EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES KOSOVO

POLITICAL UPDATE

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ON THE RECENT SECURITY INCIDENTS IN KLINË/KLINA AND THE DIFFICULT RETURN PROCESS

In the night of 17–18 May, Kosovo Serb inhabitants who had recently returned to the villages of Bicë/Biča and Grapc/Grabac in the municipality of Klinë/Klina, were reported to have been victims of a series of robberies and verbal abuses by unknown assailants. These are the most recent additions to a number of similar incidents involving Serb returnees in the municipality of Klinë/Klina. The Kosovo Police is investigating the incidents, and on Tuesday, it announced that it has arrested seven individuals suspected to be behind the latest robberies and attacks. Events of this nature, even if not always primarily ethnically-motivated, are intolerable and they create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity for Kosovo Serbs inhabitants and especially returnees in Klinë/Klina and elsewhere in Kosovo.

Incidents involving Serbian community members immediately raise the question of the motives behind them. Though the majority of incidents are petty crimes and most are not violent, the relatively high number of incidents in this municipality involving Kosovo Serb returnees may be a sign of fragile relations and a precarious security situation.[1] Rexhë Berisha, Kosovo Police Station Commander in Klinë/Klina, noted that Kosovo Serbs in his area of responsibility had been a target in some 14 incidents in 2015, while there were around 200 incidents involving the Albanian community for the same period. He noted that the rate of crimes solved involving communities was some 60%, while the rate of crimes solved involving the majority community was some 75%.[2] The Mayor of Klinë/Klina, Sokol Bashota, has strongly condemned the incidents and expressed his support for the Serb community in his municipality.[3] He also called on the Kosovo Police and relevant authorities to identify those responsible and "punish them with a sentence that fits their crime".[4] In an interview given to RTK, Kosovo Serbs victims of the attack said that they don't see robbers as Albanians or Serbs but simply as criminals. The situation in the villages is calm, and returnees appear to be determined to remain in Kosovo.[5]

Serbian government officials have not issued any statements on these recent incidents as yet. Head of the Serbian Government's Office for Kosovo, Marko Djurić, had visited earlier Serb returnees to Klinë/Klina and had called upon Kosovo to provide support and assistance to Serbs in need as "they have it the worst in Kosovo".[6] Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, speaking recently in his capacity as rotating chairman of OSCE, spoke generally of the security

[1] http://kossev.info/strana/arhiva/klina__napad_i_pljacka_povratnika/4858; http://kossev.info/strana/arhiva/povratnik_iz_kline__tukli_me_psovali_traze_da_prodam_kucu/4873; http://kossev.info/strana/arhiva/upad_u_kucu_povratnika_u_drsniku_kod_kline/4698; http://kossev.info/strana/arhiva/opljackana_kuca_srpskinje_u_selu_dugonjevo_kod_kline/4267; http://lajmi.net/sulmohet-nje-serb-i-kthyer-ne-kline/; http://lajmi.net/sulmohet-nje-serb-i-kthyer-ne-kline/

[2] http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/familjet-serbe-ne-kline-cak-i-vjedhjevemohohen-arsyet-etnike-video-101827/

[3] http://koha.net/?id=9&l=57088

[4] http://live.kallxo.com/sq/MTL/Vendore-e-Nderkombetare-Reagojne-Ndaj-Incidenteve-me-Familjet-Serbe-ne-Kline-6666

[5] http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=04&dd=29&nav_id=986235 or http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/familjet-serbe-ne-kline-cak-i-vjedhjevemohohen-arsyet-etnike-video-101827/

[6] http://www.rtvpuls.com/vesti/djuric_zatrazio_zastitu_srba_u_metohiji__/4875

situation in Kosovo and called the position of minority communities "unacceptable".[7] Media in Serbia have reported on the incidents regularly and have generally framed the incidents as being ethnically-motivated.[8]

Incidents of this nature are difficult to categorize as they are not always primarily motivated by the ethnicity of those involved. Nevertheless, the fact that these robberies are the latest in a series of incidents targeting minority communities—and specifically Kosovo Serb returnees—makes it evident that there is a real lack of security for minority communities in the municipality of Klinë/Klina. This further complicates the already complex and fragile situation the Serb community finds itself in this particular municipality, and must be taken seriously by relevant municipal and central authorities.

In that regard, actions taken by Kosovo institutions and mechanisms that have been established to protect the rights of communities and to remedy infringements upon such rights in the wake of the recent incidents in Klinë/Klina are steps in the good direction. The Kosovo Police has reacted swiftly and apprehended seven individuals suspected to be behind some of the attacks and robberies. There was effective communication by politicians representing the community, the Kosovo Police, and the Mayor of Klinë/Klina. Finally, central level institutions, especially the Ministry of Communities and Return, have cooperated closely with local authorities and the Kosovo Police.

Punishing those responsible for this latest spat of robberies would be the next step in the right direction towards stopping these types of incidents from occurring in the future. While it is commendable that public officials, including ministers and the mayor have issued condemnations and asked for those responsible to be apprehended and punished accordingly, municipal and central-level officials should be seen taking a more proactive approach when engaging minority community members, including by visiting the victims of attacks or robberies. Statements of condemnation alone are not enough, especially for the victims and the Serb community, which feels particularly vulnerable in this municipality.

The incidents bring the broader problems surrounding the return process of displaced people to Kosovo back to the political forefront. In an immediate reaction, Minister for Communities and Return, Dalibor Jevtić, said that Serb returnees to this area of Kosovo and their property are a constant target for attacks, and that calls for the perpetrators to be punished are not being heeded by the authorities.[9] On 15 May, the Government of Kosovo established the Inter-ministerial Group on Return at the initiative of the Ministry for Communities and Returns with the aim of speeding up the return process in Kosovo.[10] Jevtić expressed his hope that the newly-formed Inter-ministerial Group on Return would bring about a positive change in the returns process; only about 10% of non-Albanians that left Kosovo had returned since 1999.[11] This new Inter-ministerial Group was formed as part of the new strategy of the Ministry for Communities and Return, which was developed with ECMI Kosovo's technical assistance.

The Strategy for Communities and Return, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo in December 2013 and covering the period from 2014–2018, aims to support the process of return of displaced person both within and outside Kosovo, as well as to support the displaced persons and Kosovo's institutions with a view towards their successful re-integration and

[7] http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=05&dd=19&nav_category=11&nav_id=993614
[8] http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=04&dd=29&nav_id=986235 or http://www.vesti.rs/Hronika/NAPADNUT-SRBIN-U-KLINI-Osamario-ga-nepoznati-Albanac.html or http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/srbija.73.html:548723-Klina-Surovo-prebijen-i-opljackan-stari-bracni-par
[9] http://www.rtklive.com/rtk2/?id=2&r=1655
[10] http://www.rtklive.com/rtk2/?id=2&r=1598
[11] Ibid.

stabilisation back into Kosovo's society.[12] Kosovo's legal framework and applicable international agreements and instruments guarantee the right to return to all those living in Kosovo that had been displaced before and after 1999. The return process, however, has been slow and difficult. There is a lack of accurate data on displaced persons, lack of economic development and insufficient social welfare, few jobs and income-generating opportunities, lack of infrastructure and accompanying services, etc.[13] The 2014–2018 Strategy aims to overcome some of these difficulties through better coordination with municipal offices for communities and return, an increased focus on economic development and jobs, by providing housing and socio-economic assistance to those returnees most in need, by improved provision of services to returnees including health and education, as well as a number of other actions foreseen in the Strategy. For more information and an assessment of the return process in Kosovo, please see ECMI Kosovo's report *The Repatriation Process in Kosovo: Institutional organisation, legal framework, lessons learnt and remaining challenges*.

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[12] http://www.mkk-ks.org/repository/docs/Strategy_-January_2014.pdf
[13] Ibid.

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About ECMI Kosovo

ECMI Kosovo is the principal non-governmental organisation engaged with minority issues in Kosovo, with the overarching aim to develop inclusive, representative, community-sensitive institutions that support a stable multi-ethnic Kosovo. ECMI Kosovo contributes to the developing, strengthening and implementation of relevant legislation, supports the institutionalisation of communities-related governmental bodies, and enhances the capacity of civil society actors and the government to engage with one another in a constructive and sustainable way.

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