

# Perception of **Serbian community** towards **Kosovo Police**

A friend or a foe?



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# Table of content

Main Findings.....5

Introduction.....6

Historical context of K-Serb community relations with Kosovo Police .....8

Political influence on K-Serb community perception towards Kosovo Police ..... 13

The main security and safety concerns of K-Serb community ..... 18

Recommendations .....24

Bibliography .....25

# Main Findings

- The stance of Serbian community towards Kosovo Police is predominantly shaped by daily politics and overall political developments between Kosovo and Serbia;
- The K-Serb community has a low level of trust towards Kosovo Police. The lack of trust is more pronounced in North Mitrovica when compared to other regions in Kosovo. Moreover, the K-Serb community considers Kosovo Police as the most corrupted institution in Kosovo;
- Most of the safety concerns in Serbian majority municipalities are not of an interethnic nature. Poor infrastructure, domestic violence, stray animals, thefts and traffic accidents represent the overarching safety concerns of the communities in majority Serbian municipalities;
- People express greater levels of distrust towards police and indicate links between political structures, organized crime elements and police elements as reasons for distrust;
- There is a greater level of fear among people in the north, which leads to hesitancy to talk about serious crimes, power structures in the north and the assassination of Serbian politician Oliver Ivanovic;
- The justice system, and the State Prosecution in particular, is not effective in responding to police demands and does not provide updates on cases deposited by police structures in Serbian majority municipalities;
- The Kosovo Police structures in four Northern municipalities (North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Zvecan and Leposavic) have severe problems with fleet management. This includes reports of insufficient technical means such as vehicles that undermine the quality of services;
- Due to lack of translators, the Kosovo Police Regional Directorate of North Mitrovica fails to meet demand for translation requested from the stations under its command. The language problem affects police efficiency and results in misunderstandings between the police and citizens;
- Kosovo Police have a number of incompetent officials in structures in Serbian majority municipalities. This is due to an eased promotion process for ethnic-minorities and an accelerated vetting and training procedure in the integration process of former Ministry of Interior of Serbia (MUP) members;
- The Kosovo Police structures in Serbian majority municipalities have poor gender representation, with only 10.9% female police officers in North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Zvecan, Leposavic, Gracnica and Shterpca. The overall percentage of women serving in the Kosovo Police at the national level is 14.15%.

# Introduction

The integration of ethnic communities, in particular the Serbian Community (herein after K-Serb), into Kosovo Police (KP) has been one of the main priorities of Kosovo institutions and the international community. The integration process started immediately after the war in Kosovo and faced many challenges over the years mainly due to K-Serb community resistance to recognize the authority of the KP as a legitimate part of the State of Kosovo.

The K-Serb community living south of the Ibar river, started to endorse the concept of policing from a community perspective and as an instrument of public service. While in the North<sup>1</sup>, the inheritance of the previous system of policing based on militarization and the Serbian state prerogative prevailed until the dissolution of the parallel security structure as a result of Brussels Agreement in 2013. This has led to mixed perceptions of KP in the four northern municipalities. Despite many of the members of KP deriving from the former Serbian MUP, reluctance towards KP surfaces not only because of the symbolism associated with the KP uniform but also to their level of competence and loyalty to the community interest. This idea has been vocalized by the prominent Serbian politician in northern Kosovo, Mr. Oliver Ivanovic, who said that the same people, who performed competently in the Serbian MUP are no longer performing to the same extent in the Kosovo uniform.<sup>2</sup>

This paper summarizes the existing state of play with respect to the K-Serb community stance towards the KP in the majority Serbian inhabited municipalities by focusing on the four northern municipalities of Kosovo. It covers the main events and developments in context and presents public perception towards KP as a result of political tensions in the north and an overall state of fear among the population. Additionally, the paper analyzes the main safety concerns of the K-Serb community and offers several recommendations to address such concerns and challenges from a community perspective.

The paper relies on the extensive research KCSS team did in northern Kosovo and key Serbian majority inhabited municipalities throughout the rest of Kosovo. Discussions were held with citizens and police representatives clustered into six seminars in: North Mitrovica, Leposavic, Zvecan, Zubin Potok, Gračanica and Shtërpca. These were followed by face-to-face interviews with government representatives as well as civil society. The team did content analysis of official documents, existing reports and reviews of relevant legal frameworks. The overall findings have been backed up by the participatory observation of KCSS team involvement in different relevant processes as well as consultations with relevant actors.

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1 When North of Kosovo, Northern Municipalities or North alone is mentioned on the paper, it refers to 4 municipalities: North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Zvecan and Leposavic.

2 For more please see <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/oliver-ivanovic-nekoliko-meseci-pre-ubistva-situacija-na-kosovu-se-promenila-na-gore/ce48vdd>

# Historical context of K-Serb community relations with Kosovo Police

To fill the institutional and security vacuum after the war in Kosovo in 1999, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) provided an interim administration in Kosovo with executive and legislative authority<sup>3</sup>. Under the supervision and assistance of UNMIK and other international organizations, local institutions such as Kosovo Police (KP)<sup>4</sup> began to be established and gradually take the authority from the international administration. The K-Serb community in Kosovo did not immediately recognize UNMIK administration nor international efforts in establishing sustainable multiethnic institutions. They managed to maintain parallel structures in the Serbian majority municipalities, which operated de facto under the authority of the Serbian Government.<sup>5</sup> Parallel structures included schools, courts and healthcare, with the parallel security structures and presence of the Ministry of Interior of Serbia (MUP) constituting the largest challenge to administration.

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3 UNMIK Regulation No. 1999/1, 25 July 1999.

4 Until 2008, Kosovo Police was known as Kosovo Police Service.

5 OSCE (2003). *The Parallel Structures in Kosovo*. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/kosovo/42584?download=true>



Even though these structures operated illegally, UNMIK administration tolerated them for a long time. The same tolerance was applied to K-Albanian non-statutory security actors. Although there was no official clarification of UNMIK's approach towards the structures, ethnic tensions and the sensitivity of the political situation in Kosovo likely motivated them allowing these structures. Despite the fact that these structures no longer exist in their initial form, some elements continue to challenge Kosovo institutions and affect the K-Serb community perception towards them. The main entities which composed the parallel security structures operating in the northern municipalities were the so-called "Bridge Watchers" and the members of the MUP.

The "Bridge Watchers" were a vigilante group formed in the North of Kosovo, who identified themselves as a security organization and were supported and financed by Serbia. Due to the inability of local and international institutions to exercise full authority in the North and the community's rejection of these actors, the "Bridge Watchers" became the main "Law Enforcement" agency in the area from late 1999 to late 2001.<sup>6</sup> Their primary goal was to monitor the situation over the bridge and to resist any ad hoc or organized dash of Kosovo Albanians into northern Kosovo. In the beginning of 2003, the Bridge Watchers started to lose political and financial support from Belgrade due to Serbia's disagreements with political representatives from the Serbian community in Kosovo and an alleged attempt to recruit members from the group into Kosovo Police. In the absence of political and financial support, the group took on a lower profile and did not exercise "law enforcement" duties anymore.<sup>7</sup> However, until 2007 they managed to keep some of their components alive and continued to have a role in monitoring the security situation in Northern municipalities and intervened when needed.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the Bridge Watchers, MUP officers maintained a continuous presence in the North. MUP members consisted of former police officers in Kosovo who were active during the Milosevic regime, as well as officers sent from Serbia to gather information and provide administrative services.<sup>9</sup> In addition to administrative services, they were also engaged in policing activities, however they have always maintained a low public profile and their activities have not been entirely clear. Unlike the "Bridge Watchers", MUP officers were consistently backed by Serbia to maintain a direct presence in the North. This led MUP officers in the North to diminish the role of local groups of "Bridge Watchers" in a period where politi-

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid, Page 14.

8 OSCE (2007). *Parallel Structures in Kosovo – 2006 – 2008*.

9 Ibid.

cal cleavages began to appear within those groups. This allowed Belgrade to send a message to the local population that Serbia still had control over the zone.<sup>10</sup>

There were continuous efforts to integrate the parallel structures and K-Serb community into the Kosovo Police since the establishment. However, the first efforts to integrate them into KP in 2000 – 2003 were not successful; in 2002 approximately 200 members of “Bridge Watchers” and MUP officers expressed their interest in joining KP, however only three applicants fulfilled the criteria. However, by 2008 the integration process was considered successful by international organizations with KP including a total of 709 K-Serb members.<sup>11</sup>

As of 2008, the representation of ethnic communities in KP is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and ensured by Law No. 04/L-076 on Kosovo Police and Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self Government. The Constitution and the Law on KP states that the Police shall reflect the ethnic diversity of the population of Kosovo and that Police Officers assigned within a municipality, to the extent possible, must reflect the ethnic composition of the respective municipality.<sup>12</sup> The Law on Local Self Government guarantees the municipalities inhabited by K-Serb majorities exclusive rights to participate in the selection process of the local station police commanders.<sup>13</sup> This has been done to ensure the K-Serb community in Kosovo that KP is a force which aims to serve all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or other backgrounds.

Despite ensuring legal guarantees, after the declaration of the independence of Kosovo, KP faced major challenges in terms of K-Serb community representation in the institution and its activity in the northern part of the country. In February 2008, under pressure from Belgrade, K-Serb members of KP resigned from their positions and refused to undertake their daily tasks. They conditioned their return to their positions on being allowed to report directly to UNMIK. Due to KP's flexibility and desire for sustainable integration of the K-Serb community, they granted the request for North Mitrovica officers, resulting in 140 officers returning to their work under UNMIK's supervision. However, the same did not apply to other Serbian majority municipalities, and the majority

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10 International Crisis Group (2005), *Bridging Kosovo's Mitrovica Divide*. Available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/Bridging%20Kosovo's%20Mitrovica%20Divide.pdf>

11 M. G., J. F., & R. B. (2012). *Building the police service in a security vacuum: international efforts in Kosovo, 1999 - 2011*. Available at: <https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/Kosovo%20Police%20ToU.pdf>

12 Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 128/2. 2008 & Law No. 04/L-076 on Kosovo Police, Article 35, 2012;

13 The Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self Government, Article 19.

of K-Serb members of KP refused to return.<sup>14</sup> In response to their refusal, KP, in cooperation with EULEX and other international organizations, set June 2009 as a deadline for the resigned police officers to return to their positions; otherwise, they would lose their jobs permanently.<sup>15</sup> Due to international pressure on Belgrade and KP's flexibility, the deadline has proven to be successful, and most K-Serb officers returned to their positions by the appointed date.

2013 marked the greatest success regarding the K-Serb community integration in KP. Kosovo and Serbia reached an agreement, known as the 2013 Brussels agreement, in which the two countries agreed to dissolve the parallel structures financed and directed by Serbia and integrate their members into Kosovo's institutions. Article 7 of the agreement states that *"There shall be one police force in Kosovo called the Kosovo Police. All police in northern Kosovo shall be integrated in the Kosovo Police framework"*. Moreover, the agreement points out that there shall be a K-Serb Police Regional Commander for the northern municipalities, who is appointed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo with the proposal of the mayors of the respective municipalities.<sup>16</sup> The Serbian government had the responsibility to dismantle the parallel structures, retire their personnel and provide a list to Kosovo Authorities of MUP officers from the North that would join KP, who were then responsible for the training and integration of those officers into KP. The international community played a crucial role by ensuring the transition process was facilitated based on the agreed provisions.<sup>17</sup> Serbia provided a list of 337 individuals, of whom 285 joined KP, and the representation of K-Serb community reached a satisfactory level of 11.49% by the end of 2013.<sup>18</sup> The integration process had several challenges that sparked public reaction in Kosovo and Serbia. After the conclusion of the process, the former members of MUP who were subject to forced retirement due to the agreement and excluded from the integration process protested demanding the resolution of their status.<sup>19</sup> Public opinion attributed their exclusion to failure to meet

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14 Ibid.

15 D.E. (2014). *Inclusion or Exclusion? Minorities in The Security Sector in Post-Independent Kosovo*. Available at: [http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Inclusion\\_or\\_Exclusion\\_Minorities\\_In\\_The\\_Security\\_Sector\\_In\\_PostIndependent\\_Kosovo\\_223772.pdf](http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Inclusion_or_Exclusion_Minorities_In_The_Security_Sector_In_PostIndependent_Kosovo_223772.pdf)

16 Brussels Agreement (2013) Art. 9. Available at: [http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/FIRST\\_AGREEMENT\\_OF\\_PRINCIPLES\\_GOVERNING\\_THE\\_NORMALIZATION\\_OF\\_RELATIONS,\\_APRIL\\_19,\\_2013\\_BRUSSELS\\_en.pdf](http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/FIRST_AGREEMENT_OF_PRINCIPLES_GOVERNING_THE_NORMALIZATION_OF_RELATIONS,_APRIL_19,_2013_BRUSSELS_en.pdf)

17 M.B. & B.E. (2014). *Police Integration in North Kosovo: Progress and Remaining Challenges in Implementation of the Brussels Agreement*. Available at: [http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Police\\_Integration\\_in\\_North\\_Kosovo\\_851241.pdf](http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Police_Integration_in_North_Kosovo_851241.pdf)

18 Ibid.

19 Zeri.info (2015). *Ish pjesëtarët e MUP-it serb protestojnë në veri*. Available at: <https://zeri.info/aktuale/21126/ish-pjesetaret-e-mup-it-serb-protestojne-ne-veri/>

requirements, lack of status as permanent residents of Kosovo, their previous engagement in KP and their discharge prior to the agreement. However, their status remained unresolved. Public criticism occurred over the short duration training of MUP members, who completed a one-week training, as opposed to the regular 9-month training of KP. Moreover, the profile of MUP members was questioned due to lack of clear information regarding their background and an eased and accelerated vetting process.<sup>20</sup>

To ensure the integrity of the KP local structures, the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo (PIK) has extended its authority to the North of the country with the opening of their office in North Mitrovica five years ago. This office receives and reviews complaints from citizens in the four northern municipalities and is composed of K-Serb PIK members. On the other hand, there is no PIK office in Shterpce and Gračanica; however, their citizens can address their complaints in the nearest municipalities, Prishtina and Gjiłan respectively.<sup>21</sup> Because PIK is understaffed, the North Mitrovica office does not operate full time and only works on certain days.<sup>22</sup> The K-Serb community is not that familiar with PIK's work in K-Serb majority municipalities, and there is a need for PIK to conduct public relations campaigns in this part of the country explaining the institution's mandate and promoting its work. This would be an important step towards trust building in the KP.<sup>23</sup>

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20 M.B. & B.E. (2014). *Police Integration in North Kosovo: Progress and Remaining Challenges in Implementation of the Brussels Agreement*. Available at: [http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Police\\_Integration\\_in\\_North\\_Kosovo\\_851241.pdf](http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Police_Integration_in_North_Kosovo_851241.pdf).

21 Interview with Police Inspectorate of Kosovo official. 17/05/2019

22 Interview with Police Inspectorate of Kosovo official. 12/06/2019

23 Focus Group with Zvečan community and police representatives. North Mitrovica – 08/04/2019

# Political influence on K-Serb community perception towards Kosovo Police

The complexity of the political circumstances between Kosovo and Serbia continues to be one of the key issues affecting the K-Serb community's attitudes towards Kosovo institutions. The lack of political will to reach a stable agreement between the two countries maintains the gap between the K-Serb community and Kosovo institutions and overshadows vital issues that need to be addressed for the well-being of the K-Serb community in Kosovo.<sup>24</sup> The political differences have left KP and Serbian Police without official cooperation. Moreover, despite a nominal agreement between Kosovo and Serbia not to block or encourage others to block each other's progress,<sup>25</sup> Serbia – backed by Russia and other countries – influenced the failure of Kosovo's bid to join INTERPOL.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the lack of police cooperation has led to the North of Kosovo becoming fertile ground for organized crime activities and a safe haven for criminals from Kosovo and Serbia.<sup>27</sup>

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24 Balkan Insight (2018). *Languages: The Kosovo Problem Nobody Talks About*. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/04/languages-the-kosovo-problem-nobody-talks-about-04-26-2018/>

25 Brussels Agreement (2013). Article 14.

26 Balkan Insight (2018). *Kosovo's Bid to Join Interpol Fails*. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/11/20/kosovo-s-bid-to-join-interpol-fails-11-20-2018/>

27 Interview with Civil Society Representative from North Mitrovica

Furthermore, evidence shows that former members of parallel structures who are now in the spotlight when it comes to organized crime in the area share close ties with KP structures in the North and politicians from both countries. Accordingly, the K-Serb community in the North intrinsically associates certain segments of KP with corruption and local criminal structures and hesitates to cooperate with and recognize their authority.<sup>28</sup>

Although in recent years the K-Serb community has been adapted to the presence of KP in the North, they continue to be skeptical towards the special units of the KP operating in the area. Political entities in Serbia and political representatives of K-Serb community in Kosovo tend to portray KP's operations in the North as oppression of the K-Serb community and encourage citizens to resist. Moreover, with every intervention of KP's special units in the North, the civil defense sirens turn on with the aim of mobilizing the community, sowing fear and potentially escalating the situation. This approach fuels the community's feelings of insecurity and delegitimizes KP's efforts in fighting organized crime in the North. Consequently, Kosovo's presidential visit to Zubin Potok on 29 September 2018 was considered a provocation, and the presence of special units of KP accompanying the delegation were perceived as a threat by the community.<sup>29</sup> There were also protests and attempts to stop the KP and Kosovo Police Inspectorate(KPI) from intervening in the North and arresting KP officers suspected for corruption, despite the stated purpose and benefits the K-Serb community would have received from such operations. Citizens from the North believe that police issues in this part of the country should be resolved locally by the K-Serb majority police and consider the inclusion of special units in such issues to be an exaggeration and part of political games.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, different units of KP are more welcomed in the K-Serb majority municipalities in the South. In May 2019, special units of KP intervened in Sterpce to stop an unauthorized protest, resulting in clashes between the protesters and police.<sup>31</sup> Despite the use of extensive force and despite Serbia's attempt to politicize the operation, an agreement was reached between the

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28 Interview with Media Representative from Prishtina

29 Focus Group with Zubin Potok community and police representatives. Zubin Potok – 26/10/2018

30 Focus Group with North Mitrovica community and police representatives. North Mitrovica – 05/12/2018

31 Kallxo.com (2019). *Eskaloni proteste kundër hidrocentralit në Shtërpçë*. Available at: <https://kallxo.com/eskalon-protesta-kunder-hidrocentralit-ne-shterpce/>

protest representatives, KP, and municipality of Shterpca to hold a meeting to discuss and address citizens' concerns.<sup>32</sup>

The North of Kosovo has been the subject of many unresolved attacks towards political figures and K-Serb officials of Kosovo institutions, which has raised concerns over the police's ability to fully exercise their authority in this part of the country. The latest unresolved case involves the murder of Oliver Ivanovic, a well-known Serbian politician from North Mitrovica. His murder was preceded by three bomb attacks on his personal property and the headquarters of the party he represented. In an interview with Mr. Ivanovic, in which he humorously warned of the possibility of his murder, Milan Radojicic was named as a key figure for organized crime activities and a leader of an "informal center of power" in the North.<sup>33</sup> It is suspected that Milan Radojicic, the vice-president of K-Serb party "Lista Srpska", is the mastermind behind many political attacks in the North and closely cooperates with controversial figures like Zvonko Veselinovic<sup>34</sup>, who is considered to be his business partner in their legal and illegal activities. Despite their self-proclamation as defenders of K-Serb interests and their nationalistic narrative, Milan Radojicic and Zvonko Veselinovic do not have barriers when it comes to cooperating with Albanian criminals, who have been indicted for several criminal offenses. Zvonko Veselinovic was actively engaged in fuel smuggling, alongside a K-Albanian criminal group that helped him distribute the smuggled fuel throughout Kosovo.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, a construction company owned by Radojicic and Veselinovic is rumored to be one of the sub-contractors in the construction of "Ibrahim Rugova" highway, which connects Kosovo and Albania. Ironically, it is thought that the trucks of the same company have been used as barriers in the "Barrier Crisis" in the North.<sup>36</sup>

Although there was evidence that showed Milan Radojicic's links with organized crime, Kosovo authorities have helped legitimize him as a K-Serb political representative. The Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Ramush Haradinaj, had several meetings with him. Radojicic, as the deputy president

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32 Kallxo.com (2019). *Protesta në Shtërpçë, Policia përdor sprej për t'i shpërndarë protestuesit*. Available at: <https://kallxo.com/protesta-ne-shterpce-policia-perdor-sprej-per-ti-shperndare-protestuesit/>

33 Balkan Insight (2018). *Ivanovic Named Radojicic as North Kosovo Dark Ruler*. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/02/27/ivanovic-named-radojicic-as-north-kosovo-dark-ruler-02-26-2018/>

34 For more on Zvonko Veselinovic profile and his ties with organized crime and politicians in Serbia please read: <https://www.krik.rs/en/serbian-presidents-brother-met-infamous-criminal/>

35 Balkan Insight (2012). *Kosovo Petrol Smugglers Detained for Month*. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/06/01/kosovo-petrol-smugglers-ordered-month-in-detention/>

36 The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2019). *Hotspots of Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*. Available at: <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hotspots-Report-English-13Jun1110-Web.pdf>

of “Lista Srpska”, is a coalition partner in the Haradinaj Government. After being criticized for the meeting with Milan Radoijcic, Prime Minister Haradinaj stated that other political leaders had also cooperated with him, highlighting a joint meeting between Haradinaj, Mr. Hashim Thaci, President of Kosovo, and Milan Radoijcic at the President’s office.<sup>37</sup> Later, KP’s investigations for Ivanovic’s murder pointed to Milan Radoijcic and his group as the main suspects. As a result, KP launched a large-scale operation for Ivanovic’s murder and managed to arrest four suspects, of whom two were members of KP. However, they failed to arrest the main suspect, Milan Radoijcic.<sup>38</sup> Despite his obvious links to organized crime and the murder of Mr. Ivanovic, Serbia did not hesitate to shelter Mr. Radoijcic and refuse co-operation with Kosovo authorities for the resolution of the Ivanovic case. In addition to assisting in Radoijcic’s escape from Kosovo authorities, Serbian President Mr. Alexander Vucic continues to be vocal in the defense of Milan Radoijcic. Mr. Vucic stated that the information that Serbia has does not link Radoijcic in any way with the assassination of Oliver Ivanovic and that Kosovo authorities are hiding the facts that point to his real killer.<sup>39</sup> Serbia’s approach on the case has disturbed the K-Serb community, who are skeptical that the Ivanovic case will be solved. Despite their criticism of KP’s operational approach, they welcomed the arrests; however, there is a general feeling that the main suspect will be amnestied and freely continue criminal activity in the North due to strong political links in both countries.<sup>40</sup>

Belgrade has made continuous efforts to diminish the integration achievements in Kosovo institutions by using aggressive measures like physical threats and blackmail. In 2018, Serbia became violent against the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), leading to the withdrawal of almost 50% of Serbian members from KSF.<sup>41</sup> During this aggressive campaign, anyone who publicly supported resigned KSF members and denounced Serbia’s approach was politically stigmatized due to per-

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37 Kallxo.com (2019). *Haradinaj zbardh takimin e Hashim Thaçit me Milan Radoiçiqin*. Available at: <https://kallxo.com/haradinaj-zbardh-takimin-e-hashim-thacit-me-milan-radoicicqin/>

38 Balkan Insight (2018). *Vrasja e Oliver Ivanoviçit: Arrestimet e kryera deri më tani*. Available at: <http://archive.balkaninsight.com/al/article/vrasja-e-oliver-ivanovi%C3%A7it-arrestimet-e-kryera-deri-m%C3%AB-tani-11-27-2018>  
*There are informal reporting indicating that Radojicic may have been informed on the police raid few hours in advance, by certain elements in the Kosovo Government.*

39 Radio Slobodna Evropa (2019). *Vuçiç: Mislmo da imamo ime ubice Olivera Ivanoviça*. Available at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30034800.html>

40 Focus Group with North Mitrovica community and police representatives. North Mitrovica – 05/12/2018

41 SH.B. & T.B. (2018). *Multiethnicity destruction tendencies: Massive resignations of Serbian members from the Kosovo Security Force and Serbia’s role*. Available at: [http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Policy\\_brief\\_eng\\_434386.pdf](http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Policy_brief_eng_434386.pdf)



ceived “disloyalty”.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, despite their concerns, the K-Serb community hesitates to freely express their opinions on the Ivanovic case or other politically sensitive issues, due to fear of possible retaliation. Furthermore, Serbia has imposed the division between K-Serbs in the North and K-Serbs in the South, resulting in different political attitudes towards Kosovo institutions within the community. Representatives of the K-Serb community emphasize that Serbs in the North are more privileged by the politics in Serbia; namely, the ruling party in Serbia has political and criminal ties to the northern part of the country and easier access for intrusion in Kosovo’s internal affairs there.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, K-Serb civil society representatives point out that besides geographic divisions, Belgrade is also dividing K-Serbs into “loyal” and “disloyal” Serbs<sup>44</sup>, forcing them not to cooperate with Kosovo institutions due to the fear of an institutionalized intimidation by Serbia and an unfavorable position within the K-Serb community in Kosovo.

The arrest of KP members as part of the Radojicic criminal group has revealed the potential impact organized crime may have on KP structures in the North. Moreover, researches have shown irregularities in the grading process of ethnic minorities in Kosovo when considering them for employment in KP. For the sake of a multiethnic force, KP has lowered grading standards for minority members resulting in incompetent officials in certain positions.<sup>45</sup> As a result, KP struggles to appoint certain assignments to some of its members due to the lack of professionalism, therefore damaging its efficiency and public perception.<sup>46</sup> The avoidance of proper security checks for former MUP members integrated in KP, involvement of KP officials in organized crime activities and eased grading procedures for some KP members have resulted in low performance of KP structures in the North in terms of fighting organized crime. KP should be uncompromised when it comes to denouncing political influence in its local structures and fighting organized crime. Despite challenges, KP should ensure the public safety and well-being of Kosovo Citizens are not political and that they have the capacity to address their needs and concerns.

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42 Ibid.

43 REL (2019). *Thellimi i ndarjeve të serbëve në Kosovë nga Beogradi*. Available at: <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/ndarje-serbe-te-kosoves-beograd-30027557.html?nocache=1>

44 Ibid.

45 P.A. (2017). *Monitorimi dhe vleresimi i integritetit ne sektorin e sigurise*. Available at: [http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Monitorimi\\_dhe\\_vleresimi\\_i\\_integritetit\\_ne\\_sektorin\\_i\\_sigurise\\_804909.pdf](http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Monitorimi_dhe_vleresimi_i_integritetit_ne_sektorin_i_sigurise_804909.pdf)

46 Interview with Media Representative from Prishtina.

# The main security and safety concerns of K-Serb community

KP has a satisfactory level of K-Serb community representation with 12.2% of its members coming from this community. While statistically the integration of K-Serb citizens in KP has been successful, it doesn't reflect the same success in terms of public perceptions and relations between KP and the K-Serb community. The process of the integration of the K-Serb community into the KP was a subject of the Kosovo – Serbia dialogue, and as such, a local dialogue for the benefits and challenges of the inclusion in Police has been avoided. Therefore, despite hesitations, most of them joined KP after Belgrade instructed them to do so.

For the vast majority of other citizens, Kosovo Police (KP) are perceived to be one of the most trusted institutions in Kosovo. On the other hand, the K-Serb community continues to have negative perceptions towards them, with only 4.7% of them having trust in KP.<sup>47</sup>



Trust towards Kosovo Police by Ethnicity.

47 D.M. (2018). *Kosovo Security Barometer 8<sup>th</sup> edition*. Available at: [http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/barometri2018-SHQIP\\_853983.pdf](http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/barometri2018-SHQIP_853983.pdf)

The Kosovo Security Barometer (KSB) examines the correlation between inter-ethnic relations and trust towards security institutions in Kosovo. The KSB’s eighth edition noted that the level of trust towards KP from different ethnic communities is largely determined by the overall position of each group in social, political, and public life. As a result, there is a pronounced difference in trust towards KP by regions. For example, North Mitrovica citizens have a very low trust level when compared to other regions in Kosovo.



Trust towards Kosovo Police by Regions.

The K-Serb community is also skeptical towards KP’s integrity. While for the majority of citizens Judiciary and State Prosecution are perceived to be the most corrupted institutions in Kosovo, the K-Serb community lists KP as the most corrupted institution in Kosovo.<sup>48</sup>



Perception on corruption in Kosovo Police by Ethnicity.

Moreover, 54.1% of K-Serb respondents say police officers from the nearest police station are corrupt.<sup>49</sup> Despite the fact that police stations in Serbian-majority municipalities are composed of Serbian officials, the K-Serb community hesitates to trust them and links KP segments with negative activities that damage perceptions of KP integrity. In the last three years, KSB has also measured whether K-Serb citizens feel safe in their homes, neighborhoods, villages/cities and in Kosovo in general. Responses reflect a lack of trust towards the institutions responsible for their public safety. The results show that K-Serbs feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods, but do not feel safe in Kosovo in general<sup>50</sup>.

48 P.A. (2019). *Kosovo Security Barometer Special Edition - Corruption, Rule of Law and Police Integrity in Kosovo*. Available at: [http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Corruption\\_Rule\\_of\\_Law\\_ENG\\_Final\\_320893.pdf](http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Corruption_Rule_of_Law_ENG_Final_320893.pdf)

49 Ibid.

50 D.M. (2019). *Kosovo Security Barometer – Special edition on Public Safety*.



While it is assumed that most of the problems of K-Serb community are of an ethnic nature, they are many challenges that this community faces that affect public safety. Some of the main safety and security concerns of the K-Serb community and the Local KP structures are the lack of technical means, misinformation on KP and other institutions, poor gender representation in local police structures, poor communication between KP and other institutions, poor infrastructure, domestic violence, etc.

The establishment of the Regional Police Directorate in North Mitrovica was defined by the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. After its establishment, the focus of Kosovo institutions was the proper management of human resources, capacity building and a careful transition of command of several stations under the South Mitrovica regional directorate to the North Mitrovica directorate. As such, equipping the North Mitrovica directorate with the necessary equipment was not a priority of KP central structures, and the needs for more technical resources were neglected. From meetings between citizens and KP structures in Serbian majority municipalities, we have ascertained that the local KP structures would be more efficient if they are provided with additional technical resources. KP representatives from these municipalities stated that they do not have enough vehicles to properly patrol and be more visible in every corner of their territorial jurisdiction.<sup>51</sup> In addition, police have requested for the improvement of infrastructure, additional traffic signs, speed bumps, etc., from their municipalities. The municipal representatives stated that most of the infrastructure problems identified by the police are not within their jurisdiction, and the requests addressed to the relevant institutions have fallen on 'deaf ears'.<sup>52</sup>

51 Focus Group with Zubin Potok community and police representatives. Zubin Potok – 26/10/2018

52 Focus Group with Gracanica community and police representatives. Gracanica – 26/02/2019

The citizens' feedback shows that the K-Serb community has insufficient information on KP's functioning at the central level, their rights and other existing safety mechanisms. One of their main concerns regarding communication of information is the poor use of Serbian language in official documents. Due to the erroneous translation into Serbian, the content of many KP documents differs from the Albanian and English versions. Discrepancies in different version of these documents has led to misunderstandings between citizens and police.<sup>53</sup> There is only one (1) translator available in the North Mitrovica directorate, and due to the high demand for document translation, the translator has been unable to successfully manage the workload.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the language barrier sometimes prevents the North Mitrovica directorate from completing tasks set by the General Directorate on time, resulting in poor evaluations of their efficiency.<sup>55</sup> However, the translation is a shared problem of all regional directorates of KP. Although most of the police stations in Kosovo have language assistants, KP has reduced the number of translators in Regional Directorates, from 18 in 2015 to 15 in 2017. The same problem is present in other institutions as well. Research conducted in 2014 highlights multiple errors on crucial documents, such as the Kosovo constitution, the criminal code and, ironically, on the Serbian version of the law on languages.<sup>56</sup> Serbian civil society representatives from Kosovo have recommended several actions to address this problem. According to them, Kosovo Assembly should adopt an extraordinary regulation that would allow for the proofreading of the existing laws. They encourage the government to establish a central translation service to gather all translators in a centralized office and coordinate their workload and respectively respond to the needs of institutions like KP in a more efficient way.<sup>57</sup>

The police representatives stated that they are very close and cooperative with the community; however, they are fatigued by requests for intervention in matters outside their jurisdiction, due to citizens' misinformation on KP's work.<sup>58</sup> They are serving as a bridge between other institutions and the community, and their image is being damaged when those institutions are not responding

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53 Ibid.

54 OSCE (2018). *Thematic Report on Language Compliance in the Kosovo Police*. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/sq/mission-in-kosovo/396824?download=true>

55 Ibid.

56 Prishtina Insight (2016). *Kosovo, lost in translation*. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-lost-translation/>

57 NGO Aktiv & CPT (2016). *Quality of Translation of Kosovo Laws into Serbian Language*. Available at: <http://ngoaktiv.org/uploads/files/Policy%20Brief%20-%20Quality%20of%20Translation%20of%20Kosovo%20Laws%20into%20Serbian%20Language.pdf>

58 Focus Group with Zvecan community and police representatives. North Mitrovica – 08/04/2019

to the demands of citizens.<sup>59</sup> The same problem is present in the southern K-Serb majority municipalities as well.<sup>60</sup> The police station in Gracanica does not have a person in charge for media relations; therefore, they encounter problems being consistent in communicating their messages to the citizens.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, same as in all Kosovo municipalities, major concerns were directed towards the State Prosecution as well. Prosecutors do not follow up with local police stations on criminal offenses they reported, and there are many cases where citizens who have committed crimes in these municipalities remain free, consequently harming the trust towards KP.<sup>62</sup>

Gender representation in KP has been listed among the key challenges by the K-Serb community. While this problem is present in all police structures, it is also pronounced in the K-Serb majority municipalities. The KP regional headquarters in North Mitrovica has 125 police officers, of whom 13 are female; the KP police station in Zubin Potok has 61 police officers, of whom 5 are female; the KP police station in Leposavic has 99 police officers, of whom 14 are female; the KP police station in Zvecan has 60 police officers, of whom 5 are female; the KP police station in Gracanica has 42 police officers, of whom 5 are female; the KP police station in Shterpca has 61 police officers, of whom 7 are female<sup>63</sup>. While the Serbian community perceives the poor gender representation as a major problem, there is not much that can be done by the local police structures<sup>64</sup>. There is a need for more work from the central level of KP to encourage women from the K-Serb community to join the police and, thus, positively influence their perception towards KP.

Domestic violence is a major problem in Kosovo, and is also an issue that concerns the K-Serb community. They consider that increasing the number of female police officers would also contribute to the adequate treatment of domestic violence victims and increase the rate of reporting of domestic violence in Serbian majority municipalities.<sup>65</sup> KP is the body responsible for providing protective measures for domestic violence victims, and, if necessary, they are obliged by law to

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59 Ibid.

60 When Southern Kosovo, Southern Municipalities or South alone is mentioned on the paper, it refers to 2 municipalities: Gracanica and Shterpca.

61 Focus group with Gracanica community and police representatives. Gracanica – 26/02/2019

62 Focus Group with Leposavic community and police representatives. Leposavic – 24/01/2019

63 The data on the composition of KP in Serbian majority municipalities are obtained from OSCE municipal profiles 2018.

64 Focus Group with Zubin Potok community and police representatives. Zubin Potok – 26/10/2018

65 Focus Group with North Mitrovica community and police representatives. North Mitrovica – 05/12/2018

accompany the victims of domestic violence to other institutions, such as shelters.<sup>66</sup> There are 8 licensed centers providing shelter for domestic violence victims. The shelters are located in Gjilan, Prishtina, Peja, Gjakova, Prizren, South Mitrovica, Ferizaj and Novoberda.<sup>67</sup> Currently there are no shelters operating in Serbian majority municipalities, while the Novoberda shelter is under the management of K-Serb officials. However, most of the social workers from the K-Serb community engaged in this shelter obtained their professional credentials in Serbia and as such were not eligible to continue their work. As a result, the shelter failed to get relicensed and is not currently active.<sup>68</sup>

Regardless of the challenges, the integration of the K-Serb community into KP should be a continuous process. KP should base this process on the needs and challenges of the K-Serb community and provide them with proper representation and attention to their safety concerns. KP and other local security mechanisms should undertake various activities to make their mandates and work clear to the K-Serb community. By doing so, they will get closer to the community, encourage cooperation and promote tolerance and inclusiveness.

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66 Law No.03/L –182 on Protection against Domestic Violence. Available at: <http://www.assembly-kosova.org/common/docs/ligjet/2010-182-eng.pdf>

67 OSCE (2018). *Reporting the Domestic Violence*. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/sq/mission-in-kosovo/404351?download=true>

68 Ibid.

# Recommendations

- Kosovo Government should work in decreasing the political interference in K-Serb community relations with Kosovo Police. The international community should strongly support such initiatives and assist if needed;
- Kosovo Police must undertake campaigns to promote their work and the K-Serb community inclusion. Such campaigns should make it clear that Kosovo Police is a unified force, and the presence of any of its units in Serbian majority municipalities is merely intended to strengthen the security of the citizens;
- Kosovo Police must conduct informational campaigns to increase female engagement in the institution and increase the number of female police officers in Serbian majority municipalities;
- Kosovo Police should assess and address the needs for technical means in the North Mitrovica Regional Directorate;
- In order to respond more effectively to the requests of police stations in the North for translation of official documents, Kosovo Police shall increase the number of translators in the North Mitrovica Regional Directorate. Furthermore, Kosovo Police is encouraged to engage more translators in other Regional Directorates as well;
- Kosovo Police should provide all the necessary documents for grading process in the mother languages of all respective candidates. However, they should be uncompromised when it comes to promoting its members and such process must be merit-based;
- Kosovo Police Inspectorate should raise its presence in the Serbian majority municipalities, promote its work and actively oversee the police work on the respective municipalities;
- The State Prosecution should be more efficient and transparent when dealing with cases reported by police structures in the Serbian majority municipalities;
- The donor community, in cooperation with local civil society organizations, should support local community-based organizations in the Serbian majority municipalities, organize trainings and activities in those municipalities and promote the benefits of K-Serb community inclusion in Kosovo institutions.
- Kosovo Police, Civil Society Organizations, and Local and Central institutions should organize regular meetings and activities with the K-Serb community to discuss the security developments in Kosovo.



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