire Albanian-Serbian translators for the courts, the ministry of justice has created places for Albanian legal apprentices (*pripravnici*) in the courts and prosecutors' offices.<sup>76</sup> This is significant, because no Albanian had been an apprentice in the Bujanovac municipal court for eighteen years.<sup>77</sup> Of 82 employees in that court, only one translator is an Albanian.

While these initial steps are hopeful, the process is only just beginning, and will, by its nature, take years of careful attention, requiring continued international engagement and long-term training of Albanian legal specialists.

### D. EDUCATION<sup>78</sup>

Education reform has been largely neglected by the Serbian government, not only in the Presevo Valley, but also in Serbia as a whole. Presevo has eight

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<sup>76</sup> Presentation by Dr. Nebojsa Covic, Deputy Prime Minister Republic of Serbia, President of the Coordination Body of the Federal Government and the Government of the Republic of Serbia for the Municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, Bujanovac, 7 March 2003.

<sup>77</sup> ICG interviews with OSCE and Nagib Arifi.

<sup>78</sup> The information in this section was compiled from ICG interviews with two interlocutors in the Serbian ministry of education, members of NGOs active in the region, the OSCE, the Coordination Body, and Albanian politicians.



primary schools and two high schools. Of these, eight are Albanian, one is Serbian, and one is mixed. Bujanovac has six primary schools and one high school, of which two are Serbian. As a rule, children do not study together, even though the Albanians are obliged to learn Serbian.

Until 1982, Albanian students in southern Serbia studied according to the Kosovo program, which included Albanian history and culture. In 1983, the state started to scale back Albanian cultural expression and education, a process which continued into the 1990s. The Serbian Plan and Program currently used today contains almost no instruction on Albanian history or culture.

Albanian students study mathematics from a textbook that is used in Kosovo. The history text presents the greatest problem, as it refers to Albanians by the derogatory term "Siptars", and frequently has a strong nationalist overtone, portraying Albanians as enemies of the Serbs. The Serbian Ministry of Education claims that a revision and exchange of textbooks is underway but cannot be carried out immediately.

A group formed to analyse problems with the Plan and Program in October 2002 reported in early 2003, but Halimi claims the ministry has not responded to its concerns. Although the OSCE has headed a joint working group on education issues in the Presevo Valley, Albanian leaders indicated that not much has been achieved. The new Serbian law on self-government does little to give education responsibility to the municipalities.

## **E. MEDIA<sup>79</sup>**

Ethnic Albanians were under an information blockade throughout most of the 1990s and until 2001, but the situation has improved significantly. Belgrade allows Kosovo newspapers and periodicals to be sold again in kiosks. The Bujanovac-based *Jehona*, a bi-weekly Albanian magazine of politics and culture, takes a somewhat moderate nationalist tone and refers to the valley as "eastern Kosovo." The Coordination Body and Minister for Minority

Affairs and Human Rights Rasim Ljajic obtained some 4,800 Albanian language books for the Presevo public library.

In terms of electronic media, the OSCE has led an effort to train journalists, equip stations, increase Albanian language programming and restructure the administration of public media. On 18 January 2002, it agreed on priorities with the Coordination Body and media and Albanian community representatives.

In 2002, Radio Bujanovac began an Albanian language news program. The OSCE managed to convince it to have an Albanian editor in chief and a Serb director. A private Albanian television station founded in April 2003 in Bujanovac retransmits news from Kosovo at 19:30 and then CNN for much of the rest of the time. Its editorial content seems to oppose the PDD and Arifi and Halimi. Medvedja has no Albanian language radio programs.

Radio Presevo was formed in 2001. It broadcasts continuous news, culture and entertainment in Albanian and received a U.S.\$20,000 grant from USAID and the Serbian government for technical equipment. Since a war-damaged repeater was fixed, it can be heard as far north as Nis. Radio Presevo also broadcasts in Serbian. Presevo's television station is controlled by Mayor Halimi. It refers to southern Serbia as "eastern Kosovo" and broadcasts news from Serbia under the heading of "world news". Editorially, it supports Halimi, and Albanian opposition figures have complained that they are unable to get air time.

Although the Albanian population in Presevo and Bujanovac now have their own language media, standards of programming and reporting are low, and the stations often engage in political attacks against leading local politicians. OSCE representatives and Covic both told ICG that further international help is needed to continue the reform of electronic media, particularly in regard to professional standards. Editorial policy could also be contentious, particularly if Albanian language media continue to refer to the Presevo Valley as "eastern Kosovo".

## **F. OTHER PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS**

Many Albanian politicians have stated that much time has been lost and deadlines missed since May 2001, and both the Serbian authorities and international organisations acknowledge that reform

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<sup>79</sup> The information in this section was compiled from ICG interviews with Serbian journalists in Vranje, Albanian journalists in Presevo and Bujanovac, OSCE, the Coordination Body, and Miroslav Filipovic, director of the Bujanovac-based School for Investigative Journalism.

could be accelerated. In institutions such as the post office, border service, tax authority and land registry, no steps have even been proposed to bring in Albanians. In Bujanovac, the local development office and office of social work have no Albanian employees. In the municipality's communal services, six of 160 workers are Albanian. Out of ten socially-owned companies, not a single one has an Albanian director, and many reportedly have no Albanian employees.

Integration into other institutions is slow and a major Albanian complaint. Until recently, a big obstacle was the fact that many Presevo Valley Albanians received diplomas from secondary schools and the university in Kosovo that were not recognised by the state. Serbian authorities also refused to accept diplomas issued after 1991, which were printed with the designation "Kosovo Republic". However, following agreement between OSCE, UNMIK and the Serbian government, Kosovo diplomas are now accepted, provided they have an UNMIK stamp. Nonetheless, there still seems to be resistance in official circles. Acceptance of a diploma must often be pursued case-by-case, as no official decision was ever published by the Serbian government. Until such time as one is, administrative ambiguity could be used to dismiss Albanians from public service arbitrarily, especially if ethnic tensions rise again.

The integration of Albanians into the health care system has begun, albeit slowly. Several Albanian doctors work in Bujanovac and Presevo. Serbian authorities have been more wary of accepting medical diplomas from Pristina University because of the sensitive nature of the work. In Bujanovac there are approximately eight Albanian doctors.

According to the Coordination Body, more than twenty Albanians have been hired in Bujanovac municipality, and 60 Albanian university students have received stipends to study in Belgrade.

Until 2002 Serbian was the only official language in the three municipalities. The post-Milosevic Law on National Minorities states that where a national minority is 15 per cent of the population in a given municipality, its language should also have official status there. Presevo and Bujanovac changed their municipal statutes and adopted Albanian as an official language alongside Serbian in 2002. Medvedja followed suit on 15 October 2003.

## **G. INTEGRATION OF ROMA<sup>80</sup>**

In most discussions about multiethnic life in the Presevo Valley, the Roma are largely ignored. As in other parts of the Balkans, the Roma often declare themselves to be members of the majority national group, which makes it difficult to ascertain their numbers. In the Albanian majority areas of the valley, Roma who declare themselves to be Albanian are suspect to Albanians, who feel they are pro-Serbian. Only some 8 per cent of Roma children attend school, and they are not able to use the Roma language there. Many are placed in special education classes.

The Roma have four non-governmental organisations but, as noted above, no representative in a municipal assembly in the Presevo Valley, and no councillor.

Roma NGO representatives in Bujanovac said that the international community could give them legal advice on how to form a body to deal with Roma issues and also help them with issues of education, infrastructure, social questions, and the media. The OSCE supports creation of a Serbia-wide Roma council and has given informal training to representatives from 40 cities. Unfortunately, this initiative has reportedly stalled.

Although the Roma question is not part of the larger question of regional instability, it bears watching. The group typically suffered disproportionately from all sides during the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Should violence flare up again, there is little doubt they will be among its victims.

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<sup>80</sup> Information in this section was compiled from interviews with human rights activists in Belgrade, Bujanovac and Vranje, the Serbian ministry of education, Roma activists, the Coordination Body, and Albanian politicians.

## **VII. ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT**

### **A. ALBANIAN POLITICS: THE SHADOW OF KOSOVO, PART I**

Kosovo's politics reverberates in southern Serbia, and its final status will inevitably impact stability there. Most Albanian politicians and citizens argue that the sooner final status is determined, the better for southern Serbia. Any solution – independence, partition, conditional independence, or a combination thereof – will affect the Presevo Valley. Should the Serbs seek to join northern Kosovo with Serbia, many Albanians in Kosovo and southern Serbia could seek to forge “eastern Kosovo” from southern Serbia. This idea has had currency in local Albanian politics since 1992, when Presevo Mayor Halimi organized a referendum in which a majority of Albanians supported it.

Ethnic Albanian politicians in the Presevo Valley are largely moderate, in the sense that they condemn violence and mostly concentrate on seeking more economic development and the advancement of Albanians in the institutions of the Serbian and federal governments. Although most have serious criticisms concerning the integration of Albanians into the police, judiciary and other state organs and the pace of educational and media reform, they are willing to work within the Covic Plan. Inasmuch as ethnic Albanians do not feel that integration is progressing, moderate leaders will find it harder to parry the calls of former UCPMB commanders, who contend Albanians were cheated by the government and the international community.

Presevo Valley politicians are divided, however, between those pushing for integration and those holding out for the “eastern Kosovo” solution. Moderates, such as Halimi, seem willing to cooperate with the international community and the government but are wary of provoking a backlash from the radicals. Divisions exist even within Halimi's PDD party. Nagip Arifi, mayor of Bujanovac, reportedly has close contact with the former UCPMB commanders. In Bujanovac, Musliu's cousin, Jonuz Musliu, who headed the political wing of the UCPMB, remains active in local politics with the unregistered LDP and pushes the more nationalist Albanian platform. Despite participating in July 2002 municipal elections, both the LDP and PDSH openly supported an Albanian

boycott of the multiple failed Serbian presidential elections in late 2002, and both boycotted the 16 November 2003 Serbian presidential election. It now appears that they will also boycott the 28 December Serbian parliamentary election. Presevo Valley Albanians told ICG that the Albanian leadership perceived itself to be under pressure from Kosovo politicians to boycott all Serbian national elections, in hopes of strengthening the case for “eastern Kosovo”.<sup>81</sup> While Halimi and the PDD pledged support for Miroslav Labus in the 2002 elections, the majority of ethnic Albanians abstained from that contest and again in November 2003.<sup>82</sup>

In any case, a general sense of unrest in the valley suits radical Albanians. From the perspective of the UCPMB commanders, ongoing violence gives the impression that the region's status is not resolved. Some Kosovo Albanians see the Presevo Valley as both a bargaining chip and a threat should Serbia seek to partition an independent Kosovo. In the meantime, each new violent incident shrinks the space available to moderate politicians, while some Albanians attempt to turn every problem into an ethnic one. Payment of taxes and utility bills is an example. The Coordination Body claims that many Albanians in the Bujanovac municipality have not paid these bills for months. When the government attempts to disconnect them, the issue is construed as Serbian discrimination and an attempt to harass Albanians into leaving the valley. According to the Serbian Electric Company (EPS), it is owed approximately €15.3 million in unpaid electricity bills by municipalities in southern Serbia.<sup>83</sup> Given the past use of utility bills as a form of pressure against Albanians in both Kosovo and southern Serbia in Milosevic's time, as well as the need for the state to collect for services, this seems an ideal issue for the Coordination Body.

In the meantime, Presevo Valley politicians are engaging in business as usual within the confines of Serbia's largely unreformed Titoist political, social and economic structures, distributing patronage and

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<sup>81</sup> ICG's interlocutors in the Presevo Valley named Hashim Thaci and Ramush Haradinaj as the sources of this pressure. However ICG's research in Kosovo suggests that there is little real basis for this perception; Thaci at least has gone on record supporting the participation of Albanians in South Serbia in “democratic institutions”.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> “Potrošači na jugu Srbije za struju duguju milijardu dinara”, B92 web site, 31 October 2003.

dividing political and economic spoils. A controversy in Bujanovac over the appointment of directors and executive boards of the nine public corporations founded by the municipal assembly is illustrative of the political battle over public sector jobs.<sup>84</sup> It is also possibly a sign of hope, since Serb and Albanian councillors were able to reach an agreement.

The first three meetings of the newly elected Bujanovac municipal council went well, but on 15 November 2002 the Serb coalition of DOS parties began a boycott, complaining that the Albanian members were abusing their majority. Although all the DOS parties in Belgrade did not support the boycott, local politicians are far more ambivalent since they are berated by Serb voters who believe that they sacrificed Serb control of the municipality by allowing elections.

On the issue of public municipal corporations, a number of Albanian councillors contend that a deal had been struck in early April 2003, giving Serb parties a majority on the managing boards of four of the nine (and thus ability to name the directors) and Albanian parties five. This agreement was the result of eleven meetings that lasted as long as twelve hours. At the last minute, however, the Serb parties rejected the deal. The deadlock was finally broken with agreement that the Albanians would control four corporations, the Serbs three, and the remaining two would be divided so that one had a majority Albanian board with a Serb director and the second the reverse.

Nonetheless, control over public corporations continues to cause friction. On 7 October 2003 the head of the OSCE mission, Maurizio Massari, travelled with Covic to Bujanovac in an effort to resolve the latest controversy, caused in large part by the recent law that prevents members of municipal councils from serving on governing boards or as directors of public companies. The impasse had caused the Bujanovac council to cease functioning.

During the same trip Covic and Massari failed to resolve an impasse over the Presevo municipal council, which had not functioned for three months after Halimi expelled its president, Skender Destani, from the PDD due to his insistence that the council

examine the expenditure of reconstruction funds. Destani took five PDD delegates with him, meaning that the opposition had 22 of the 38 council votes at its disposal. Halimi has blocked new elections by preventing the council from gathering a working quorum. As of this writing, Minister Ljajic is attempting to find a compromise. If new elections occur – and they may be called by the end of December 2003 – voters may express dissatisfaction with Halimi by voting for Destani; whether he would continue Halimi's moderate policies is unknown.

Although the redistricting and elections in the valley have been a success, they have not resolved issues of misappropriation of public funds, misuse of public position, and others associated with distribution of political patronage. Rather, they have simply transferred responsibility for these actions from Serb to Albanian politicians. An increasing perception of corruption and high-handedness by Albanian politicians is beginning to discredit the moderate option represented by the PDD. As Albanian disgust grows with the political moderates - Halimi and Arifi – over perceived misuse of funds, they will become increasingly weaker. Although many people openly voiced disappointment with the PDD, this does not yet appear to have translated into open support for the more nationalist political elements associated with the LDP and PDSH. But a new municipal election in Presevo could be as much a referendum on the rule of Halimi as on implementation of the Covic Plan.

## **B. SERBIAN POLITICS: THE SHADOW OF KOSOVO, PART II**

Accustomed to holding power through unfair rules, Serbs have had a difficult time accepting that they are a minority in Bujanovac and that Albanians deserve a majority of political representation. In response to over a decade of nationalist propaganda and fear-mongering emanating from Milosevic's media, many Presevo Valley Serbs fear for their very existence, and most have gravitated towards hard-line nationalist parties. They are constantly looking over the hills at Kosovo out of concern that high Albanian birth-rates and "terrorism" will drive them from southern Serbia and even make them a minority in their own country. They worry that the processes that contributed to the loss of Kosovo are being replayed in the Presevo Valley.

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<sup>84</sup> In Bujanovac, local Serbs have much to lose economically and politically from a more fair representation of Albanians. Out of 121 workers in municipality Bujanovac, Arifi claims that only seventeen are Albanians.

Party labels mean little. Elected politicians have had trouble sharing or transferring power to Albanians, for fear of being branded traitors by their voters and the more radical nationalist parties. As a result, the DOS parties in southern Serbia frequently take positions that are in contradiction to the policies of their party leaders in Belgrade, and the moderates are being squeezed out of political life.

Because of this, much of the progress made to date has depended on Nebojsa Covic. In contrast to the local Serb politicians, he is able to communicate effectively with international officials, presents the Serbian position articulately, and appears committed to seeking peaceful outcomes through dialogue. In addition, Covic appears to have the support and confidence of the army, MUP and Gendarmerie, as well as of Albanian politicians. The latter went so far as to praise Covic as having a calming influence in southern Serbia. As a result, the importance of his role cannot be overestimated. When he is preoccupied with other duties – such as Kosovo during much of 2002 and the aftermath of the Djindjic assassination in 2003 – implementation of the Covic Plan typically stalls. When he is actively involved in the region, progress accelerates.

Another actor whose engagement has been crucial is Rasim Ljajic, the minister for minority affairs and human rights. Because Ljajic is a Muslim Slav (Bosnjak), the Muslim Albanians tend to see him as an honest broker. The roles of Covic and Ljajic show how much peace in the region depends on personalities, particularly since the Serbian government has yet to expand the work of the Coordination Body beyond security issues. Should these two individuals be removed from the scene, either via new elections or assassination – both of which are real threats in today's Serbia – the international community and Presevo Valley Albanians would lose valuable interlocutors and intermediaries.

## **VIII. REFORM OF THE COORDINATION BODY**

While the integration of Albanians has progressed since the Covic Plan was made public in March 2001, much remains to be done. Perhaps most urgent is complete reorganisation of the Coordination Body so it can better address numerous issues and institutionalise the role that Covic plays. The Coordination Body was founded during the crisis with the UCPMB and consists of six generals and four civilians. Its primary focus is to coordinate the activities of the Joint Security Forces (army, Gendarmerie, police). It has de facto final say in all events – political, cultural, social – in the Presevo Valley. This arrangement may have been appropriate in 2001 but the time has come for the body to reflect the focus on the integration of Albanians and development of the economy.

There are no Albanians on the Coordination Body. Although the government of Serbia issued a decision in June 2002 that all relevant ministries should be involved in its work, their participation has been sporadic or non-existent. Due to the lack of a functioning Coordination Body, numerous problems – ranging from education to the economy to transportation to the judiciary – pile up and go unresolved. As a result, local Albanians feel that cooperation has failed to deliver results. This emboldens the more extremist elements, who claim that the moderates sold out. A functional Coordination Body is essential to the continued stability of the region.

In January 2002 the OSCE began round-table discussions on issues with agreed agendas. These typically had three to four representatives from each side. Issues discussed included recognition of diplomas, amnesty for former fighters, economic aid grants, and human rights. One outcome of these meetings was creation of specific action plans. Building on this, the OSCE has suggested reconstructing the Coordination Body to include permanent members representing all relevant ministries, a secretariat with ten community members, the mayors of the three municipalities as vice-presidents and a president. However, nothing appears to have come of this proposal.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

The Presevo valley has demonstrated that peaceful conflict resolution is possible in the Balkans, provided that the international community takes an active role, and there is good will on both sides of the ethnic divide. Perhaps the greatest triumph for the Serb side is that Belgrade has been able to achieve through diplomacy and negotiation what it likely would not have achieved through force: secure borders, international support for those borders, and an end to a domestic insurgency. The triumph for the Albanian community is the beginning of integration into Serbian state institutions and structures, albeit slowly, as well as the avoidance of ethnic violence and possible ethnic cleansing. Yet the peace is still fragile and there are numerous elements that can renew instability.

Southern Serbia is dependent in part on the continued good will of both the Serbs and Albanians, as well as on the continued engagement of the international community. Because of the complex factors in play, including the potential for spillover from Kosovo and the vital security role of the international community, nothing can be taken for granted. The continued low-level violence will certainly affect the political debate and reduce the margin of manoeuvre available to moderate Albanian and Serbian politicians.

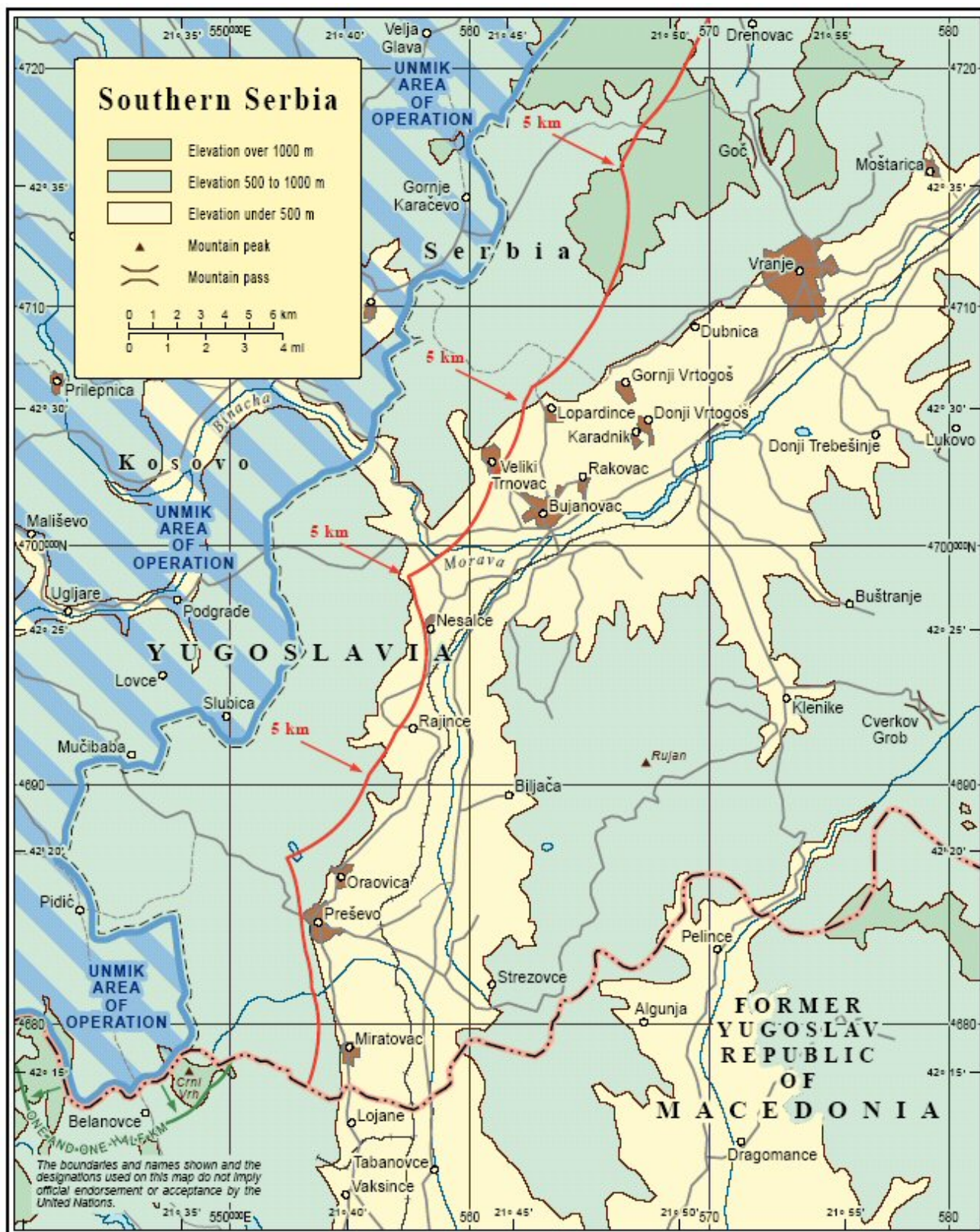
Because of this, moderates on both sides need help to resist pressure from hardliners in their own camps. The majority of ethnic Albanians support peaceful political struggle, as demonstrated by the high voter turnout in July 2002 and interest in the multiethnic police. Ongoing international involvement is needed to apply pressure on the Belgrade authorities to stay with promised integration and to convince former UCPMB commanders in Kosovo that violence will not be tolerated nor changes to the status of the Presevo Valley considered. The international community – the U.S. Army, UNMIK and KFOR in particular – must shoulder their share of the burden in Kosovo, particularly regarding border security. Economic investment and job creation in the area are critical. But most importantly, the international community, the Serbian government and Albanian politicians must work together to make the Coordination Body fully functional and replace personality-driven politics with institutionalised solutions capable of sustainable activity.

**Belgrade/Brussels, 9 December 2003**



## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF SOUTHERN SERBIA



## **APPENDIX B**

### **GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS**

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<b>ABL</b>	Administrative Boundary Line. The boundary between the UN administered province of Kosovo and Serbia proper.
<b>AKSH</b>	Albanian National Army. A shadowy pan-Albanian guerrilla organisation.
<b>DOS</b>	Democratic Opposition of Serbia. The coalition that unseated Slobodan Milosevic.
<b>GSZ</b>	Ground Safety Zone. A five-kilometre wide swathe of land inside Serbia and Montenegro that borders on Kosovo, from which heavy weapons are excluded under provisions of the agreement that ended NATO's 1999 campaign, and into which Serbian security forces were permitted to return pursuant to a 2001 agreement..
<b>ICTY</b>	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.
<b>KFOR</b>	The NATO-led international peacekeeping force in Kosovo
<b>KPC</b>	Kosovo Protection Corps. The successor of the UCK.
<b>MUP</b>	Ministry of Internal Affairs (in this case, of Serbia).
<b>NLA</b>	National Liberation Army. Albanian guerrilla group active in the 2001 conflict in Macedonia.
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
<b>PISG</b>	Provisional Institutions of Self Government. The locally elected Kosovo authorities.
<b>SPS</b>	Socialist Party of Serbia. The party of former Yugoslav President and ICTY defendant Slobodan Milosevic.
<b>SRS</b>	Serbian Radical Party. The ultra-nationalist party of ICTY defendant Vojislav Seselj.
<b>UCK</b>	Liberation Army of Kosovo.
<b>UCPMB</b>	Liberation Army of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja.
<b>UNMIK</b>	United Nations Mission in Kosovo.
<b>VSCG</b>	Army of Serbia and Montenegro.