

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo

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[Commentator] In October 1998, the OSCE deployed the Kosovo Verification Mission to oversee Belgrade's compliance with UN Security Council resolutions. The escalation of violence in Kosovo forced the Mission to withdraw in March 1999. Only four months later, the OSCE came back to establish the largest and most challenging mission in its history: the Mission in Kosovo.

Kosovo 2000: a landscape scattered with ruins gives way to a pattern of new red-brick houses, symbols of hope for a secure future. After 12 years of repression, the ethnic Albanian majority has become the dominant force in post-war Kosovo. Large-scale atrocities and ethnic cleansing left deep scars in the minds and souls of Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. Hatred and tension still linger among the decay. Flames of nationalism threaten to engulf a community yearning for respect and dignity. Under the United Nations Administration, the UN and the OSCE are leading a campaign for tolerance. As Kosovo's wounds slowly begin to heal, progress is on the rise. Step by step, the 700 international and 1 400 local staff members of the OSCE's largest field mission are engaged in laying the foundations for new civil society. Just like numerous other OSCE field operations, the Mission in Kosovo is working to give all citizens a secure and democratic environment.

Establishing rule of law is of paramount importance to create new and just democratic structures in war-torn societies. To ensure the rights of prisoners to defence attorney and to a fair trial belongs to the manifold tasks of the department's rule of law. A survey by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo proved that close to 200 Kosovo detainees were denied access to an attorney.

[Rolf Welberts] After K-Day, there was nothing in place. The old judiciary did not exist anymore. The international community came and they came with a mandate to establish a local judiciary, a new local judiciary. So, we have two problems: one is a young system with judges and prosecutors and advocates who do not yet have the necessary qualification; and, on the other hand, the problem of ethnic bias. We built up a judicial institute, Kosovo Judicial Institute. There, we train judges and prosecutors. We have started training for defence council as well. If we didn't do it, nobody else would. So, I'm afraid that our presence for that is essential. For many people, including myself, there are regular moments of despair. But they don't last long because then you do get ahead. Often when you think 'this is it', you still ... you find a way.

[Herbert Cram] I had no idea what I was getting into. I saw an ad on the Internet, I filled out a résumé and I mailed it to the people. I thought it would be just another job, but when I got over here, it took me just about three days to understand that it's going to be a lot more than just another job.

[Commentator] To build a functioning civil society, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo maintains a police school. Highly dedicated officers from countries including Great Britain, France, Germany, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the United States train and instruct local Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb candidates to become able and fair policemen. The aim is to train 4 000 local recruits to be out in the field providing a professional police force. The long-term OSCE goal is to nationalise this institution.

[Herbert Cram] The majority of the people that apply are Albanians, male and female. There is a certain percentage that come from the former KLA; there is a certain percentage that OSCE and United Nations once recruited from ethnic groups. One Albanian is just as dedicated as a Serbian. I can't tell the difference between the two of them. There are a couple of students that brought up the fact that, 'Well, I'm Albanian and they're Serbian' and this and that and so on and so forth, and I was teaching the class at the time, and I told them: 'You stop right here. If you're working with another police officer who is wearing the same uniform as you are, he or she is your partner and he or she is the one that's going to either save your life or you are going to save their life, and it shouldn't be a question "Well, he's a Serbian or she's a Serbian or he or she's an Albanian" or whatever other background they are from. You are police officers.' At the end of the day, I am totally, mentally exhausted. I am drained. And it is a day-to-day challenge. It really is.

[Commentator] Another task of the OSCE in Kosovo is to help identify the victims of the conflict. In the missing persons programme, clothing serves as a main lead.

[Susanne Ringgard] Families had travelled throughout Kosovo during the conflict and many had died far away from where they came from. And, in some cases, the people who buried them didn't know who they were. So there was a great need to identify all of the bodies that were found at the time. Clothing for us represents a lead towards identification. There has to be a match between the information we get from the families, the biological profile, the ante-mortem data and the information that comes out of the autopsy report. So we do not identify bodies purely based on recognition of clothing.

[Commentator] Re-establishing the value of human life and human dignity is a key concern of the OSCE. The missing persons programme works closely together with the Hague War Crimes Tribunal. Numerous huge clothing displays, like this one in Pristina, help families to find answers about the fate of their loved ones.

[Susanne Ringgard] There are still a lot of clothing which has been handmade, has been mended, which is also why women most often are the ones that are the best ones to recognise the clothing because, in many cases, they're the ones that have done mending or who have made some of the clothing. The rewarding side is the certainty that you bring to people, that they may not, deep down, want. The experience is very much a mixture of maybe a desire to get certainty, to move on, but also the fear of getting that certainty and thereby extinguishing any kind of hope to find the person alive.

[Commentator] One of OSCE's main tasks is active human rights monitoring and promotion of the political participation of minorities. Before the war, over 140 000 Roma, Egyptian and Ashkalia community members lived in Kosovo. Over the years, they were mishandled by Serbs and Albanians for different political purposes, and their communities are ravaged by widespread poverty and illiteracy.

[Esra Erdem] What could be done? First of all, we provided direct contacts with the security forces — KFOR police — and tried to improve their situation in order for them to gain more freedom of movement and then more contact with their Albanian neighbours. They didn't have any leadership as such; their real leaders had left. They have now leadership who we have identified, a couple of people among their communities. They had to have a representation to give this minority group a structural mechanism to defend their interests and then to raise their voice, to struggle for their rights. A longer-term objective is to make these communities to be reintegrated as equal members of the Kosovo society. I am the most happiest when I'm in the field, when I'm in touch with the local population. And I like doing this job and then I don't let myself to lose motivation or energy at all. At least I'm trying. Of course, working conditions, living conditions are not that easy.

[Commentator] Fostering an active and free media scene in countries in transition is important for a functioning democratic society. Twelve years of repressive rule created a vacuum for Kosovo-Albanian journalism. The craving for a free press led to an explosion of media outlets. Seven major newspapers share a circulation of only 40 000 readers. And more than 79 small radio stations occupy the airwaves over Kosovo.

[Mike McIvor] So it's like mushrooms. You think ... you know, you turn your back and you look down on the ground and ... there's two or three more. In the end, there won't be nearly the number of broadcasters nor newspapers here, I suspect. But that's up to the people of Kosovo to decide which ones they want and which ones they don't. It's our job to try and make it as much as possible a level playing field for them to make that decision. We want to teach them, to instruct them and to assist them in becoming not only professional but viable in terms of the market place. But we're also stuck having to regulate them, so that puts us as a bit of someone who cuddles the teddy bear and then hits it with a hammer because, on occasion, the regulatory process has to be very stern — in licensing with the broadcasters and so on. And then, as a third dimension, we monitor the media.

What we don't see, yet, to any degree at all, are journalists addressing the fundamentals of their own society. There is a problem with black marketing; there is a problem with mafia-like gangs; there is a problem with the breakdown in some of the civic structure: drains are plugged, electricity is being reported because it's an

international issue; garbage pick-up is underreported because it's more of a domestic issue. So they're not dealing with issues that help build a civil society.

[Commentator] The OSCE and its numerous international and local staff members was responsible for holding and organising the first free elections in Kosovo's history on 28 October 2000. Carolyn McCool, as Head of the OSCE Regional Centre in Mitrovitsa, had the difficult task to oversee the elections process in her area, a difficult territory because of the large Kosovo Serb minority north of Mitrovitsa which boycotted the election process.

[Carolyn McCool] To be candid, I tended to the view that elections this fall were going to be too early, that it would be very difficult to have them organised properly and that perhaps the candidate population and the voting population wouldn't be ready for it. I've changed my mind. I think that this was the right decision. It's going to give us municipal governments and that's all that it's going to give us. But having established municipal government, we'll then be able to move on to questions of the interim constitution, the central authority, and Kosovo will then be able to enter this new era in Balkans political development.

The most difficult part of my job as Regional Director, I would have to say, is implementation of mission policy with the national communities in Mitrovitsa region. And, of course, we have a very large Kosovo Serb population north of the Ibar River and a very large Albanian population south. What I have to do is try to persuade Serbs to nominate judges to the judiciary, try and convince Albanians to accept greater cooperation with Serbs.

I've been touched by the reactions of people that I've seen in the polling centres and I have shared their feelings, although this is not my election. I feel, in a sense, honoured to have been able to be part of this process.