

A CLASH OF PERCEPTIONS?

SECURITY IN SOUTH SERBIA

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Publishers

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSCE Mission to Serbia
Belgrade

The Balkan Centre for Middle East
Belgrade

Design
comma | communications design

Translation into English
Prevodilacka agencija Kukolj

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The views herein expressed are solely of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Balkan Centre for Middle East carried out this research from July to November 2012, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, within the project *Consolidating the democratization process in the security sector in Serbia*, which was financially supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

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Introduction

After 5 October 2000, when the regime of Slobodan Milošević was overthrown, a process of democratic transition began in Serbia. However, as soon as the new democratic government was established, it was put to the test. Although the first conflicts were recorded as early as in late 1999, the crisis reached its climax in November 2000, when an armed Albanian insurgency flared up in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa.¹ After a decade of thwarted attempts to solve similar challenges by force and without the consent of the international community, democratic Serbia apparently this time learned the lesson. In March 2001, a cease-fire peace agreement was signed after the international community's strong diplomatic mediation efforts. The agreement was accompanied by a comprehensive plan for the demobilisation and rehabilitation of rebels, integration of the Albanian community into the Republic of Serbia and the economic development of South Serbia. More than a decade later, the security situation in South Serbia is significantly improved in the objective sense. However, despite progress, it has remained fragile with an unquenched potential for destabilisation. In 2012, the security situation has deteriorated and after a few years of calm, there has been a series of successive armed attacks on the police checkpoint in the village of Dobrosin. Moreover, despite the results achieved with calming the situation in South Serbia, this area is still used as a training ground for competing in the expression of patriotism and national feelings. In the Albanian village of Lučane, in the Municipality of Bujanovac, a monument was erected to fallen army members and police officers. Conversely, tensions increased after the erection of the monument to the killed Albanian fighters, members of the Liberation Army of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, in Preševo in November 2012.

How is the security situation in South Serbia perceived by Belgrade and how is it seen by the local community? Are the perceptions of the government and the local community in conflict or do they share a common language which could be a starting point for building a sustainable and inclusive security policy for the Republic of Serbia? How do the government and the local community understand the causes of insecurity in South Serbia? What can be done in order for the public policies in the Municipalities of Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac to contribute to the improvement of both state and human security within the framework of democratic governance? The purpose of this research is to provide answers to these questions through a comparison of the state perception of security in South Serbia with the way it is seen and understood by the local community.

¹ The term South Serbia will be used hereafter to denote the Municipalities of Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac.

This paper first presents a summary of the existing literature, discusses the research problems and presents the major findings of the research. The second section consists of the analytical framework and methodological approach to research. The third section is devoted to the political and security context of research. The fourth section presents the government's perception of security. The fifth section is devoted to the local community's perception of security. The sixth section discusses the similarities and differences that the government and the local community have in the perception of security and provides recommendations for improving the security policy of the Republic of Serbia toward South Serbia.

1. Overview of literature and research problems

The problems in South Serbia, which escalated into an armed conflict in 2000, have traditionally attracted public attention. This is confirmed by a number of articles on this topic in the national electronic and print media.² However, the national academic community has shown almost no interest in South Serbia so far.³ Exceptions are a few studies that have been published in scientific publications, as well as a small number of studies that have been produced by the non-governmental sector or international organisations. In contrast, the international production of academic studies and policy analyses on South Serbia is slightly larger, but it is still considerably behind the volume of literature regarding Kosovo. The majority of both national and international studies provide a general analysis of the political and security situation in South Serbia⁴ and the possibility of a spill over of the conflict from Kosovo.⁵ Other reports focus on specific topics, such as human rights,⁶ higher education,⁷ multi-ethnic police,⁸ decentralisation and protection of minorities,⁹ demography,¹⁰ cross-border disputes,¹¹ inter-ethnic relations,¹² integration,¹³ and economic challenges.¹⁴ Most of these papers analyse the governmental policy and focus on the elite's perspective, while only three studies analyse the perceptions of the local population.¹⁵ In addition, none of these studies deals only with security perceptions. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap in the existing literature by comparing the government's perception of security in South Serbia with the perception of the local community.

2 However, this number has fallen each year. According to the media archive Ebart, the number of articles in print media mentioning South Serbia is the following: 2003 - 881; 2004 - 525; 2005 - 737; 2006 - 902; 2007 - 706; 2008 - 542; 2009 - 559; 2010 - 423; 2011 - 353; 2012 (October) - 235.

3 In the National Library of Serbia, where all editions published in Serbia are deposited, the number of bibliographic units with the key words South Serbia is the following: 2000 - 0; 2002 - 0; 2003 - 1; 2004 - 0; 2005 - 0; 2006 - 1; 2007 - 1; 2008 - 0; 2009 - 0; 2010 - 0; 2011 - 2; 2012 - 0.

4 ICG 2003, 2006, 2007, 2010; Ross 2009; Thorogood 2006.

5 Liotta 2003

6 Fond za humanitarno pravo, 2003

7 Ivošević and Luković 2010

8 Stodiek and Zellner 2010, Popović 2007

9 Huszka, 2007

10 Raduški 2008

11 Brozović 2012

12 Bačević et. al, 2011

13 Policy Center 2011

14 Marinković and Vuković 2007

15 Bačević et. al, 2011, Brozović 2011, Milosavljević et al. 2011. None of these three studies addressed only the security perception but a far wider circle of topics. However, it is possible to conclude from all three of them that the local communities in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda consider that the key security threats are the excessive presence of the Republic of Serbia's security forces (especially the Gendarmerie units) and economic problems such as poverty and unemployment.

The aim of this study is to establish the degree of convergence between the ways in which South Serbia is treated within the official security discourse on one hand and within the local community discourse on the other hand. The key research question of this paper is: whether, how and why the national and local perceptions of security are different? The aim of this study is not only to identify, describe, explain and understand the possible discrepancy between the perceptions of security by the state and the local community, but also to offer practical policy proposals that may reduce these differences.

This question is important for several reasons. Firstly, the political security of each state is based on its socio-political cohesion and the state's capacity to provide public goods to all its citizens, including security. It is difficult to improve socio-political cohesion and it is almost impossible to provide public goods if the state views problems in one way and its citizens view them in a different way. The national security policy toward South Serbia will be legitimate and fruitful in so far as it respects the concerns of the local population, including all ethnic groups that live in this area.

Secondly, human security and security within the local community cannot be achieved without relying on the state. Although non-governmental organisations, the economy and the international community are very important factors in enhancing human security, the state is still the key guarantor of the security of its population. Hence, it is in the interest of the local community that its concerns and fears become an integral part of the state's perception and the basis for designing a national security policy. Thirdly and finally, this question is important also for the international community. Since the armed conflict in the Western Balkans terminated in 2001, a lot of effort and resources have been invested into building peace in the region. Given the great military and political presence of the international community, it is hard to imagine a renewal of armed conflict in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. However, peace will not be sustainable and the Western Balkans will not cease to be a source of instability for the rest of Europe, as long as the states are weakened by the low level of socio-political cohesion. States that are unable to provide security as a public good to all its citizens are weak states.

Strength of state

The internal strength of a state is reflected in the level of its socio-political cohesion as well as its ability to deliver public goods to its citizens. In terms of strength, it is possible to distinguish between *strong*, *weak*, *failed* and *collapsed states*. *Strong* states are those in which there is a high level of citizens' identification with the political institutions that are fully capable of delivering public goods. *Weak* states are those that, due to the unstable economic or political situation, are not able to deliver public goods to all citizens, who in turn call into question its legitimacy, mainly in one part of its territory. In *failed* states, the government is unable to deliver basic public goods, particularly security, to most of its citizens. Finally, *collapsed* states are those that exist only formally, through external recognition, while chaos and lawlessness rule within them. The state's strength should be distinguished from the state's power, which is reflected in its material, primarily military, capabilities. States can be very powerful but weak inside, and vice versa - there are many states that are very strong inside but not powerful.¹⁶

The main finding of this study is that there is a convergence of the state and local security discourses when it comes to the economic nature of the causes of insecurity in the territory of South Serbia. Both the state and local community see poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment as fundamental causes of security threats. Regarding the perception of threats and security policy instruments, the state and the local population have partly convergent and partly divergent views. Firstly, they have a similar perception of "soft" security threats such as organised crime, drug abuse and corruption. However, their perception is different in terms of "hard" security threats. While the state continues to perceive this region as an area at risk of terrorism and potential armed rebellion, the local population generally believes that these threats belong to the past. Secondly, when it comes to security policy instruments, both the state and local community consider that those policies which have a positive impact on economic and socio-political development contribute to the stabilisation of security in the region. However, their perceptions diverge when it comes to the militarisation of the region. The state assumes that the large presence of Armed Forces and Gendarmerie in the territory of South Serbia are essential for security and economic development. In contrast, the local community, and in particular its Albanian part, believes that excessive militarisation of the region has an adverse impact on economic recovery, and consequently on security.

16 See more on this topic in Ejodus, 2012

2. Analytical framework and research methodology

Security, in the most general sense, is the absence of threats to acquired values. According to Arnold Wolfers “security in an objective sense measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.”¹⁷ In addition to the objective and subjective dimensions, it is possible to consider the intersubjective dimension that refers to common perceptions of security shared by a group of individuals or institutions. This paper will analyse those intersubjective perceptions of security in South Serbia both from the viewpoint of civil servants and the local community. Thus, the subject of this study will not be to establish the objective security situation in South Serbia nor the subjective perceptions of particular individuals, but an intersubjective experience of security.

Why is the research of intersubjective perception of security important? Firstly, the enhanced objective security is not necessarily accompanied by an intersubjective experience of enhanced security. For example, despite all the parameters of a drastic drop in the level of violence, both between and within the countries at the global level, this development is not necessarily accompanied by a strong increase in the intersubjective sense of security. Secondly, the mere awareness that certain security measures are in place can increase the intersubjective sense of security in spite of their ineffectiveness.¹⁸ Finally, the intersubjective experience of (in)security is an integral and inseparable part of both the subjective perception of certain individuals and the “objective” security situation. Because of a false or genuine experience of vulnerability, communities may resort to certain measures which become a part of the objective security situation. For all these reasons, the research of intersubjective perceptions of security is in itself a relevant research venture. Now, after defining the concept of security to be used in this paper, we should distinguish between national and human security.

National security is the absence of threats to vital national values. Although states vary considerably in terms of the values they nurture, according to Vojin Dimitrijević there are a few universal values common to all countries with respect to national security. These are: survival, territorial integrity, political independence and quality of life.¹⁹ Before the end of the Cold War, the dominant way of thinking and practicing security used to be focused on the concept of national security. In the nineties, the United Nations proposed the following:

17 Wolfers, 1954, 485.

18 Schneier, 2003.

19 Dimitrijević, 1973, 20.

The concept of security must change from an exclusive stress on national security to a much greater stress on people's security, from security through armaments to security through human development, from territorial security to food, employment and environmental security.²⁰

In line with these recommendations, over the following years, the concept of "human security" has been developed within the international community and within certain academic circles.²¹ The reference point of this security concept is not the state, but individuals and their needs.²² According to the general opinion, the state has traditionally been concerned primarily with the protection of national security, while local communities, especially multi-ethnic communities, are mainly oriented toward the protection of the community and individuals. The aim of this research is to establish empirically whether and to what extent this is true in South Serbia. It will create policy-relevant knowledge directly aimed at increasing socio-political cohesion in the Republic of Serbia and achieving a more efficient and more effective provision of human and national security within the framework of democratic governance. The research will result in a number of recommendations on how it is possible to contribute to overcoming the divergence between the current security policy of the Republic of Serbia on one hand and the needs and perceptions of the local population in South Serbia on the other.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of reviewing academic literature on this topic, as well as other primary and secondary sources, with the goal of abstracting the security perceptions of both state and local communities in South Serbia. In order to identify the public perception of security in South Serbia, we have analysed policy documents of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, policy of government bodies dealing with this issue, statements of military, police and civilian officials as well as debates in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (NARS). We also analysed the following documents: the Defence White Paper, the National Security Strategy (NSS), the Defence Strategy, the Strategy of Mol Development, the Strategy for Combating Organised Crime, the Strategy for the Fight against Drugs and the Strategy for Long-term Economic Development of South Serbia - Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa. In addition, the institutional development and the policy led by the Republic of Serbia toward South Serbia in the past decade were also considered. Finally, we also analysed the media statements of the representatives of state bodies, as well as transcripts from the NARS sessions for the period 2000 - 2012.²³ In regards to the security perception of the local community, we have analysed the discourse of political representatives in the three municipalities, public opinion polls and academic studies that directly or indirectly deal with this problem.

The second phase of the research included qualitative empirical research. The state's perception of the security environment in South Serbia was examined through 11 interviews held in October and November 2012 with the representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Coordination Body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for the Municipalities of

20 UNDP, 1993

21 MacFarlane and Khong, 2006

22 Paris, 2001

23 The transcripts used are available to the public in an electronic format and consist of nearly 100,000 pages of text.

Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa (hereinafter referred to as the Coordination Body), the Protector of Citizens' Office and the Ministry of Defence. In regards to the perception of the local population, this has been examined through a combination of group and individual interviews. Initially, in August 2012 two focus groups were held, one in Bujanovac with the participation of the citizens from Bujanovac and Preševo Municipalities, and another in Medveđa in which the citizens from this municipality participated. Each focus group consisted of 11 respondents who were selected to represent the ethnic and gender structure of the local population. After this, 13 interviews were conducted with the representatives of political parties, the media and NGOs in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa in September.

3. Political and security context

After the war in Kosovo ended in 1999, low-intensity conflicts have spilled over into the territory of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa. After a brief lull, the Albanians from South Serbia once again actualised their intention to annex the so-called Preševo Valley to Kosovo, in line with the idea that was presented for the first time in the unofficial referendum held in 1992.²⁴

Geographical position

The Municipalities of Medveđa, Preševo and Bujanovac are located in the south of the Republic of Serbia, along the administrative line with Kosovo. The Medveđa Municipality (524 km²) is located in the Jablanica District, and the Municipalities of Preševo (264 km²) and Bujanovac (461 km²) are located in the Pčinja District. The surface area of these three municipalities accounts for 1.6 per cent of the total territory of the Republic of Serbia (excluding Kosovo), which is 77,453 km². According to the 2002 Census, a total of 86,822 inhabitants lived in these three municipalities, which accounts for 1.15 per cent of the total population (7,498,001).²⁵ The Municipalities of Preševo and Bujanovac are the only two municipalities in the Republic of Serbia with a majority Albanian population, while in the Municipality of Medveđa they constitute 26 per cent. These three municipalities are populated by 57,595 inhabitants of Albanian nationality, which is 93.5 per cent of the total number (61.647 per cent) of Albanian citizens in the Republic of Serbia according to the 2002 Census.

According to the 2011 Census, Preševo has 3,263 and Bujanovac 18,985 inhabitants. These figures do not reflect the actual demographic situation in the two municipalities, primarily because the Albanian community boycotted the census. The fact that confirms that the census boycott by the Albanian population was “successful” is that according to the 2002 Census, Preševo had 34,904 and Bujanovac 43,302 inhabitants, which would mean that the Preševo population fell by as many as 31,838, and Bujanovac population by 24,760 inhabitants.²⁶

24 In the referendum held on 1 March 1992, 97% of citizens voted for “political and cultural autonomy with the right of annexing Kosovo”.

25 A large part of the Albanian population boycotted the last census conducted in 2011. Therefore, the data from this census is not valid for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa and will not be used for this research.

26 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia: <http://webbrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/userFiles/file/Stanovnistvo/DBR%2032272%20-%20Population%20Dashboard%20v16.swf>, accessed on 23/11/2012.

The crisis reached its peak in November 2000 when a low-intensity conflict developed into an armed rebellion. The roots of this conflict can certainly be looked for in the distant past. However, the aggressive nationalist policy of the Milošević regime, numerous violations of the human rights of the Albanian minority in the nineties, the termination of the conflict in Kosovo by NATO intervention and the establishment of the international protectorate over Kosovo in June 1999, had a decisive impact on this development.²⁷ Soon after the end of the NATO intervention, the dissatisfied Albanians, inspired by the success of the armed struggle for self-determination, initiated an armed rebellion in South Serbia. The realisation of this idea was facilitated by the presence of large quantities of weapons and a number of experienced guerrilla fighters, veterans of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), and the lack of control in the Ground Safety Zone (GSZ), from which the members of the Liberation Army of Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac (LAPMB) could easily organise attacks.

Table 1 - Population of the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa according to the 2002 Census

	Serbs	Albanians	Roma	Total
Preševo	2,984 (8.55%)	31,098 (89.09%)	322 (0.92%)	34,404
Bujanovac	14,782(34.14%)	23,681 (54.69%)	3,867 (8.93%)	42,330
Medveđa	7,163 (66.57%)	2,816 (26.17%)	109 (1.0%)	10,088
Total	24, 929 (28,7%)	57, 595 (66,3%)	4,298 (4,9%)	86, 822

In addition, the upcoming democratic changes in Belgrade, which began with Milošević's defeat in the presidential elections in September 2000, in the political sense, were an opportunity to include the Albanian issue in South Serbia on the new government's agenda.²⁸

Ground Safety Zone

The Ground Safety Zone (GSZ) was established by the Military Technical Agreement signed between KFOR and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) on 9 June 1999. The GSZ was a 5 km strip along the administrative line between Kosovo and FRY. Only lightly armed police forces were allowed to enter this zone. The agreement on the return of Yugoslav forces into the GSZ was signed by the representatives of the Yugoslav Army and KFOR in Merdare on 12 March 2001.

The crisis deepened in November 2000, when LAPMB intensified attacks on the security forces of FR Yugoslavia and Serbia. The conflict was ended by the signing of two separate ceasefire agreements on 12 March 2001, one between Serbia and KFOR representatives in

27 A good source that provides an insight into the approach of Milosevic's government to the Albanians in South Serbia is the Humanitarian Law Centre's report entitled *Albanians in Serbia - Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa*, published in 2003. On page 12, there is a comprehensive overview of human and minority rights violations by 2000.

28 When Milošević conceded the election results after mass demonstrations on 5th October, the united opposition coalition DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia) established a transitional government, which included the members of Milosevic's party, which lasted until the parliamentary elections, scheduled for 23 December 2000. In the transitional government, DOS took control of the Ministry of the Interior. As expected, the elections brought a convincing victory for DOS and their takeover of power on all levels of public administration.

Merdare and the other between the LAPMB and a NATO special envoy in Končulj. The implementation of the agreement was specified in the *Programme for a Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa*, which was designed, in the name of the Government of Serbia, by its Deputy Prime Minister Nebojša Čović.²⁹ The key elements of the “Čović Plan” were: dissolution, disarmament and amnesty of LAPMB members; withdrawal of military and police forces engaged for emergency situations; return of refugees; building of multi-ethnic institutions with respect for human rights and economic revitalisation of the region.³⁰ The security aspects of the plan were implemented relatively quickly, which brought visible results in terms of stabilisation of the security situation. However, other elements, those related to the integration of Albanians in all state structures and economic development of these municipalities, is still being implemented, twelve years later, with more or less success.³¹ In addition to implementing the “Čović Plan” and establishing the Coordination Body in December 2000, some positive steps were made towards the better integration of the Albanian population, such as amending the law on local elections, signing the principles for creating a multi-ethnic police force and forming the Albanian Minority National Council.

Despite the great success achieved in ending the armed rebellion, this area has remained a source of instability, which is indicated by the continued presence of a large number of the Republic of Serbia's security forces and the armed incidents that have been occurring sporadically since 2001.³² The incidents usually include attacks on the security forces with firearms or explosives, but also the excessive use of force by the Gendarmerie during the search or deprivation of liberty of Albanians, seizure of large amounts of weapons left over from the time of armed rebellion and murders.³³ In 2002 and 2003, there were several incidents that threatened to erupt into a renewed conflict. Since 2005, the armed attacks have been reduced and the tensions have been expressed mainly politically. Thus, for example, the murder of an Albanian teenager by the Serbian Armed Forces in the border area in 2005 triggered mass protests by the local Albanian population and the arrest of the “Gnjilane group” in 2008 in Preševo. The Albanians reacted similarly in May 2012, when in the midst of the election campaign, several Albanians were arrested for alleged war crimes committed in 2001 although some of them were the amnestied former members of the LAPMB.³⁴ Nevertheless, the ethnic Albanian parties participate in local elections and in local government, and since 2007 one representative of Albanians from South Serbia has

29 The SRS MP, Vojislav Šešelji, was among the loudest in parliament in criticising the work of the Coordination Body and the security situation in South Serbia. “But there, in Bujanovac and Preševo, where Shiptar terrorists entered, there you have surrendered and sold the territory, and now Čović is making a detailed plan on how to hand over the authority to Shiptar terrorists, to make it legal in terms of our Constitution and our laws.” The National Assembly, 2001, *Book 9*, 206.

30 Čović 2001.

31 In order to stabilise the situation, multi-ethnic police units were formed. The members of the Albanian community were gradually included in the work of the local authorities, the Coordination Body and other state bodies. Their number is still not sufficiently represented in public companies, which employ more Serbs than Albanians. The economic situation in these municipalities is still very unfavourable despite the considerable financial investment by the Government of the Republic of Serbia and foreign donors.

32 Unofficial information is that the number of special forces, i.e. the Gendarmerie, is estimated at 500 members stationed in the barracks, Brozović 2012:18. The analysis of media reports on armed incidents and attacks on state symbols, state institutions, local leaders and citizens shows that their number has decreased over the years. Unlike in 2003 and 2005, when the number of armed incidents exceeded 10, in the period 2008 – 2012, the media has recorded from 1 to 3 incidents per year in Bujanovac and Preševo, while in 2011 no incidents were recorded. In 2012, several armed attacks on the police checkpoint in Dobrosin were recorded.

33 A SRS MP, Dragan Tomić, in his address to the National Assembly pointed to “10 years of continuous violence, including murders and evictions, threats and blackmails, and now we have three municipalities down there in South Serbia, Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa, with a mass emigration of Serbs” and complained that the state failed to take adequate measures to prevent and stop it. The National Assembly, 2002, *Book 6*, 72.

34 The arrested Albanians were soon released from detention and they were not indicted.

been in the NARS. However, the deteriorating security situation in northern Kosovo in 2011 worsened the political and security situation in South Serbia. The strongest proof of the Albanian population's dissatisfaction with the current situation is the new declaration that was adopted by all Albanian councillors in the municipal assemblies of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa in early March 2012.³⁵ In this declaration, the Albanians complain about discrimination, failure to implement the "Čović Plan" and the inefficiency of the Coordination Body; they also refer to the needs of the local Albanian population for cultural, religious and political autonomy, which are clearly expressed in the 1992 referendum. Moreover, there were repeated armed attacks against the security forces in South Serbia in 2012. This primarily refers to three armed attacks on the police checkpoint in the village of Dobrosin near Bujanovac in May, June and October 2012.³⁶ Finally, in mid-November the veterans of the LAPMB erected a monument to the fallen fighters of this organisation in the centre of Preševo. This raised tensions in Belgrade and suspicions towards the Albanians in South Serbia, on the eve of the Albanian national holiday Flag Day on 28 November.

The political and security situation in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa is closely linked with the developments in Kosovo. Accordingly, the Albanian politicians from South Serbia have repeatedly requested the exchange of territories in response to the proposed idea of the partition of Kosovo.³⁷ Their demand is to unite the three municipalities with Kosovo if the north of Kosovo, inhabited mainly by a Serbian population, is annexed to Serbia.

The unresolved problem of the border between Serbia and Kosovo has produced a number of practical problems for the local population, especially with regard to the freedom of movement.³⁸ Besides occasional tension at the rhetorical level and the unresolved status of Kosovo, the security situation in these municipalities is also complicated by their geographical position. A section of Corridor 10 passes through the Municipality of Preševo, which also partly borders Macedonia, making it an important route for the distribution of drugs, human trafficking, illegal migration and other forms of criminal activity. One branch of the so-called Balkan route passes through these territories, which is the distribution route for heroin and other drugs from Afghanistan to Western Europe.³⁹ Finally, the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa are amongst the least economically developed parts of Serbia, characterised by high unemployment rates. All this makes the territory of South Serbia a very fragile area in terms of security.

35 This declaration is based on the *Platform for the Special Status of the Preševo Valley* adopted by the Albanian councillors of the municipal assemblies of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa in January 2006. The platform required, among other things, the decentralisation and demilitarisation of South Serbia. If these requirements were not to be respected, the policy of the Albanian community would be adjusted to the results of the 1992 referendum on which the Albanians from Preševo Valley voted for annexing Kosovo. See: *Preševo Valley in the independent Kosovo*, Danas, 14 January 2006.

36 The Albanian organisation Movement for the Liberation claimed responsibility for the first and the most severe attack that occurred in May.

37 In regards to Kosovo, the Albanian politicians invoke the principle of the inviolability of borders. However, they believe that in the situation of the partitioning of Kosovo, the principle of reciprocity should apply.

38 Brozović 2012.

39 Strategy for the Fight against Drugs in the Republic of Serbia 2009-2013, p. 2.

4. State discourse on security in South Serbia

The purpose of this section is to delineate the contours of the state security discourse on South Serbia. The central axis of this discourse is a common understanding that the security situation has improved significantly over the last ten years. It is being pointed out that an armed rebellion was successfully ended in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa and that the number of armed incidents has decreased radically. However, assessments of the current security situation vary to a great extent and depend on who presents them and in what context. At the level of political discourse, there is a noticeable difference between the government and the opposition. While the government usually presents the security situation as favourable or sensitive at worst, the opposition presents it as far more problematic.⁴⁰ However, the interview reveals the additional complexity of the situation and confirms the old rule of bureaucratic politics that “where you stand depends on where you sit.” The assessments of a “favourable and stable” security situation are at one end of the spectrum and they are presented by the representatives of the Coordination Body, as well as the police stations in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa. The assessments of a “tense and unstable” situation are at the other end of the spectrum and they are presented by the representatives of the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID), the Gendarmerie and the Coordination Directorate for Kosovo and Metohija. Between these two extremes, there are the representatives of the Border Police that assess the security situation as “complicated”. Despite these differences, it is possible to conclude, based on the analysed material, that South Serbia is treated in the state discourse as an area with the potential for destabilisation despite the trend of pacification. The key security threats and challenges in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa are armed *rebellion*, *terrorism/extremism* and *organised crime*. It is important to note that these three threats are often presented as almost inseparable parts of a single complex of issues arising from the *unilateral declaration of Kosovo’s independence* and the *economic underdevelopment of South Serbia*.⁴¹

40 The MPs from the ranks of the opposition parties, especially the SRS, mainly pointed to the danger of “Shiptar terrorism” and extremism, and expressed their concern about the potential separatism and disruption of vital communication lines in the south (National Assembly. 2002. *Book 6*, 149-150.)

41 The order in which these security challenges, risks and threats are presented in this report does not always and necessarily correspond to the perception of all stakeholders in the national security sector.

The Republic of Serbia treats an *armed rebellion* as a major potential threat in the territory of South Serbia. In all key policy documents that identify threats to national security, such as the National Security Strategy, the Defence Strategy and the White Paper, the threat of armed rebellion is high on the list of threats to national security in Serbia, immediately following the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence. The truth is that neither of these documents explicitly states that this threat is most acute in the territory of the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa. Moreover, the government representatives did not characterise the armed incidents that occurred in the period 2001 – 2012 as acts of armed rebellion, but as acts of terrorism.⁴² The reason for qualifying the armed incidents as terrorism, rather than armed rebellion, certainly lies in the fact that since 2001, when the Končulj Agreement was signed, there have been no intense and protracted conflicts between the state security forces and the uniformed rebel units. During the interview, none of the respondents explicitly pointed to an armed rebellion as being the most prominent threat in South Serbia. For example, Dragan Šutanovac, Minister of Defence in the period 2007 – 2012, said that "we, in the defence system and the Ministry of Defence, have not seen the so-called military threats, endangering the security of South Serbia. Hence, the activities of the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Armed Forces have not been focused on preventing these threats, but primarily on the development of civil-military relations and building the authority and confidence in the Serbian Armed Forces of all those who live in that territory."⁴³

However, despite all of the aforementioned, it is justifiable for several reasons to assume that the threat of armed rebellion is still seen as the greatest potential threat in the territory of South Serbia. Firstly, the only armed rebellion that has occurred since 2000 to date in the territory of the Republic of Serbia was in the territory of these three municipalities. The entire policy of the Republic of Serbia toward this area is marked by the memory of this conflict. The institutional framework of this policy, primarily the Coordination Body, was derived precisely from the efforts to carry out the post-conflict reconstruction of the area and to prevent the outbreak of new armed rebellion. Asked whether the armed rebellion mentioned in the National Security Strategy and the Defence Strategy referred to South Serbia, Dragan Šutanovac said: "The strategic approach analyses the security situation both through the past and future perspective. There need not be an exact indicator for someone to consider something strategically [...] but they certainly knew where the neuralgic point was and probably do not think that an armed rebellion is expected to happen in Šumadija."⁴⁴

Secondly, the public authorities believe that the attacks in this territory are sporadically performed by the groups that were involved in the armed rebellion in 2000 and 2001 and whose base is now in Kosovo. The representatives of the CID and the Gendarmerie emphasise in the interviews that the terrorist and separatist groups operating from the territory

42 The only exceptions to this were the representatives of the opposition parties, primarily the SRS, which called these acts an armed rebellion in the NARS. See the transcripts of the National Assembly sessions, for example the National Assembly. 2001. *Book 9*, 206; National Assembly. 2002. *Book 6*, 149-150.

43 Interview conducted on 18 September 2012.

44 Interview conducted on 18 September 2012.

of Kosovo and Macedonia still have a huge potential for regional instability.⁴⁵ Thirdly, the presence of security forces has increased in the territory of South Serbia. The largest military base in Serbia ("South") has been built near Bujanovac, and the Gendarmerie units have been deployed along the administrative line. All of this supports the thesis that even though the risk of the outbreak of armed rebellion in South Serbia is not explicitly discussed, the concern is built into the institutional foundations of state policy for the region and constitutes "background knowledge" and the foundation on which a number of other security discourses and practices have been built.

(2)

The second biggest threat in the territory of South Serbia, presented in the state security discourse, is *terrorism/extremism*. This is a highly-ranked threat in all strategic documents, positioned immediately after that of an armed rebellion. The territory of South Serbia is not specifically mentioned in these documents, as is the case with armed rebellion. However, based on the analysis of the media statements of public authorities representatives and the analysis of parliamentary debates and published interviews, it is clear that the Municipalities of Preševo and Bujanovac are considered as areas that are most exposed to the risk of terrorism in the Republic of Serbia. The government representatives justify the presence of the Gendarmerie in this area because of existing terrorist threats. For example, after the incident that occurred in summer 2009, when an explosive device was thrown at a building mostly inhabited by the members of the Serbian Armed Forces and police officers in Preševo, and the attack on the Gendarmerie patrol in the surroundings of Bujanovac, the Minister of the Interior Ivica Dačić said that there was a need for special units until the situation was stabilised.⁴⁶ This was confirmed by the Gendarmerie Commander Bratislav Dikić who in August 2009 said: "We are not threatening anyone, we care about the safety of citizens in this area and our presence is necessary, which is supported by the fact that there were terrorist attacks in the past. Our presence is needed even more than before."⁴⁷

The interviewed MoI representatives see the Albanian groups, which are strongly connected with organised crime groups, as sources of terrorist threats in South Serbia. According to their opinion, these groups operate unhindered in Kosovo and Macedonia and include some former members of the KLA and LAPMB. The interviewed persons deem that the lack of adequate legal mechanisms in the territory of Kosovo, among other things, enable them to operate freely. They believe that the terrorist acts carried out by these groups are often motivated by territorial and separatist aspirations. In addition, they think that the goals of some of these attacks are the introduction of discipline within the Albanian community, criminal activity and impact on the political dynamics in South Serbia or the relations between Belgrade and Priština. A representative of the Gendarmerie sees the terrorist acts in Dobrosin in 2012 as a "warm up" for something much more serious that is being prepa-

45 Interviews conducted on 5 and 6 November 2012.

46 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/104404/Dacic-razgovarao-sa-albanskim-liderima-sa-juga-Srbije/print> Accessed on 23 November 2012.

47 <http://www.naslovi.net/2009-08-09/rt/zandarmerija-cuva-mir-na-jugu-srbije/1272631> Accessed on 21 November 2012.

red. In addition, the representatives of the Ministry of the Interior consider the expansion of the Wahhabi movement in South Serbia particularly alarming; according to their estimates, it has been spreading from Saudi Arabia via Kosovo. The MoI staff members in charge of the fight against terrorism believe that this phenomenon, which was almost non-existent in South Serbia until 1999, has been largely expanded in recent years.⁴⁸

(3)

Organised crime is seen by state officials as the third greatest danger threatening national security in the territory of South Serbia. Although all strategic documents define this threat as one of the most dangerous, it is not explicitly connected with South Serbia in these documents. However, cross-reading of the key strategies clearly indicates that this area is seen as threatened by organised crime. For example, the National Security Strategy states: "Organised crime in the territory of the Republic of Serbia manifests particularly in the form of illicit drug trade, trafficking in human beings and illegal migration [...]."⁴⁹ The Strategy for the Fight against Drugs in the Republic of Serbia in the period 2009 – 2013 is even more explicit and states that "geo-strategic position of the Republic of Serbia and its location on the international drug route that connects the East with the West (the Balkan route) contributes to the situation where a large amount of drugs pass through, but are also kept in our country."⁵⁰ The Strategy for Combating Organised Crime also points to the position of Serbia: "[...] over a number of years the "Balkan route" has been used for smuggling Afro-Asian citizens, as well as persons of Albanian and Turkish nationality, to EU countries."⁵¹ Although these municipalities are not explicitly named in these strategies, they are implicitly included because one branch of the so-called Balkan route passes through this territory.

The interviews also confirmed that organised crime is treated as one of the greatest threats to security in South Serbia. For example, former Minister Šutanovac says: "as much as the Silk Road was a good thing for trade, it was a bad thing because of the development of organised crime. Hence, all bad things that used to come from the East to the West were passing in particular through this part of former Yugoslavia and Serbia, and I think that it is, in fact, the basic and the main threat from which other threats are stemming."⁵² The interviewed MoI representatives also believe that the area of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa is a very important branch of the "Balkan route", which is a route of illegal migration, human trafficking, drugs, arms and explosives. According to a representative of the Border Police (BPD), the number of illegal border crossings, especially from Macedonia, has drastically increased in recent years. These are mainly migrants of Afro-Asian origin, mostly Afghans and Pakistanis. This problem began to intensify in 2001 after US intervention in Afghanistan.⁵³ In some cases, in-

48 Interviews conducted in November 2012.

49 National Security Strategy, p. 8.

50 Strategy for the Fight against Drugs in the Republic of Serbia, 2009-2013, p. 2.

51 Strategy for Combating Organised Crime, p. 5.

52 Interview conducted on 18 September 2012.

53 During the first ten months of 2012, mostly citizens of Afghanistan (3730) and Pakistan (2488) were registered after discovered illegal crossings. They are followed by the nationals of Algeria (845), Somalia (426), Syria (323), Bangladesh (256) and other countries. The MoI staff members believe that the Arab Spring in 2010 also contributed to this problem and expect soon a far greater influx of immigrants from Syria.

ternational terrorists have been discovered in these channels.⁵⁴ Some well organised groups of local citizens, which are very difficult to identify, also help illegal immigrants cross over the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Illegal logging is a problem that is particularly acute along the administrative line, especially in the Municipality of Medveđa. The interviewed MoI representatives feel that the destruction of forests has led to a disastrous situation.

The Deputy Head of BPD described the security situation as “complicated.” A particular problem is that neighbouring Macedonia, from where most illegal migrants come, does not control its border in the best way and does not implement the Readmission Agreement. On the other hand, a lot of pressure is being exerted on Serbia from Hungary to accept illegal immigrants who have entered the territory of the EU from Serbia.⁵⁵ According to him, the biggest pressure from illegal migrants is in the strip below Preševo, near Miratovac. Their crossing is facilitated by the fact that the local people in this territory do not feel that either Serbia or Macedonia is their own country. Another problem is the so-called bogus asylum seekers who come mainly from South Serbia. They are mostly members of the Albanian and Roma national minority who, because of their difficult economic situation, abuse the visa-free travel to the EU and seek asylum in EU countries. Due to this problem, some EU member states have threatened to cancel the visa-free regime for the citizens of the Republic of Serbia if this issue is not resolved.

(4)

The unilateral declaration of Kosovo’s independence and its unresolved status are seen in the state discourse as circumstances conducive to insecurity in South Serbia. Although it may seem paradoxical, both state-building in Kosovo and insufficient development of its institutions are perceived as sources of threats. The secession of Kosovo is considered a threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia. For example, all three strategies developed by the Ministry of Defence state that the biggest security threat is the illegal and/or unconstitutional declaration of the independence of Kosovo, and that the most important national interest is the preservation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia. This threat does not refer only to Kosovo but also to the territory of South Serbia where there is a risk of the spill over of secessionist tendencies. The following is stated in the National Security Strategy:

Separatist efforts of one part of the Albanian national minority in Kosovo and Metohija, which culminated in the illegal unilateral declaration of Kosovo’s independence, are a direct threat to the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and one of the most serious security challenges in the region. Such efforts may encourage the spread of separatist ideas and thus become a factor of destabilisation in other parts of the Republic of Serbia and the wider region.⁵⁶

54 The most recent is the case of Ajdan Tamak, a member of the Kurdish Hezbollah, who was arrested in May 2011 at the Horgos border crossing.

55 Interview conducted on 5 November 2012.

56 National Security Strategy, p.9.

It is considered that this spill over is made easier by the fact that the Kosovo institutions are weak and political culture undemocratic. According to the National Security Strategy:

Slow development of democratic institutions and democratic political culture and relations in Kosovo and Metohija, disregard of basic human rights, denial of freedom of movement, expansion of organised crime, usurpation and destruction of private property and cultural-historical heritage and the difficult process of return of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as other security problems that have regional dimensions, turn this region into the main source of instability in the Republic of Serbia.⁵⁷

The South Serbia municipalities are particularly exposed to the potential spillover of insecurities from Kosovo. The reason for this fear is the existence of the Ground Security Zone and the fact that this area is inhabited by an ethnic Albanian population that socially, politically and economically gravitates towards Kosovo.⁵⁸ Speaking about the situation in the GSZ in August 2011, the then Minister of Defence Dragan Šutanovac said: "All the time we are saying that the situation in South Serbia is stable, but that it can become explosive in a very short period of time. There is no military threat, but there are extremists whom we can hear today in Priština."⁵⁹ The Minister of the Interior Ivica Dačić spoke along a similar vein about the spill over of threats from Kosovo to South Serbia: "Serbia is faced with real forms of internal terrorist threats, through persistent attempts to spill over certain activities of Albanian extremist and terrorist groups from Kosovo and Metohija into South Serbia."⁶⁰ The MSA Director Svetko Kovač also said before the Parliamentary Committee for Defence and Security in 2010 that "the biggest threat to national security was the declaration of Kosovo's independence and particularly the activities of "criminal and terrorist groups, which move along the administrative border with Kosovo and Metohija."⁶¹ The risk of the spill over of soft security threats, especially smuggling drugs, human trafficking, vehicles, weapons and excise goods from Kosovo to South Serbia was recognised in the Strategy of Combating Organised Crime.⁶² The interviewed MoI representatives also assessed that a large number of security threats, which distinguished South Serbia from the rest of the country, came from Kosovo.

(5)

Finally, the state perceives the insecurity in South Serbia largely as a result of the *economic underdevelopment of the region* and the *low level of social integration*. The former Minister of Defence Šutanovac confirms this with the following words: "I am also one of those people who think that the source of all misfortune, adversity, tensions and so on, lies in the

57 National Security Strategy, p. 8.

58 According to some data, about 20,000 Albanians moved from the Ground Security Zone during and immediately after the war. <http://freeserb.home.xs4all.nl/comments/2001/a16042001.html> Accessed on 19 December 2012.

59 <http://www.beta.rs/default.asp?tip=article&kategorija=vestidana&ida=2557512&id=&ime=> Accessed on 13 August 2012.

60 http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/hronika/dacic_srbiji_preti_unutrasnji_terorizam.3.html?news_id=218665 Accessed on 12 August 2012 and <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/1044404/Dacic-razgovarao-sa-albanskim-liderima-sa-juga-Srbije/print> Accessed on 12 August 2012

61 <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/192820/Kovac-Bezbednosna-situacija-stabilna-Kosovo-najveca-pretnja> Accessed on 18 November 2012.

62 Strategy of Combating Organised Crime, p. 3.

economic situation. Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in improving the economic situation, not only in South Serbia, but also in some other municipalities. I think that it is a type of soil that is fertile for sowing various forms of evil that can escalate tomorrow.”⁶³ The state policy towards South Serbia since the adoption of the “Čović Plan”, has focused on the economic development of the region as a prerequisite for peace. In the past 11 years, this component of state policy has become increasingly important, which is best reflected in the Coordination Body. This body was first established as an umbrella institution for the coordination of joint security forces and over time it has begun to assume an increasingly important economic role. Moreover, in 2007 the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the *Strategy for Development of South Serbia* with a focus on the three municipalities that are the subject of this research. This document also presents the view that economic development is a prerequisite for stability: “The implementation of the Strategy will ensure the economic stability and prosperity of these municipalities and the improvement of living standards, which are the basic prerequisites for improving the stability in South Serbia.”⁶⁴ Danijela Nenadić from the Coordination Body’s Office explains this change as follows:

The Coordination Body, i.e. the Coordination Body’s Office, does not primarily deal with security in the way it did in the period immediately after the conflict in South Serbia. We deal with security in a completely different way, we use that term “soft” security and we strive to avoid new potential conflicts and to assist in building a society in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa in which the members of all minority communities, or more precisely all the communities living in South Serbia, will be able to freely enjoy all their civil rights.⁶⁵

In addition to these policies aimed at the economic development of South Serbia, a series of measures have been taken with the purpose of enhancing social integration in this territory and promoting human security. Thus, for example, the 2007 Law on Local Self-Government envisaged the establishment of Municipal Security Councils and Councils for Interethnic Relations.⁶⁶ According to the Heads of the Police Stations in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, the Municipal Security Councils have proven to be a very useful channel of communication with the local population.⁶⁷ The working groups organised within these Councils enabled the state representatives to identify, together with the local community, challenges to human security and the measures required for their elimination. The working groups organised within the framework of these Councils to deal with domestic violence, youth safety, drug abuse, traffic safety, corruption, interethnic tensions and other important topics, contributed to the development of security policies that are tailored to the needs of the local population. For example, according to Gendarmerie representatives, the citizens used the Municipal Security Councils to complain about the way the Gendarmerie moved through populated places. After that, the Gendarmerie leadership made a decision to lower and cover their gun barrels when passing through a populated place and also to slow down

63 Interview conducted on 18 September 2012.

64 Strategy for the Long-term Economic Development of South Serbia - Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa 2007.

65 Interview conducted on 5 October 2012.

66 A good source of information on the Municipal Security Councils is the *Guidebook on Local Security Councils*, BCSP 2011, and the *Councils for Interethnic Relations – model decision on the establishment and the rule book*, OSCE Mission to Serbia 2009, is a good source of information on the Councils for Interethnic Relations.

67 Interviews conducted on 2 November 2012.

their vehicles.⁶⁸ In addition, according to the Gendarmerie representative, due to numerous remarks by the local community, this unit decided to withdraw from the town of Bujanovac and transfer out of the settlement.⁶⁹

Moreover, the Law on the National Councils of National Minorities was adopted in 2009 with the aim to empower minority communities and to provide them with tools that would allow them to exercise their minority rights in culture, education and the use of their mother tongue.⁷⁰ In 2011, Protector of Citizens offices were opened in Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa in order to allow the citizens of these communities to access the mechanisms for the exercising of human rights, according to the Protector of Citizens Saša Janković.⁷¹ The Serbian Armed Forces also began to change their approach in this territory through the improvement of civil-military relations and raising community confidence in the Serbian Armed Forces. To this end, the Office for Civil-Military Relations was opened in Vranje in 2007 in order to “[...] help the Serbian Armed Forces in improving communication with the civilian structures in South Serbia.”⁷² During the interview, former Minister of Defence Šutanovac explained the approach to the development of civil-military relations in this way: “So, it is South Serbia, where there is the Albanian majority population in one part [...] where we placed a special emphasis on civil-military cooperation and restoring confidence in the Serbian Armed Forces, because what happened in the nineties completely destroyed that relationship [...]”⁷³ Finally, the Army offered some of its capacities to the local population. It opened its sport fields to the local football clubs, as well as the military hospitals for medical examination of civilians, while its medical doctors were sent to provide services in the remote villages of the GSZ.

68 Interview conducted on 5 November 2012.

69 The Gendarmerie command operations centre is located in Ristovac, eight kilometres north of Bujanovac.

70 http://www.pravamanjina.rs/index.php/sr_YU/ostvarivanje-prava/manjinska-samouprava/nacionalni-sa-veti-nacionalnih-manjina Accessed on 25 November 2012.

71 http://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php/lang-sr_YU/2011-12-25-10-17-15/1605-2011-12-06-19-16-33 Accessed on 25 November 2012.

72 Statement of Zoran Jević, State Secretary in the Ministry of Defence on the occasion of the opening of the Office. http://www.mod.gov.rs/novi_lat.php?action=fullnews&showcomments=1&id=504 Accessed on 25 November 2012.

73 Interview conducted on 18 September 2012.

5. Security discourse of the local community in South Serbia

Based on secondary sources and field research, this section will present the security discourse of the local community in the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa. All representatives of the local community believe that the security situation has improved significantly over the past ten years. This particularly refers to the interethnic relations, which are much better now. The Mayor of Bujanovac Municipality Nagip Arifi says: "In 2002, you could rarely find a bar where a Serb and an Albanian had a coffee together, and now you can see that at any given moment, in every bar, you can't even tell whether the bar owner is an Albanian or a Serb."⁷⁴ Despite not being separated any more in public spaces, members of the two communities rarely socialise with each other: "There is no socialisation after work or it is very rare. There are no home visits or friendship among them," says Nikola Lazić, a journalist with the weekly *Vranjske*.⁷⁵ There is still mistrust between the two communities.

An important finding is that there are similarities but also differences in the perceptions of security by the Serbian and the Albanian population in South Serbia. The similarities are primarily related to the perception of economic underdevelopment and the dispute between Belgrade and Priština over Kosovo. Both communities believe that these two challenges are the main generators of insecurity. On the other hand, members of the Serbian community, understandably, have far more confidence in state institutions and do not see them as someone else's or as being threatening. Thus, for example, Stojanča Arsić, the representative of Serbs and Vice-President of the Bujanovac Municipality, stresses that the relationship between the Army, which is stationed in the Ground Safety Zone, and the citizens is at a high level. He also believes that the presence of the Gendarmerie is very important for combating organised crime, while the increased presence of the armed forces and police contributes largely to the security of the region. Other citizens of Serbian nationality in South Serbia have a similar opinion.⁷⁶

It should also be mentioned that there are differences in the security discourse used by the Albanians from Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa. As a rule, the Albanians from Preševo feel most threatened by the state, those from Bujanovac a little less, while the Albanians

74 Interview conducted on 11 September 2012.

75 Interview conducted on 10 September 2012.

76 Interview conducted on 12 September 2012.

from Medveđa complain least about public authorities.⁷⁷ This situation is obviously in direct correlation with the level with the percentage of Albanian population in these municipalities. It is necessary to bear in mind the differences in the discourse of the political elite on one hand and the citizens on the other. In fact, the representatives of the Albanian political parties often assess the insecurity of their community, through the media and statements, to be worse than what we were told during the field research.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the ordinary people in the focus groups and the interviewed representatives of NGOs and the media, despite numerous concerns, which will be discussed below, consider that the level of insecurity, discrimination and interethnic tensions is much lower.

The security assessments of the interviewed local community representatives vary from “very stable”, through “satisfactory” and “solid but not perfect”, to “the same as in the rest of Serbia.” Only in one interview were we told that the security situation in Preševo and Bujanovac could be characterised as a “state of emergency” due to the large presence of the Gendarmerie and the way in which it is perceived among the Albanian population. However, this does not mean that the local community believes that there are no security challenges at all.

On the basis of all analysed material, it is possible to identify four key groups of security challenges faced by the local community in South Serbia. These are: *economic underdevelopment; alien, weak and ineffective government; societal insecurity and the unresolved status of Kosovo.*

(1)

The biggest problem faced by the local community in South Serbia is the *economic underdevelopment* of the region, and in particular the high rate of unemployment. Despite the fact that Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa do not belong to the poorest municipalities in Serbia according to their average earnings, the unemployment rate is very high.⁷⁹ The most recent official figures show that the unemployment rate in Preševo is 56 per cent, in Medveđa 47 per cent and in Bujanovac 43 per cent.⁸⁰ The perception of the local population is that the unemployment rate is even higher and ranges between 60 and 70 per cent. Due to the difficult economic situation, they are forced to be involved in the grey economy, which is penalised by the state. One of the respondents in the focus group explained it with the following words: “And why doesn’t the state help us? [...] It’s not my fault that I don’t have a job. I wanna work [...] I wanna do any job! But there is no any, no job and that’s it [...] So what now? I manage somehow, but the state takes from me the little money I have to in-

77 Baćević, et al. 2011, 36.

78 The declarations adopted by the local Albanian politicians in 2006 and 2012 mention the adverse position of their community and militarisation of the region as proof that little has changed in South Serbia.

79 According to the latest data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia from June 2012, the average earnings in Serbia were 42,335 RSD. The average earnings in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa amount to 41,408 RSD, 34,569 RSD and 40,032 RSD respectively. Source: <http://webbrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/00/74/37/zp14072012.pdf> Accessed on 19 November 2012.

80 <http://www.pressonline.rs/info/politika/stankovic-zapostavljen-jug-srbije> Accessed on 19 November 2012. The National Assembly deputies often mention the economic underdevelopment and unemployment in the three municipalities of South Serbia as a serious security challenge. See, e.g.: National Assembly. 2008. Book 5, 176; National Assembly. 2010. Book 22.67.

vest in some trade, to survive, and does not let me work [...] Is it fair?" Above all, the introduction of a 20 euro fee per vehicle for crossing the administrative line between Serbia and Kosovo has particularly worsened the economic situation. Free passage across the border is allowed for a week upon the payment of this fee, which means that an amount of eighty euros must be paid for crossing the border during a one month period, which is a huge amount for the citizens of this region.

Also, the local community points out that a problem is the state's insufficient investment in the region. During the interviews, almost all interviewees recognised the government's efforts toward the improvement of basic infrastructure over the past decade. However, they believe that no funds were invested in the promotion of employment and also that foreign investment is lacking. In addition, we were often told that the government's actions actually prevented the region's economic recovery, especially the keeping of a large number of gendarmes and military personnel. The Mayor of Bujanovac Nagip Arifi says, for example, that the presence of "large security forces negatively affects the development of the economy, since no one, no western investor is ready to invest in the economy of Bujanovac after seeing so many special forces of both the Gendarmerie and the Army."⁸¹ We should particularly emphasise the extremely bad economic situation of the Roma population in Bujanovac. The Roma settlement in Bujanovac lacks basic infrastructure. The streets are unpaved, the settlement is exposed to frequent flooding, and a huge problem with the sewage threatens the health of settlement's residents. The best example is the jaundice epidemic which broke out four years ago. Most of the settlement residents live on child allowance and social assistance.

The local population states that the main consequences of the poor economic situation are distrust towards the state and a high level of migration to the larger cities in Serbia, Western Europe and to Kosovo. The President of the Preševo Municipality, Ragmi Mustafa, claims that "there are plenty of people who decide to leave their homes forever. This economic situation is unbearable. Over seventy per cent of healthy and capable citizens of the Municipality of Preševo do not work; they are unemployed. Also, as a result of the absence of economic prospects, people are leaving these three municipalities."⁸² According to him, the indifference of the authorities in Belgrade to improve the economic situation in the south has been premeditated in order to get "the territories without an armed conflict, without persecution, with firearms as occurred in the nineties."⁸³ Ramiz Salimi, representing an association of Roma in Bujanovac, describes it as follows: "[...] the biggest threat is that people will simply leave this town. This is the biggest threat we face [...] but it is not a security threat, it is an economic threat. See, people simply cannot survive."⁸⁴ Some interviewees even believe that despite the improved security situation, the economic situation has worsened over the last 11 years. For example, the Vice-President of Medveđa Municipality Florim Sahiti says: "Security is much better now than ten years ago. But the economic situation is the same, perhaps even worse [...] Because ten years ago we had many more inhabitants than we have today."⁸⁵

81 September 11 September 2012.

82 Interview conducted on 11 September 2012.

83 Interview conducted on 11 September 2012.

84 Interview conducted on 12 September 2012.

85 Interview conducted on 13 September 2012.

Another major problem that the citizens of Albanian nationality from South Serbia face is *an alien, weak and inefficient state*. The biggest problem indeed is that many Albanians do not fully perceive Serbia as their country. The situation has certainly improved compared to 2001 when the armed conflict broke out. The President of the Albanian National Minority Council in Serbia Galip Beqiri openly says “we are not as threatened by the state as we were during Milošević’s era.”⁸⁶ Meanwhile, the Albanians have “accepted Serbia as their reality”, according to the Vice-President of Medveđa Municipality Florim Sahiti.⁸⁷ However, the Albanians continue to feel alienated from Belgrade, which stems from the low level of their integration into the state, their perception of being discriminated against, but also the prevalence of certain phenomena, such as corruption and nepotism. The Albanians believe that, despite the many advances that have been made in recent years, they are still not included in the work of state bodies in the best way. Despite the fact that the percentage of Albanians employed in the police forces of Preševo and Bujanovac is higher than a decade ago, it is considered that it still does not fully correspond to the percentage ratio of the Serbian and Albanian populations in these municipalities. According to the statement of Avdi Bajrami, Head of the police station in Preševo, the station employs 60 per cent Albanians, 30 per cent Serbs and 10 per cent Roma and Gorani.⁸⁸ According to Dragan Veličković, Head of the police station in Bujanovac, that station employs about 60 per cent Serbs and 40 per cent Albanians.⁸⁹ Furthermore, there is the problem of the under-representation of Albanians in the higher police structures, for example, at the police station in Vranje. The problem of the under-representation of Albanians is particularly acute in the Gendarmerie.⁹⁰ The focus group participants were asked: “Why is the Gendarmerie not multi-ethnic like the police?” They pointed out that since they were not included in the work of the Gendarmerie, they could not feel it was “theirs”, and they felt discomfort or even fear in its presence. Hajredin Hyda, President of the Municipal Assembly of Bujanovac explains:

Everyone should understand that this presence creates some discomfort. I’m not saying insecurity, but discomfort. Because this presence makes people wonder why they are present, whether something is going to happen [...], for example, when you see three or four armoured vehicles of the Gendarmerie, moving 10 or 20 kilometres an hour, and then you see these masked people, you feel discomfort. Anyone feels that way, not only the Albanians but also the Serbs, each person who sees that is reminded of Northern Ireland.⁹¹

The problem is described similarly by the President of Preševo Municipality Mustafa Ragmi. “These Gendarmerie formations are special units and do not communicate with anyone. Neither with the local self-government, nor with the police station, the local police, the citizens, anyone... and when they move through the populated places in the Municipality

86 Interview conducted on 13 September 2012.

87 Interview conducted on 13 September 2012.

88 Interview conducted on 2 September 2012.

89 Interview conducted on 2 September 2012.

90 Brozović 2012, 19.

91 Interview conducted on 12 September 2012.

of Preševo, they use their armoured vehicles, they are fully armed and masked, always pointing their guns, automatic rifles toward the citizens.”⁹² With respect to the patrolling of the Gendarmerie units in the populated places, the respondents in the focus groups, not only Serbs but also Albanians, had more understanding for the reasons of their presence along the administrative line and in the Ground Security Zone. However, the Albanian respondents emphasised that the way the Gendarmerie performs its tasks in the populated places disturbs them. They gave the following examples: wearing balaclavas over the face which intimidate the population, patrolling through populated places with elevated gun barrels and the checking of citizens’ identification documents. One of the focus group participants explained it in these words:

I’m walking with a friend in the street, in broad daylight, in the city, and they (the Gendarmerie) go past in those armoured vehicles with a machine gun on the top, and there is a gendarme behind the machine gun, wearing a balaclava, and as we go down the street he points the machine gun at us and as long as we go on, he turns the machine gun toward us and aims at us...

According to the interpretation of some interviewees, the Gendarmerie checks the identification documents of older women, who are in the company of their husbands and children, only to humiliate their husbands and scare their children. An example that confirms the thesis of the Gendarmerie’s arrogant behaviour is the arrest of the Albanians suspected of terrorism and war crimes in early May in the midst of the election campaign. All of them were released on 30 May and the suspects have never been indicted.⁹³ The Albanian representative in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Riza Halimi, described the arrest as the maintaining of a “continuous state of terror” against the Albanian minority.⁹⁴ In the other interview that Halimi gave after the arrest of eight Albanians, he stressed that the coincidence between the arrest and the presidential, parliamentary and local elections was not accidental, but that it was a “political game” and involved scoring “cheap political points” two days before the elections.⁹⁵ An interviewee from the NGO sector in Bujanovac explains these events in the following way: “Well, it was like a movie, so to say, a typical American movie, screened before the election so that people would vote in line with their nationalist orientation. And by that logic, we should all defend ourselves because all the Albanians are terrorists [...]”⁹⁶ Most Albanians are not inclined to believe that the prosecution and the Mol “accidentally” made the oversight.

The local population also highlights the under-representation of ethnic Albanians in the judiciary. Only four Albanians work as judges and all of them are employed in the Basic Court in Vranje. In addition, there are no judges of Albanian nationality in the Higher Courts in Vranje and Leskovac, the Appellate Court in Niš and the Supreme Court of Serbia, which only de-

92 Interview conducted on 11 September 2012.

93 Nikić, Žarko. *Sorry for having arrested you*, *Akter*, 6 November 2012

94 “Halimi: *Arrest is the continuation of state terror*, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/halimi-hapsenje-je-nastavak-drzavnog-terora> Accessed on 14 October 2012.

95 Eight people arrested in South Serbia, five for war crimes, accessed on 19 October 2012, http://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/hronika/na-jugu-srbije-uhapseno-osam-osoba-pet-zbog-ratnih-zlocina_316990.html Accessed on 14 November 2012.

96 Interview with Ragmi Mustafa, Human Rights Committee - Bujanovac, conducted on 10 September 2012.

creases confidence in the justice system among the Albanian population.⁹⁷ Moreover, all the representatives of local authorities interviewed within the field research, noted that it was a big mistake to transfer the courts from Preševo and Bujanovac to Vranje after the 2010 judiciary reform. The consequence of this decision is that the residents of the three municipalities must travel dozens of kilometres to the Municipal Court in Vranje just to obtain a simple certificate.

There is distrust towards other state institutions as well, especially among the Albanians but also among the Serbian population. Nikola Lazić, a journalist with the weekly *Vranjske*, explains it this way: “The people here have a particular mistrust toward state institutions, such as prosecution, courts, the judiciary, tax administration, customs, and it is common to both Serbs and Albanians.”⁹⁸ The representatives of the Albanian community have periodically participated and boycotted the work of the Coordination Body. Moreover, the local population complains that the employees in the Coordination Body are not well acquainted with the real situation in the field.⁹⁹ According to the interpretation of the focus group participants, the Coordination Body has not brought anything good to the South for ten years. They perceive this body as a kind of alienated bureaucratic mechanism that serves for making the individuals in that body more rich. They also claim that the citizens do not benefit from any of the projects that the Coordination Body organises and say honestly that they are fed up with seminars, workshops, etc. They stress that the Coordination Body, if there is any good will, should help these municipalities in terms of economic development, and above all, they should eliminate the corruption in their own ranks. Finally, even when this body is aware of the problems, it seems that the government has no interest in solving them. It is believed that it serves only as an institution that distributes money to the southern municipalities and facilitates communication between the local community and the state, but it has no real political authority. In June, Riza Halimi called for consideration as to whether it makes sense to continue the existence of the Coordination Body because, according to him, even after the reconstruction of the Coordination Body in 2009, the Albanians have not participated any more in its work.¹⁰⁰

In regards to the Albanian National Minority Council, it has provoked conflicts in the Albanian political scene. One group believed that the National Council was only an instrument for the Belgrade authorities to show the European Union that the rights of national minorities in Serbia were being respected. The other group expressed the opposite opinion and supported participation in the establishment of the Council.¹⁰¹ According to one interviewee, the key conflict in South Serbia takes place between the majority of decent and civilised people who want to live and work in peace and the “structures that have emerged from various wars and have not been able to transform and find their place in society. They are at the-

97 Strategy for Integration of the Albanian Minority in Serbia – proposal, <http://www.policycenter.info/Dokumenti/Strategija%20za%20integraciju%20albanske%20manjine%20predlog.pdf> Accessed on 14 October 2012.

98 Interview conducted on 10 September 2012.

99 Brozović, Zorana. 2012, p. 16.

100 *Dissolve the Coordination Body*, http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=06&dd=13&nav_category=12&nav_id=518496 Accessed on 19 October 2012.

101 According to a survey of TransConflict, the vast majority of even 89.40 per cent of Albanians are aware of the existence of the National Council. However, the survey has also showed that two-thirds of the Albanian population are not exactly familiar with the responsibilities and functions of the Council, *Survey of Minority Rights of Albanians and the Albanian National Minority Council*, <http://www.transconflict.com/programmes/institutions/nmc-serbia/albanian-nmc/anketa-o-manjinskim-pravima-albanaca-i-nacionalnom-savetu-albanske-nacionalne-manjine/> Accessed on 14 October 2012.

ir best when they fish in troubled waters or in a state of emergency [...] this normal situation does not suit them. They would like to always have a situation in which they can present themselves as important figures working for national interests.”

Finally, both Serbian and Albanian communities believe that the state is too weak to protect them from crime and corruption. People believe that these phenomena have affected both the political and economic structures, and that the authorities are not able to solve these issues. According to the perceptions of the local population, the problems in South Serbia are more acute than in the rest of the country, due to its specific geographical position, proximity to three borders, proximity to Kosovo, Corridor 10 and the “Balkan route”. Because of all this, the other interviewee believes that “[...] this area is somewhat specific, some laws of the street and darkness rule here, and it is a problem.” The focus group participants presented similar opinions and complained that all the parties working in these two municipalities blackmailed people by offering them a job if they became party members and if they were politically active. Due to politicisation, the local institutions have become partisan bodies where bribery and corruption rule, according to them. In regards to the work of the public services, it is pointed out that they are available to everyone. The only problems with these services are nepotism and party-based actions, but our interlocutors point out that this problem exists at all levels. These are the words of a focus group participant: “It is all bribery and corruption [...] Everything is done through connections and if you become a party member, everything can be done [...] you cannot even get a scholarship for children without some connections, and if you go through some connections, they immediately force you to join a party.”

The local population has the most positive attitude towards the following institutions: the local so-called “multi-ethnic” police, the Municipal Security Councils and the Serbian Armed Forces. The attitude of the local population towards the local police is generally positive. One of the indicators is that the Albanian population more frequently reports domestic violence, which earlier never used to be the case.¹⁰² The Municipal Security Councils are also perceived very positively. The focus group participants pointed out that the councils were implementing distinctive projects and explicitly praised their work and results. They believe that it is good that the security councils consist of important individuals and officials in the municipalities. Hajredin Hyda, who chairs the Security Council in Bujanovac, also says that “the Municipal Security Council really works [...] the function of the Security Council is well conceived because it gathers in one place all the relevant people who are responsible within their competences.”¹⁰³ Finally, the Army also has a good reputation among the local population. Nikola Lazić told us: “The Army is very popular here as it is in the whole of Serbia. General Milosav Simović, who largely opened the Army to the people, has been here for a long time as commander of the garrison in Vranje and of the whole Brigade.”¹⁰⁴ Not only the Serbs, but also the Albanians, state that the Army has established an excellent relationship with the local community and give examples of Army personnel visiting the villages and measuring people’s blood pressure, distributing medications, clearing snow and the like.

102 Interview conducted with the Heads of Police Stations in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa held on 2 November 2012.

103 Interview conducted on 12 September 2012.

104 Interview conducted on 10 September 2012.

The third challenge addressed in the security discourse of the local community is societal insecurity. Societal security is “the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats.”¹⁰⁵ Members of the Albanian community in South Serbia mention a number of social security challenges they encounter. The first issue relates to the use of national symbols. The regulations of the Republic of Serbia prohibit the use of other countries’ national symbols during cultural events, celebration of national holidays and sports competitions. The Albanians from Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa usually use the Albanian flag and the Albanian anthem for such purposes, which, in addition to violating state regulations, provokes the Serbian population.¹⁰⁶ It was repeatedly stated that a solution acceptable to both parties had to be found. In the case of Sandžak, this problem was solved by introducing a “Sandžak flag”. The representatives of the Albanian minority in Serbia have not shown a willingness to overcome this problem in any way, but insist on using the Albanian symbols.

In regards to the right to use the Albanian language, there are positive developments, but the representatives of the Albanian minority still complain that it is not entirely implemented as guaranteed by law.¹⁰⁷ The most obvious example of the violation of the right to use the language occurred during the 2011 Census when the census forms were not bilingual, and the Albanian parties called for a boycott of the census. However, careful reading of the statements of the Albanian representatives reveal that the “essential” reason for the census boycott was the inability of being able to register the Albanian population that over the last ten years has been living temporarily in Kosovo and also the registration of asylum seekers, who are currently in Western European countries.¹⁰⁸

The second problem refers to education. Presently, higher education in the Albanian language in Serbia is carried out only in two departments: in Medveđa, at the branch of the University of Niš and in Bujanovac, at the branch of the Faculty of Economics in Subotica. In regards to primary and secondary education, there is the problem of textbooks in the Albanian language, which come either from Kosovo or Albania.¹⁰⁹ As the Republic of Serbia does not recognise the Republic of Kosovo, it does not recognise the textbooks that come from there. According to Albanian representatives, this leads to a somewhat absurd situation because even during the rule of Slobodan Milošević in the nineties, the Albanians had textbooks in the Albanian language.¹¹⁰ When some textbooks are permitted, such as the primer from Albania, they undergo major changes.¹¹¹ Finally, access to education for Roma children is very limited due to the very bad economic situation of that community. There are

105 Wæver et. al 1993, 23.

106 The National Assembly has discussed on several occasions the displaying of the Albanian flag in South Serbia. See: National Assembly. 2010. Book 35, 153-154.

107 <http://www.juznevesti.com/Intervju/Beograd-i-Pristina-proizvode-probleme.sr.html> Accessed on 15 October 2012

108 “Albanians boycott the Census, <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/Dru%C5%A1tvo/950246/Albanci+bojkotuju+popis.html> Accessed on 15 October 2012.

109 The Member of Parliament Riza Halimi spoke about the lack of textbooks in the Albanian language in the National Assembly. See: National Assembly. 2011. Book 11, 86.

110 *Belgrade and Priština produce problems*, <http://www.juznevesti.com/Intervju/Beograd-i-Pristina-proizvode-probleme.sr.html>, Accessed on 16 October 2012.

111 The Albanian primer that was allowed in the last school year, 2011/2012, was significantly modified. For example, “the beautiful city of Priština” was replaced in the primer with “the beautiful city of Niš” and accompanied with a photo of the Skull Tower.

no textbooks or classes in the Roma language, and for that reason 99 per cent of Roma attend Serbian schools. In addition, the conversation with local community representatives left the impression that the teachers discriminate against Roma children. The representatives of the Roma community say that in the Primary School Branko Radičević, where Roma children are the majority, many of them repeat grades, while none of the children of Serbian nationality have repeated a grade.¹¹² The problem is also higher education, because even if there are scholarships for higher education for Roma children, the Roma in Bujanovac have a problem with accessing the relevant information.¹¹³

The fact that university diplomas bearing the UNMIK stamp are not recognised in Serbia have additionally worsened the employment opportunities for Albanians.¹¹⁴ The problem of diplomas has been overcome through the mediation of the European University Association, which will certify these diplomas with its stamp for the purpose of their recognition.¹¹⁵ The population of South Serbia hopes that this solution will, in the future, facilitate the employment of Albanians and Serbs who have acquired education at universities in Kosovo.¹¹⁶ The Albanian representatives also believe that financial aid for the scholarships of Albanian students must also be granted to those Albanian students who wish to study in the Albanian language at universities in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, which do not exist in the Albanian language in the Republic of Serbia.

(4)

The fourth security challenge recognised by the local community is the *unresolved status of Kosovo*. Both Serbs and Albanians claim that this problem generates many of the other challenges they face, without having an influence on its solution. The President of Bujanovac Municipality Hajredin Hyda says: "The greatest threat to the Municipality of Bujanovac is that we are blameless in the relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Therefore, we are victims of the relationship between the two governments, and that is the only major threat [...] because we do not participate in these discussions, or these events or these verbal duels [...]." ¹¹⁷ Occasionally, the ideas of the partition and demarcation of Kosovo are launched from Belgrade. As a response to this message, the representatives of the Albanian political parties in South Serbia demand that the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa be annexed to Kosovo. All of this is a constant source of uncertainty for the citizens of both Serbian and Albanian nationality. It can very often be heard that the Albanians from South Serbia are the "hostages" of the relations between Belgrade and Priština. During a discussion in the NASR, the representatives of the Albanian community put forward the following:

112 Interview conducted on 12 September 2012.

113 Ibid

114 The Republic of Serbia does not recognise diplomas from Kosovo because of the unresolved status of Kosovo. Also, the word "additionally" is used because most Albanians mention that discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin is the first reason that it is difficult for them to find a job.

115 The agreement on the principles was reached on 2 July, and the final agreement on 21 November 2011. The first set of over 70 diplomas was certified on 26 June 2012. It remains an open question as to whether they will be recognised in Serbia and whether people will be able to get a job. Malazogu and Bieber, 2012, 14.

116 The issue of diploma recognition also concerns the Serbs who have completed studies in Kosovo, since the Serbs who completed studies at the University in Kosovska Mitrovica cannot find a job within Kosovo institutions.

117 Interview conducted on 12 September 2012.

“I am convinced that the stabilisation of the situation in Kosovo is a very important thing for the Albanians of Preševo Valley, because it is a prerequisite for them to stop being hostages of the intolerable situation in Kosovo, to finally move towards a better life and for the entire environment to be able to experience this.”¹¹⁸ Ordinary citizens have a similar opinion. One of the focus group participants says: “Nothing can be better until the issue of Kosovo’s status is solved [...] believe me, until that is resolved, nothing will be better.” Finally, some Albanians from the local community in South Serbia consider that the Albanians in South Serbia should be treated like Northern Kosovo is treated by Priština. The President of the Albanian National Minority Council Galip Beqiri clarifies “[...] we are committed to the principle of reciprocity. We do not request the changing of borders, we do not ask for anything more but to get all the rights here in the Municipalities of Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa that were given to the Serbs in Kosovo”.¹¹⁹ This applies to a wide range of rights that not only Serbian, but all the municipalities in Kosovo, were given through the Ahtisaari plan.

118 National Assembly. 2007. *Book 36*, 62.

119 Interview conducted on 13 September 2012.

6. Conclusion

The research led to several key findings. Firstly, it seems that certain representatives of the state and the local community often perceive the security situation in South Serbia as much worse than it actually is; from the objective perspective, it is far more stable today than a decade ago. Secondly, there are overlaps and differences between the state and the local discourses on security threats. Both discourses stress the economic underdevelopment and the unresolved status of Kosovo as key generators of insecurity in South Serbia. However, when it comes to specific security challenges, it appears that the state and the local community have different agendas. The state and its security apparatus are very focused on the prevention of terrorism and organised crime. On the other hand, the local community is most concerned with the state's weakness, ineffectiveness and alienation from the local community.

Thirdly, the research has shown that the security policy perceptions of the state and the local community are partly the same, but also diverge to a certain extent. Their opinions diverge regarding the role of the security sector in the stabilisation of the situation in South Serbia. On one hand, the state representatives believe that the presence of the Armed Forces and the Gendarmerie has contributed to stability and economic development in South Serbia. In contrast, the Albanian majority in particular believes that the strong presence of the security forces hinders economic development and consequently the security stabilisation of the region. The state and the local community perceive in the same way those security policies that were aimed at economic development, social integration and the enhancement of human security. For example, both the state and the local community believe that the Municipal Security Councils are excellent channels of communication that have produced great results in improving the security situation at the local level.

Fourthly, the research has indicated that there are differences within the state discourse. Security perceptions vary within the state, depending on the institution and even the organisational unit. For example, the differences in the perception of security have been noted between the members of the Gendarmerie, who are primarily involved in the fight against terrorism and organised crime and perceive the situation far more dramatically, and the local police forces, which have a much broader agenda and see the security situation in South Serbia as favourable. One also gets the impression that the police officers who work in Belgrade perceive the security situation in South Serbia as more problematic than the police officers who work in these southern municipalities. Fifthly, the research has revealed the differences within the local security discourse, between the Serbs, Albanians and Roma, between the political elites and ordinary citizens, as well as between the residents of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa. All the aforementioned groups agree that the situation in terms of physical security has been improved a lot over recent years, but that the

integration of minorities and economic development are not at a satisfactory level. The political representatives of the Albanians present the problem of discrimination as being much more acute than the ordinary citizens do. Both groups criticise the state for the manner in which the Gendarmerie operates in South Serbia. Finally, the citizens of both Albanian and Serbian ethnicity in Medveđa feel safer and have the most confidence in the state, while the citizens of Preševo have the least confidence.

7. Recommendations:

Recommendations for the Government of the Republic of Serbia

1. The Government of the Republic of Serbia should continue cooperation with international organisations and institutions that work actively in South Serbia and which have contributed significantly to the stabilisation of the situation in that territory.
2. The Government of the Republic of Serbia should work on facilitating trade and the movement of people between Kosovo and Central Serbia.
3. The Government of the Republic of Serbia should include representatives of the Albanian community in South Serbia in the work of the Serbian European Integration Office.
4. The Government of the Republic of Serbia should open an EU information centre in South Serbia in order to better inform the population about the impact of EU accession on the lives of their communities.
5. Republic of Serbia budget funds should be allocated to strengthen the Albanian Language Department of the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. In addition, the development of multidisciplinary "Albanian Studies" should be encouraged and funds should be allocated to scholarships for students who would be interested in these studies and the study of the Albanian language.
6. The Government of the Republic of Serbia should initiate a dialogue with the local community in order to find a compromise on marking the conflict in South Serbia.
7. The Government of the Republic of Serbia should consider the possibility of returning jurisdiction to the local court in Bujanovac.

Recommendations for the Serbian Government's Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa

1. The Coordination Body's influence and importance within the Government of the Republic of Serbia should be enhanced.
2. The Coordination Body should increase the visibility of its work in the field.
3. In allocating resources, the Coordination Body should take into account the conclusions, recommendations and initiatives of the Municipal Security Councils.
4. The Coordination Body should develop programmes for empowering civil society at the local level.
5. The Coordination Body should continue and intensify its efforts, and invest more resources into the development of a new generation of political elites at the local level through linking them with Belgrade.
6. Ethnic representation in the Coordination Body and the Coordination Body's Office should be increased. This institution should also favour job candidates who speak the Albanian language.

Recommendations for the Serbian Ministry of the Interior

1. The further development of training programmes for police officers of Albanian nationality in the vocational schools in Belgrade should be worked on.
2. Ethnic representation in the ranks of the Border Police should be increased.
3. Police officers of Albanian nationality and people belonging to the Albanian national minority should be encouraged to apply to the Gendarmerie competitions.
4. The Gendarmerie should be involved in the work of the Municipal Security Councils.

The Gendarmerie should establish better channels of communication with the local community, in order to explain its actions to the population, making it more understandable for them. This especially applies to wearing masks and driving slowly through populated places.

5. The policy of reducing the presence of the Gendarmerie units in populated places, as much as possible, should continue.
6. The actions of the Gendarmerie in populated places that may cause antagonism of the local population should be minimised. This refers to the consistent implementation of

the command to lower and cover gun barrels when passing through populated places but also to other measures that can reduce tensions between the local population and the Gendarmerie units.

7. When performing security operations in South Serbia, media sensationalism should be avoided.

Recommendations for the Serbian Armed Forces

1. The Army should continue with the good practice of civil-military cooperation and the opening of military capacity for the local population.
2. The Army should encourage Albanian national minority members to study at the Military Academy.

Recommendations for the international community

1. It is necessary to support the development of civil society and its connections with the civil society organisations from other parts of Serbia.
2. Education and networking of youth leaders from South Serbia should be supported.
3. It is necessary to support media training aimed at better informed, more objective and less sensational reporting on South Serbia.
4. Support the greater involvement of civil society in South Serbia in the public oversight of the security sector through educational and research projects.

Recommendations for the local community

1. Political forces, representatives of ethnic communities at the local level, should increase their efforts to achieve consensus and unite around common interests and problems faced by all the communities in order to join forces in putting pressure on the central government to support the development of the region.
2. Representatives of the local Albanian community should be constructive in their cooperation with the Coordination Body and the Albanian National Minority Council.

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Annex A

About the respondents

Interviews conducted

1. Ragmi Mustafa, Human Rights Committee – Bujanovac, 10 September 2012
2. Nikola Lazić, journalist with the weekly Vranjske, 10 September 2012
3. Ragmi Mustafa, President of Preševo Municipality, 11 September 2012
4. Driton Salihu, Editor of the web portal Presheva.com, 11 September 2012
5. Abdulla Ahmedi, Coordinator of the Office of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Preševo, 11 September 2012
6. Nagip Arifi, President of Bujanovac Municipality, 11 September 2012
7. Nexhat Behluli, Coordinator of the Office for Local Economic Development of Bujanovac Municipality, 12 September 2012
8. Hajredin Hyda, President of the Municipal Assembly of Bujanovac and Chairman of the Security Council of Bujanovac Municipality, 12 September 2012
9. Stojanča Arsić, Vice-President of Bujanovac Municipality, 12 September 2012
10. Ramiz Salimi, President of the Association of Roma in Bujanovac, 12 September 2012
11. Galip Beqiri, President of the Albanian National Minority Council, 13 September 2012
12. Slobodan Drašković, President of Medveđa Municipality, 13 September 2012
13. Florim Sahiti, Vice-President of Medveđa Municipality, 13 September 2012
14. Danijela Nenadić, Director of the Office of the RS Government's Coordination Body for the Municipalities Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, 5 October 2012

15. Dragan Šutanovac, former Minister of Defence of the Republic of Serbia, 18 September 2012
16. Office of the Protector of Citizens in Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa – written responses, 17 September 2012
17. Bogdan Kosanović, Assistant Manager of the Serbian Mol's Coordination Directorate for Kosovo and Metohija, 2 November 2012
18. Dragan Veličković, Head of the police station in Bujanovac, 2 November 2012
19. Avdi Bajrami, Head of the police station in Preševo, 2 November 2012
20. Zoran Anđelić, Head of the police station in Medveđa, 2 November 2012
21. Vasković Zoran, Assistant Head of the Border Police Directorate, 5 November 2012
22. Slobodan Đurić, Head of Gendarmerie Intelligence Unit, 5 November 2012
23. Radoslav Đinović, Head of the Department for Monitoring and Investigating Terrorism, Criminal Investigation Directorate, 6 November 2012
24. Ana Đurić, Department for International Cooperation , Criminal Investigation Directorate, 5 November 2012

Annex B

About the researchers

Filip Ejodus

is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. He acquired his Master's Degree at London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE), and at the Political Sciences Institute in Paris (Sciences po Paris), and defended his PhD Thesis in the field of international security at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. In the period January 2007 – March 2009, he was the Executive Director of the Centre for Civil-Military Relations and the Deputy Director of the Belgrade School of Security Studies, and presently he is a member of the Executive Board of the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy. He co-chairs the Regional Stability in South East Europe Study Group (RSSEE) of the PfP Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes. He is the editor of the Journal of Regional Security. He is the author and editor of several books and scientific papers in national and international publications in the field of European integration, international relations and security studies.

Ivan E. Kostić

is a PhD student at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, Department of Cultural and Media Studies. He graduated from the Faculty of Philology, Department of Oriental Studies – Arabic Language and Literature. In the same Department, he defended his Master Thesis entitled *Aspects of Islamic Reformism in 19th and 20th Centuries* and completed his master studies at the Islam and Civilisation Study Group. He is one of the founders of the Belgrade-based Balkan Centre for the Middle East. He is the author of numerous articles and a foreign affairs commentator on the Middle East and Islam for the leading media outlets in the country and the region. Since 2011, he has been a lecturer at the Faculty for Media and Communications for the courses *The Middle East Culture and History and Orientalism and Occidentalism*. He is a member of the editorial board of the religious science magazine *Kom*. The fields of his scientific work are: Islam in Europe and in the Balkans, the history of the Balkan Muslims, the relationship between contemporary social theories and Islam, contemporary Islamic thought and reformism within Islam.

Marija Marović

is a researcher and author in the Balkan Centre for the Middle East. She acquired her Master's Degree in International Security at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, USA. She completed undergraduate studies at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology, Department of Arabic Language and Literature. She worked for the OSCE Mission to Serbia on the implementation of police reform support programmes, including her engagement in the OSCE Office in Bujanovac. She is a foreign affairs commentator on the Middle East for Al Jazeera Balkans. She is the author of several publications on the topic of security sector reform and the Middle East.

Other team members

Other team members who participated in the research are Miloš Bešić, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, and Marko Kovačević, Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Political Sciences. Miloš Bešić held focus groups in Bujanovac and Medveđa. Marko Kovačević analysed the discourse on the perception of threats in South Serbia in the debates of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

Annex C

About the Balkan Centre for the Middle East

The Balkan Centre for the Middle East is a non-governmental organisation established in 2010 in Belgrade with the aim of improving the understanding of the deep historical, cultural, religious and political intertwinement of the societies and states in the Balkans and the Middle East.

The Balkan Centre for the Middle East advocates the civilized harmonisation of Europe and the Middle East, and perceives the Balkans as a meeting place with the strong potential to become a bridge of cooperation and mutual understanding between the West and the East in the 21st century. In order to achieve this goal, the Balkan Centre for the Middle East performs research, educational and publishing activities, independently or in cooperation with other institutions and individuals from Serbia and abroad.

The Balkan Centre for the Middle East has been working on gathering and networking organisations and young researchers from post-Yugoslav countries who study Middle East and Ottoman culture, which has left a big mark on the Western Balkans during the five-centuries of Ottoman rule.

Almost a year after its foundation, the Centre has managed to bring together young scientists and researchers from diverse social fields, such as: political science, oriental studies, security studies, sociology, anthropology and linguistics.

