

CSCE MISSIONS TO KOSOVO, SANDZAK AND VOJVODINA

FINAL REPORT

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CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (CSCE)

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1. OVERALL ASSESSMENT

1. A final evaluation of the Missions, their performance and possible impact, can only be made after some time has passed.

The Missions entered the area in September 1992, when the war in Bosnia & Herzegovina had lasted for six months. The Missions have consistently advocated a policy of restraint and have taken every opportunity to try to defuse tensions of an ethnic nature in the areas. At the time of the Missions' departure the fear that the Bosnian war might spread still persists in Kosovo, Sandžak and Vojvodina. Nevertheless, in spite of the rhetoric, propaganda and disinformation that accompany the war psychosis inside and outside ex-Yugoslavia, one perceives an inclination in the three regions to stop short of actions that could escalate into a major confrontation. There are reasons to believe that the active involvement of the Missions in a continuous mediation process has contributed to the maintenance of relative tranquillity. It is all the more regrettable that their presence could not be continued since most political and ethnic groups in the FRY recognize the stabilizing influence of the Missions.

2. A major difficulty in the implementation of the Missions' task has been the almost total lack of experience in democracy in ex-Yugoslavia. Protection of human rights as a concept is incorporated in the legislation. In practice, however, it takes second place to the exigencies of the state. It is worth noticing that this applies all over the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), in other words, it is not exclusively an ethnic issue. The Missions have to a large extent performed the functions of an "ombudsman" institution, again an activity which has been recognized as

positive by all sides. There is ample evidence that in individual cases authorities have refrained from repressive actions because of actual or potential intervention by Mission personnel. There is still far to go before the FRY can present a tolerable human rights record. (In this respect Montenegro appears to have done appreciably better than Serbia.) The Missions have had liberal access to newspapers and to government representatives in arguing the case for real safeguards for human rights.

3. The future of the ethnically sensitive areas of the FRY is closely connected with the political developments in Belgrade. Given the many unsettling factors - strikes, mass unemployment, drastic reduction of living standards etc. - one cannot be at all certain that the present power structure will be maintained. Events in Bosnia and the outcome of the Geneva peace talks may also influence the Belgrade political scene. In a scenario of turbulence at the top, the ethnic communities may see new dangers or new possibilities.

4. The CSCE Missions could only carry out their mandate with the consent and the formal support of the federal authorities. Unarmed mission members depend for their protection on the authorities in control of the territory. The hostility encountered in some political circles was a disturbing element already from the start of Mission operations. When the moderate FRY government under Milan Panić had to leave in the wake of the December election results the critics of Mission presence became increasingly vocal. Notwithstanding their admission that there was a stabilizing effect, the Missions were considered by the dominant political forces as an undesired and even humiliating legacy of the Panić era. When, in their view, nothing could be gained internationally by a prolongation, it became only a matter of time before the formal cover for the Mission operations was withdrawn. Still, it may be said that during their ten months of activity the Missions established themselves as an objective "third force" in a troubled region, and won the respect of the peoples it wanted to assist.

5. In their rounds of final meetings Mission members have taken

pains to emphasize to ethnic leaders that the departure of the Missions does not mean that their communities have been abandoned by the CSCE. It would seem essential that some international presence is maintained by those who are still allowed to operate in the regions of the FRY, i.e., the embassies of CSCE participating states. If their efforts to stay in touch with the ethnic communities could be somehow coordinated, so much the better. They cannot replace the Missions, but they can cushion the shock felt by many in the ethnic communities at the Missions' departure.

6. Another line of action that might be considered by the CSCE is to explore how best to improve access to unbiased information in the FRY. At the moment, two government controlled TV channels are the only sources of information for the overwhelming majority of the population, information which is necessarily slanted.

2.FIELD REPORTS

Summaries

Kosovo: In political terms the three Missions stationed in Kosovo encountered a tense stalemate as distinct from a powder keg ready to explode upon the smallest provocation. Looking back over the two preceding years, it is evident the Serbian administration has refrained from pursuing policies to re-establish Serbian pre-eminence in a piece of territory where Albanians dominate by virtue of their control of much of the economy and their 90 percent share in the population. The Albanian opposition is openly secessionist, generally preferring independence to union with Albania. Its policy of peaceful resistance has rallied virtually the entire Albanian population behind the goal of shaking off the Serbian yoke.

Upon the departure of the Missions the basic determinants of the stalemate had not changed. Serbia retains absolute control by

means of brute force, but has not come up with any constructive ideas to normalize conditions in its southern province. The Albanians, while well organized and dedicated to achieving political independence, are for now incapacitated by Serbian armed might with no immediate prospects of liberation.

Tension in the province had been fluctuating over the past ten months, with serious incidents including several deaths occurring during the stay of the Missions in Kosovo. Reprisals there were, but so far none have triggered the dreaded ethnic conflagration that has been so confidently predicted by many foreign observers and by Albanian propaganda.

It would be idle to speculate what new measures Belgrade might try out in an attempt to control secessionism and restore Serbian presence. As yet Belgrade has found no viable response to the concerted and well-directed Albanian drive for complete independence. Serbs will generally admit that a large-scale ethnic cleansing of the province is not possible. They could easily shut down the parallel government and incapacitate the secessionist leadership but even they acknowledge that such measures are no answer to the Albanian challenge in the longer term.

In view of the extreme political confrontation, attempts to bring about dialogues between opposing sides were fruitless. Interestingly a press crisis that threatened to lead to violence provided the one and only genuine dialogue between the state publishing house and Albanian publishers of the opposition press. The mediation by the Missions revealed interesting differences about tactics on the Albanian side and produced some results but the search for a compromise had to be discontinued with the expiry of the mandate.

There were large numbers of complaints of a variety of violations alleged to have been perpetrated by various authorities, including numerous cases of extreme police brutality. Several important cases could be pursued in depth with the authorities, except for the police which refused to cooperate apparently on directives from Belgrade. Even so influence exerted on the police at the local level imposed some restraint according to Albanian sources. There was evidence suggesting that with the departure of the Missions repression would be intensified. However, none of the

measures employed at the time suggested a basic change in Belgrade's policy of maintaining control by means of limited repression.

Through almost daily discussions, briefings and interviews with official and non-governmental delegations, visitors and the domestic and international media the Missions sought both to advance their objectives and to promote a more realistic appreciation of the situation in Kosovo. These efforts received favourable comment from official and other quarters. Sharp criticism emanated from some official circles, the Serbian parliament and some domestic media.

Sandžak: Traditional tolerance between the Muslim majority and the Serbs was subjected to severe strain following the outbreak of hostilities across the border in Bosnia in April 1992. Widespread concern, particularly in the international community of a spill-over of the Bosnian conflict into the Sandžak and Kosovo and from there into neighbouring countries, was stimulated by biased and false information, and by kidnappings, armed attacks and other provocations of Serbian paramilitary extremists. There was also a sharp radicalisation among the Muslims. However, an attempted boycott of the December elections by the leading Muslim party was only partially successful. Several local non-Serbian administrations came into power. More recently, political and military successes of the Bosnian Serbs further weakened extremist Muslim leaders and strengthened correspondingly moderate forces which advocate more vigorously a search for an accommodation with Serbia as the only realistic policy in present circumstances. The tendency for moderation has been gaining momentum especially at the local level, where in many areas traditional good relations

resurfaced and began to dilute some of the accumulated distrust between Serbs and Muslims. Local Serbian radicals have experienced in parallel a loss of influence, though their hard core remains intact.

Positive trends were further reflected in requests for active intervention by the Missions to encourage dialogue. Investigations

of serious incidents, human rights violations and other complaints also served to promote moderating tendencies. In this context relations with some professionally minded police officials were particularly fruitful. Muslim interest in dialogue with the authorities became strong enough to create tension between radical and moderate political leaders, the latter approaching the Missions for their good offices in arranging contacts with the Belgrade authorities, and the former obstructing with unrealistic demands for autonomy. The Missions expended a great deal of effort to bring the demands down to earth. In this process once again moderates made some gains, while both sides were encouraged to climb down to realistic positions. This process had made some progress by the time the mandate of the Missions expired at the end of June, but much work remained to be done by the Muslim opposition to get ready for a dialogue with the authorities. While the positive developments have been significant and have gained momentum, there should be no illusion about the fact that wounds in the civic body are far from healed. Destabilizing and destructive tendencies are still in evidence. The disastrous economic situation brought about by armed conflict, the collapse of the Yugoslav market and United Nations sanctions is contributing its share to social disintegration and inter-ethnic tensions with consequences that are at this time difficult to assess.

As to future developments, it is important that positive tendencies have emerged and have gained strength. They are significant enough to justify the hope for further relaxation of inter-ethnic tensions in the Sandžak in the months to come. The will to accommodation and moderation is particularly evident at the grass roots but also among the leading Muslim politicians. However, progress in restoring normal conditions also depends on a number of extraneous and highly unpredictable factors, among them unsettled politics in Belgrade, restoration of peace in Bosnia and the resilience of the battered economy. The untimely removal of the Missions as impartial arbitrators is particularly unfortunate since they enjoyed considerable trust and prestige among the two principal ethnic groups and their role as catalyst in promoting dialogue was widely appreciated by moderate forces in search of accommodation.

Vojvodina: Of the three regions covered by the Missions, Vojvodina may have better prospects of a return to normal. Interethnic tensions, at a dangerous level following the armed conflict across the Croatian border began to abate, as long traditions of inter-ethnic tolerance began to reassert themselves. Good participation of ethnic minorities in the elections last December gave them representation at all levels of government as well as control in some cities and towns. This should not be taken to mean that the minorities are happy with the drastic reduction in their autonomy under the Serbian constitution of 1990. There are strong political pressure for additional rights. However such demands have been temporarily supplanted by overriding priorities of restoring peace and coping with the economic collapse. The Mission has exploited opportunities to facilitate dialogue, chiefly between Hungarian leaders and the authorities, and has brought to the attention of the authorities a number of alleged human rights violations. It might be noted that the incidence and severity of human rights violations in Vojvodina was far below that reported in the Sandžak and especially in Kosovo. The authorities, with the exception of the police, have generally cooperated with and supported the work of the Mission. Upon the departure of the Mission they have expressed their appreciation for its contributions to defuse tension. As to the future, it is noteworthy that with few exceptions influential political leaders of the Hungarian minority favour accommodation with the Serbian regime as the only realistic policy at this juncture. The political trend during the past few months has worked against local extremism both among Hungarians and Serbs. Barring unfortunate political developments the favourable tendencies are likely to persist.

Reports

CSCE Missions to Kosovo

Priština: La situation au Kosovo durant ces six derniers mois peut être qualifiée toute à la fois d'explosive et d'une grande stabilité. Elle a été définie par un administrateur local important

de "grande anarchie".

Les deux communautés albanaise et serbe vivent selon des modes et des types d'organisation strictement parallèles, qu'il s'agisse des secteurs de l'organisation politique, de l'éducation, de la santé, de l'économie. L'opposition albanaise n'a toujours pas réussi à réunir le Parlement de la "Republique du Kosovo" élu le 24 mai 1992, mais l'objectif des autorités de Belgrade d'organiser des élections au niveau provincial semble hors d'atteinte en raison de la volonté aussitôt exprimée de boycott par la communauté albanaise. Le système d'éducation parallèle pourvoit à l'indoctrinement de la jeune génération dans l'esprit de l'indépendance et est financé grâce à un système de taxation volontaire d'une rare efficacité. Les services publics fonctionnent dans le vide, peu de recours à l'état civil, postes quasiment à l'arrêt, système judiciaire surchargé en raison du retrait des juges albanais et de l'immensité de la tâche. Dans le secteur économique, l'ensemble du secteur industriel est paralysé par les licenciements en masse prononcés sur base d'appartenance communautaire ou l'exclusion volontaire des Albanais. Le commerce en détail, un temps florissant, est aujourd'hui obéré par les difficultés d'approvisionnement, l'hyperinflation et les intimidations de la police financière.

Si les autorités de Belgrade conservent sur la Kosovo-Metohiaja la main mise aux niveaux policier et militaire, le contrôle semble toujours moins assuré face à la stratégie de la communauté albanaise fondée tout à la fois sur la résistance passive et le temps, une cohésion sans faille et le nombre. S'il y a pu y avoir des velléités de "terrorisme albanais", aucune preuve n'a jamais été apportée et les cas sont peu nombreux (comme peut-être à Glogovac en fin de mai). Les exactions policières sont quotidiennes mais il apparaît cependant que les autorités serbes restent en deçà de certaines limites au delà desquelles des actes de représailles apparaîtraient inéluctables. En dépit des accusations répétées de manière périodique par la Ligue Démocratique de Kosovo (LDK), il n'apparaît pas que des formes organisées de nettoyage ethnique soient systématiquement appliquées. L'opposition albanaise a ainsi réussi à survivre et à se fortifier face au défi serbe et se transformer en un mouvement rassemblant derrière l'imperatif de

l'indépendance presque la totalité de la population albanaise (1.8 à 2 millions d'habitants, densité de 200 habitants/km carré). Face à cela, les Serbes aiment à rappeler leur attachement au Kosovo, "berceau de la nation", cette "Algérie dans l'Orléanais" selon l'expression d'André Malraux. Aucun parti politique serbe ne remet en cause cette appartenance et l'optimisme semble persister à Belgrade quant à une reprise de contrôle de la province une fois les crises de Croatie et de Bosnie en voie de règlement. L'implantation des colons serbes a cependant échoué jusqu'ici en dépit d'incitations financières alléchantes.

Les incertitudes bosniaques ont actuellement tendance à conférer au fait albanaise une dimension nouvelle dans la région susceptible d'éclipser un tant si peu à l'avenir la revendication minimale d'indépendance du Kosovo. La publication le 1er juillet par le Forum des Intellectuels Albanais d'une "Déclaration sur la question albanaise" relance le débat entre deux conceptions sur l'avenir du Kosovo, l'indépendance proposé par le Dr. Ibrahim Rugova et le retour à l'Albanie envisagé par le Professeur Rexhep Qosja, Président du Forum. Selon cette déclaration, la question est née de la "mutilation de l'entité albanaise, une des plus anciennes nations du continent européen". Elle appelle à la "reconnaissance du droit national universellement reconnu et à l'autodétermination des Albanais là où ils sont majoritaires, mettant ainsi fin de manière pacifique à une "sujétion à caractère colonialiste". Cette "obligation morale de la conscience démocratique internationale" devrait se concrétiser selon cette même analyse par la réunion prochaine d'une conférence internationale sur la question albanaise.

Le Dr. Rugova a réagi en déclarant que "si la communauté internationale devait reconnaître le partage ethnique en Bosnie-Herzégovine, alors nous aurions sans doute à envisager de nouveaux développements." Le Dr. Fehmi Agani, Vice-Président de la LDK, indiquait le 23 juillet que "si des solutions devaient faire référence à des critères ethniques sur le territoire de l'ex-Yugoslavie et dans les Balkans, rien ne serait plus naturel que de rechercher l'unité des Albanais".

Si tout pronostic sur l'avenir immédiat concernant le Kosovo est pour le moins aliénatoire, il semble cependant que cette

question suite à l'environnement étroitement "yugoslave" pour s'inscrire dans le cadre plus large du fait albanais. Il reste à espérer que la capacité de retenue montrée jusqu'ici par les deux communautés puisse être maintenue pour que le Kosovo, possible monnaie d'échange pour les Serbes, entité inaliénable pour les Albanais, traverse, sans trop de dommage la période qui le sépare d'une inéluctable négociation.

Peć: After almost six months in Peć, CSCE leaves an area that is still characterized by ethnic tensions, daily occurrences of human rights violations and a general unwillingness on the part of both Serbs and Albanians to engage in meaningful discussions. Despite these continuing problems, the Mission has accomplished a great deal. In its basic role, CSCE has helped focus attention on ethnic problems and has encouraged local residents to start thinking in terms of solving such problems. Serbian officials no longer try to pretend that human rights violations and ethnic tensions are minimal as they did in the CSCE's early days, and many Albanian contacts outside the LDK now admit that some kind of cooperation with the Serbs is necessary.

As it was six months ago, the situation in Peć today features two peoples caught in a web of historical half truths. Both Serbs and Albanians see Kosovo as their historical homeland and focal point of their national identities, creating a kind of nationalist mythology that gets in the way of attempts to establish dialogue. Instead of addressing the current problems facing Kosovo, both sides prefer to talk about historical wrongs. A two-hour meeting with Albanian lawyers featured more than ninety minutes of complaints against the Serbs, but not one suggestion for a practical step to be taken to improve matters.

Any improvements to be made, however, lose their importance as long as the organs of the Serbian government continue their repression against the Albanian population of Kosovo. Illegal house searches, arrests without charges and police beatings are a daily occurrences. Human rights organisations have documented almost a thousand such cases in the Peć area so far this year. Local officials have little if any control over the police who take orders from Belgrade. As long as this disregard for the basic

rights of the citizens continues, there can be no trust on the part of the Albanians for any agreement with the Serbs.

Contributing to the atmosphere of mistrust is a lack of rumor control and a willingness of all sides to believe propaganda. In spite of all logic, most Albanians in Peć believe groundless rumors that Serbians were responsible for the July 4 attack on Serbian police and that police are covering up the identities of the perpetrators. Both Serb and Albanian media have consistently misrepresented facts to support their political goals. After two Albanians were killed by police in early May, foreign media picked up Albanian fabrications of a military action. CSCE was able to report that there was no military involvement, but without its presence it will be more difficult for the international community to distinguish truth from fiction. In almost half of the cases of Albanian media reported human rights abuses which the Mission investigated, the reports turned out to be exaggerations or misrepresentations.

There is a great deal of uncertainty as to what the future holds in the Peć region. Albanians see the Mission's departure as the signal for more police violence following that which began in the wake of the July 4 attack on police near Peć. Most Serbs downplay the possibility of conflict but are uneasy about the increased levels of violence. The situation could remain the same in the short term as both sides show little desire for meaningful dialogue. Serbian officials continue to insist that Albanians enjoy the same legal status as Serbs, but have no program for creating a harmonious inter-ethnic relationship.

To be fair, some attempts to improve relations have been made. The President of the district court in Peć has tried to recruit Albanians for vacant judgeships. Most refuse to serve because the job requires an oath of loyalty to the Serbian government. The local court proposed that this oath be taken in Priština before the President of the court of Kosovo rather than before the Serbian parliament in Belgrade, but to no avail. All such attempts run into the flat refusal of the LDK to have anything to do with the Serb government.

The continuing violations of human rights have had a cumulative effect on the Albanian majority. The frustration felt by

Albanians has manifested itself in several attacks on the police this year, possibly by Albanians, and if police repression continues, such attacks may become more common. CSCE served as a safety valve for the victims of repression and a restraint on police activity. The lack of regard for human rights in an atmosphere of economic collapse is the most significant threat for conflict in the future. Without improvement in this area, it is unlikely that Albanian leaders will enter into dialogue with the government or that tension will decrease. The presence of CSCE forced local officials to consider the issue of human rights and world opinion. Without CSCE, it is likely that the small emphasis human rights issues have received will disappear and that the region will remain in an increasingly violent stalemate.

Prizren: The region covered by the Prizren Mission is cosmopolitan, located at the periphery of Yugoslavia, open to the foreign world and with a long tradition of opposition to the center be this Turkish, Italian or Serb. Therefore the Mission had to deal with both a politically sophisticated population and a situation whereby each community (the Albanian majority, the Serbian minority, Turks, Gorans, Gypsies and others) have learned over the centuries to live with each other, knowing full well that, whatever the ultimate outcome, they will have to go on living with each other. Serbs and Albanians have tended to ignore each other without deep-seated animosity. As a result, the area covered by the Prizren Mission has been calm compared to other locations in Kosovo. Unwritten rules of conduct between communities bind them in a sort of truce, regardless of outside influences originating from the Serbian leadership in Belgrade.

The arrival of the Mission in the region has not fundamentally altered the situation. Authorities became perhaps marginally more prudent, while Albanians felt somewhat more protected. A triangular relationship solidified between the authorities, the Albanians and the Mission, the latter becoming a channel of communications substituting for direct dialogue between Serbs and Albanians. The departure of the Mission will not alter significantly the existing relations. Initially Albanians may be exposed to an increase in pressure from the police, state security services, border guards,

financial police army and perhaps some para-military groups.

The fundamental determinants of the situation are negative for the Serbs. Their proportion in the population could still be declining, the economy is in shambles, morale is low and doubts are expressed regarding official goals pursued by Belgrade. The arrival of the Mission raised the question whether the Kosovo issue had been turned from a domestic into an international issue.

Albanians perceive the perspective as more promising. They claim that the population balance continues to shift in their favour and that they suffer not too heavily from the economic decline because of gastarbeiter remittances. Morale is high and there is a "unity of doctrine" of which they are noticeably proud. Their society is cohesive and well structured with institutions that aim with considerable success at creating a parallel government. Their political leadership is capable and has a dedicated following. The goal of complete independence for Kosovo is shared by the great majority of Albanians. Some envisage union with Albania in the long run. The arrival of the Missions was interpreted as a confirmation that their strategy of maximising international involvement in the conflict was correct. They believe that time is on their side. The Serbian Kosovars have understood this but the authorities in Belgrade less so.

The authorities find themselves in an unenviable position. If they allow the movement to continue unimpaired, it will gain in strength and legitimacy and receive increasing international acceptance and support. If the Serbs decide to confront it, they have two options, negotiation or the use of force. To start a negotiating process, both the Serbs and the Albanians have to be willing to aim for a status short of independence with a large devolution of power to the provincial government. Such a solution is currently unacceptable to mainstream Albanians for falling short of complete independence. For the authorities in Belgrade any significant devolution of power is unacceptable. Thus prospects for an early negotiated settlement are not promising. A confrontational scenario has been envisaged in case of a settlement in Bosnia that largely meets Serbian aspirations. The settlement would liberate resources and energies to be turned to Kosovo. Another scenario envisages a major provocation caused by the Serbian right wing that

would trigger the dreaded confrontation. A third scenario envisages a provocation by Albanian groups who are dissatisfied with passive resistance as a means of confronting Serbian pressure. Finally there could be a change in the policy of passive resistance if all other options are abandoned. It is not possible to predict in detail the likelihood of any one of the scenarios occurring. To forestall any one of the confrontational scenarios it might be necessary to convene a conference to negotiate a settlement that would have to be guaranteed internationally.

CSCE Missions to the Sandžak

The CSCE Mission to the Sandžak was established in November 1992 with the opening of an office in Novi Pazar. Coverage of the region was significantly improved when a second office was opened in Prijepolje in March 1993. Each office was normally manned by two Mission members until their closure in late July 1993. The outbreak of the war in Bosnia in April 1992 brought hardship to the ethnically mixed population of the Sandžak including armed attacks on persons and property and kidnappings. The ongoing civil war in the adjacent Bosnian territory constituted the main cause of tension in the region. The general impact of the attacks has been a marked deterioration in ethnic relations, falling however short of a violent response to these provocations. The majority of ethnic groups have opted for a search for peace. All sides including the ordinary Serbs, Montenegrins and Muslims and their leaders have shown moderation and patience. Even so a high level of distrust has upset the former network of social relations.

Unfortunately the proponents of peaceful coexistence have not yet grown strong enough to sideline political interests that appeal to nationalistic feelings and seek a special status for the Sandžak. Less moderate Serbs persist in their belief that they are threatened by creeping Muslimisation. Similarly Muslim extremists make immoderate demands for a special status for the region which are perceived to undermine the territorial and political integrity of both Serbia and Montenegro. It is however widely acknowledged that the presence of the Missions has contributed to stabilizing

the situation and strengthen moderate elements. Political dialogue at the local level is underway in many localities. The leading Muslim party may split if tensions between its moderate and radical wings do not abate.

Heavy police presence indicate that Belgrade is unwilling to make the slightest concessions to autonomy in any field. Most Serbs acknowledge that their presence is necessary because they feel threatened by Muslim extremists. The Muslims and part of the Serbian opposition on the other hand consider themselves intimidated and harrassed in what amounts to a police state. With the exception of a few minor incidents there has been no evidence of oppression by the army.

Economic hardship springs from the disruption of the old Yugoslav market, effects of armed conflicts and United Nations sanctions and is steadily growing. Countermeasures by the financial authorities tend to exacerbate ethnic relations.

There is considerable uncertainty as regards the future. A long tradition of peaceful coexistence of ethnic and religious groups could overcome current distrust and suspicion and form a solid basis for a positive evolution. Favourable factors would include moderation in Belgrade, peace in Bosnia, conduct of the police according to the law and treatment of detainees according to prescribed standards, and an international presence to help reduce ethnic tension.

A pessimistic scenario would become possible with a turn towards extremism in Belgrade, political isolation of the Muslims, increasing economic hardship caused in part by Serbian economic discrimination against Muslims ("double blockade" of the Sandžak). In such a scenario local politicians would find it ever more difficult to prevent polarisation that could lead to escalating interventions by irresponsible and extreme political interest groups from either side.

CSCE Mission to Vojvodina

The CSCE Mission in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina was established in October 1992 in the border city of Subotica, centred

in the area most densely populated by Hungarians who account for about one third of the population of the province. Following the expiry of the mandate at the end of June, the Mission was effectively withdrawn by the middle of July 1993.

The overall situation improved during the stay of the Mission. During the armed conflict with Croatia the situation had been extremely tense, particularly in the border areas by the Danube. The perceived threat of ethnic cleansing as well as several such actions, particularly in Croat settlements caused large numbers of Hungarians and other minorities to seek refuge across the border in Hungary. A heavy influx of refugees from Croatia and later from Bosnia added to ethnic tension, though at present actual departure of refugees to their former homes and pressure from Belgrade to expedite this process began to reduce this irritant. With the stalemate in the Croatian borderlands the situation began to improve as traditional ethnic tolerance of the local population began slowly to assert itself and Belgrade's focus shifted toward Bosnia. Minority participation in the elections December last year engaged Hungarians and other smaller minorities at all levels in the political process. In local elections Hungarians gained control some local administrations.

This political engagement, Serbian ascendancy in Bosnia, the dramatic escalation of the economic crisis including the collapse of the price of wheat are among the factors that have distracted attention from ethnic issues and weakened advocates of extreme solutions both among the local minorities and Serbian provincial radicals. Many of the latter are post-World War II migrants from Bosnia and elsewhere who have not fully integrated with the more tolerant and better educated Vojvodina Serbs.

In terms of the Mission's mandate, dialogue between the authorities and the minority communities has improved steadily. There remain very serious problems. Minorities are far from happy

with the drastic reduction in the autonomy of the province under the 1990 Constitution of Serbia, but the tendency to pursue various political and other aims by democratic and peaceful means has

strengthened recent months.

In the human rights area the number and severity of incidents has been far below that in the Sandžak and especially in Kosovo and it has moreover also declined. On the whole cooperation with the authorities has been from the beginning rather good. Several cases of human rights violations as well as problems encountered by draft dodgers could be dealt with. Some positive impact of these activities including more restraint by the police were reported to the Mission.

Taking together the experiences in Vojvodina, the Mission has performed a limited but constructive mediating role that has been fully acknowledged by the authorities and leaders of the minority communities. It is possible that the Mission has expedited a process of normalisation in inter-ethnic relations, which however is far from complete. Moreover when peace returns to the region, some of the tensions and problems could re-emerge as the pressures of armed conflicts, virtual economic collapse and political extremism abate. Thus the Mission has had a role to play on the basis of its mandate. There is room for further constructive mediation. In the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms the number of significant cases may decline further, but the need for examining problems and promoting observance of international standards will certainly not disappear in the short term.

3. PERSONNEL

The following Missions members remained on site until the withdrawal of the Missions at the end of July:

Belgrade:

Tore Bøgh (Head of Missions), Philipp L. Hahn (Deputy Head of Missions), Terhi Hakala

Kosovo:

Priština: Maurice Bonnot, Peter Praher

Prizren: Franklin Thévenaz, Thomas H. Dunlop

Peć: John Erath

Sandzak:

Novi Pazar / Prijepolje:

Jesper Boisen, Julian Peel Yates,
Svätopluk Zeman, Mandak

Vojvodina:

Ambassador Hedwig Wolfram, Ali Mes'ut Orsa

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