

Madam Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This intervention is from the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of Serbia

This is commendable and important effort to share conclusions and examples on how the commitments concerning the human dimension are being translated into the real life and real people. You have to be informed, yet again, that freedom of movement for Serbian and non-Albanian communities in Kosovo is still substantially limited. In 2012, Serbs in Kosovo still have to seek security in numbers and gather within areas called enclaves, and to move from one to another with great caution and fear for life. For them, this means physical insecurity for physical presence and moving outside invisible but very much existing walls of enclaves. Even the enclaves are not sure places: children were killed by wild drive-by spraying from firearms as they were playing in the creek in the village of Gorazdevac; no perpetrator was found.

There are two main aspects of lack of freedom of movement for Serbs and members of non-Albanian communities in Kosovo. One aspect is brute violence, ranging from stoning vehicles and busses carrying Serbs, through beatings to murders.

For instance, this summer an elderly man went into a bank in the town of Pec minding his own business, to take his pension, and ended heavily beaten up by the mob of local Kosovo Albanians who could not tolerate his very presence. The message is a rough and unmistakable: stay away.

But the violence does not stop there. Since the arrival of international civilian and military presences in June 1999, there have been more than 1,000 killed Serbs and non-Albanians; the latest in the string was the murder of an elderly Serbian couple, husband and wife, returnees to the village of Talinovac, who were killed in their own home last summer. These murders invariably end up with investigations that reveal no suspects, there are no convictions. There is factual impunity for crimes against Serbs, since in Kosovo, murder of Serbs evolved from crime into the most efficient means of limiting freedom of movement and deterring the return of the displaced persons. It became the ultimate tool of capping Serbian presence at the targeted level.

The other and no less worrying aspect of lack of freedom is institutional one. Under one pretext or another, the life is being made increasingly difficult for Serbs in Kosovo. An example is the recent, and still ongoing, case of the Peace and Tolerance Center in Pristina, the only place where Serbs can freely come to, talk in Serbian, read the press in Serbian and have a doctor come to tend to their health. We are talking about premises of some 30 m², situated within a police station exactly for the sake of security. This serves the last 40 Serbs still living in Pristina, as opposed to the former 44,000 strong Serbian population before 1999. So even these 40 people and these 30 m² turn to be unacceptable for the local institutions which want to close it down. This was temporarily halted due to international pressure and to a great deal thanks to the quick response of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, but the case is still open. The implications of closure of this Center are grave – and all too obvious. If that happens, the last 40 Serbs will not be able to endure much longer. In other words, Pristina is only these 30 m² away from becoming yet another Kosovo settlement ethnically cleansed of Serbs. Is this a multiethnic Kosovo that Serbia and international community are striving to preserve?

As a point of comparison, prior to June 1999 there were more than 400 towns and villages where Serbs lived. Now more than 300 of these settlements are monoethnic.

There is another still unfolding example of institutionally sponsored control of freedom of movement of Serbs in Kosovo. In a bid to facilitate “safe” freedom of movement for Serbs in Kosovo, authorities in Pristina insisted on introducing uniform new registry plates for all. But eventually, Serbs began noticing that their vehicles kept being stopped by the traffic police much more frequently than before, sometimes even each 5-10 km. It was also noticed that vehicles in Serbian populated enclaves somehow turned to have the same two letters on their plates. For instance in the enclave of Strpce these two last letters are “BG”, which by the way is the official registry plate for Belgrade. Further inquiry also revealed the pattern of lettering combination on plates in enclaves. However, it was not possible to identify any such pattern in Albanian populated areas. Quite the contrary there were anecdotal reports of some Albanians angrily refusing plates with letters BG because, quote: “they did not want anyone to think they were Serbs.” This is simply leading to the conclusion that such widespread incidence and the repeating pattern cannot be coincidence. The last time that an ethnic community in Europe was publicly marked was 70 years ago....

Thank you for your attention