

Prisoners in their own Land: The Struggle and Resistance of Serbs in Kosovo

Report from the Kosovo barricades

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NATO's war against Serbia is far from over. Even before Serbia's government, a pro-Western puppet regime, could come to a conclusion about whether or not to join NATO, NATO troops were already present on Serbian soil, more precisely in its southern province of Kosovo.

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After the NATO bombing of the then-existing Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the agreement of Kumanovo, the installation of a UN Mission to Kosovo and the retreat of the Yugoslav army and Serbian police forces were agreed upon. In reality this has meant the expulsion of 250,000 Kosovo Serbs, Roma and other minorities by members of the NATO-hatched "Kosovo Liberation Army" (KLA) and other Albanian extremists, under the command of its so-called "protection force". As a result, hundreds of civilians (many of them Albanians who opposed the KLA regime) were murdered, and in the remaining Serbian enclaves locals now lead a ghetto existence. Up to this point, only in the North of Kosovo has the Serbian population managed to lead a more or less self-determined lifestyle, thanks in no small part to the administrative border to the rest of Serbia. Nonetheless, they are increasingly isolated, impoverished and vulnerable, receiving little to no support from Serbia's government.

After Kosovo unilaterally declared independence in 2008 under the leadership of [alleged organ trader and recognized terrorist Hashim Thaci](#), the situation deteriorated further: in the manner of a Catch-22, NATO troops, known locally as "Kosovo Force" (KFOR), and the so-called "European Union Rule of Law Mission" (EULEX) were mandated to enforce the "sovereignty" of a territory which chose to separate against international laws, a process which also included the installation of Albanian customs officers along its Northern border in order to eradicate Serbian "parallel structures".

In response, Serbian inhabitants constructed approximately 20 street barricades last July in the predominantly Serbian region of Northern Kosovo (consisting of the communities of Leposavić, Zvečan and Zubin Potok and the Northern section of Kosovska Mitrovica) in order to keep out EULEX and the "Kosovo government" frontiersmen. [Clashes have already been](#)

[provoked](#) several times by KFOR soldiers who attempted to remove some of the barricades, employing the use of tear gas and truncheons against unarmed protesters.

Activists from Belgrade recently started to organise free bus trips into the Northern region of Kosovo in order to supply moral and material support to the Serbian population. The author was permitted to join one of these trips on the 26th of November, as one of approximately 200 participants. The group could be described as heterogeneous, ranging from members of Serbian youth organisations and humanitarian activists, to writers and private persons of all ages. Some of the people had roots in the different regions of the Province of Kosovo (now completely under Albanian/NATO control), such as a doctor whose father was killed by the KLA in 1999, and a young man living in Belgrade, who had to flee with his family from the provincial capital of Priština when he was still a child.

The administrative border of Kosovo can be passed without customs control and the Belgrade convoy arrived in Northern Mitrovica towards evening. Once there, inhabitants showed the visitors the first barricade, built with gravel and concrete, over the Ibar River that separates the Serbian North and the Albanian South of the town. Many graffiti with the label “1244” can be seen, which refers to the 1999 UN Resolution that explicitly excludes the possibility of an independent Kosovo. On the other side of the river silhouettes of pedestrians can be seen, locals who would probably never cross the few meters to the other side of town — a case which applies even more strictly in the reverse. It is not for nothing that in a nearby store, postcards with the engraving “bridge of disunion” can be purchased.



Barricade on the bridge dividing Northern and Southern Mitrovica

Northern Mitrovica is a place where civilians have become victims of assault again and again, the worst incident since 1999 being in March of 2004, when an [Albanian mob killed 19 people](#) and caused much destruction, both in the town as well as within the enclaves.



Barricade within the town of Mitrovica

While at the barricade, members of a Serbian writers' association started to decorate the structure with hundreds of books that would later be donated to the local library. In a nearby tent tea was being served to the people to warm up during the night, while a *gusle* player performed for the crowd. (The *gusle* is a traditional South Slavic string instrument.)

Later several activists held speeches and a number of writers read their poetry. Volunteers were invited to donate blood for the local population. Several nearby coffee houses, as well as conversations with the bridge guards, made the night pass unexpectedly fast. The bridge guards are there to protect the people from assaults, and some have been doing their jobs already since the retreat of the Yugoslav Army in 1999. Protection has not been available from any other sources, the only exception being a group of French soldiers, who in the beginning at least tried to prevent attacks against civilians on some occasions. The German soldiers have a reputation locally that is considerably worse.

Early the next morning further excursions were organised, including visits to the localities of Rudar, Jagnjenica and Dudin Krs, where [the most recent violent incidents took place](#) a short time before the trip. Locals and soldiers are separated by barbed wire, and although the atmosphere seemed to be quiet, the previous happenings have shown that this can change rapidly.



Meters of barbed wire separate the people from NATO soldiers

With winter setting in, the question arises of what the future holds for the locals. After the 9th of December, when Serbia was denied status as an EU candidate, it can be expected that President Boris Tadić will try to strengthen pressure on the Kosovo Serbs to abandon their barricades. Tadić has his sights set on bringing Serbia closer to the European Union in order to gain the support of people who still think that Serbian membership might improve their living conditions, as the corporate media are saying.

In fact many people across all of Serbia, facing unemployment and privatisation, say that the current government is the worst and most unsocial one they have ever had. Certainly the Kosovo Serbs cannot count on the support of President Tadić's pro-Western government, but they do have most of Serbia's public support on their side, as demonstrated by the convoys being sent to the barricades.



More makeshift barricades block the roads within Kosovo

During the trip back to Mitrovica, a cemetery catches the visitor's eye: the names on the tombstones are all Albanian, and in stark contrast to the centuries-old Serbian Orthodox monasteries and graves that have been decimated in recent years, this place is in good shape and there are no signs of vandalism. It is also not unusual to hear people speaking in Albanian in the Serbian-majority region of Northern Mitrovica, and in fact the whole city used to be ethnically mixed before the war.

Arguably, the lives of Albanians in what is now the Serbian-populated North seem to be more bearable than is the case for Serbs in the Albanian-dominated South: according to Serbian media there is one sole Serbian person left in Southern Mitrovica, an elderly retired woman who generally does not leave her house and receives her supply of daily goods through an Albanian colleague.

Another local ethnic group that has suffered significantly are the Roma. In June 1999, a short time after the NATO bombings, Albanian extremists burned down the "Romska Mahala" in Southern Mitrovica, which was one of the oldest Roma settlements in the Balkans. The UN administration settled them in a camp in the North, close to the famous Trepča mines. Tragically, because of lead poisoning, [dozens of children became seriously ill](#).

The trip back to Belgrade was a time to reflect upon the experience as a whole. It is impossible to picture the population in the North of Kosovo ever accepting the reign of a force that is responsible for some of the most terrible crimes that could be imagined, from alleged organ trade and child prostitution to countless ethnically-motivated murders. Not to mention the NATO presence that dominates all of Kosovo.

The justified resistance of the Kosovo Serbs against a regime of globalised war, terror and poverty has to be treated as such and deserves support from across the globe. The name of Kosovska Mitrovica should stay in the memory of all engaged citizens, alongside names like Gaza, Caracas, Fallujah and the many other places where people stand up for a life of dignity.

People who are interested in getting more information on the issue or want to help or participate in a trip to the barricades are asked to contact Mr. John Bosnitch: jbosnitch@gmail.com

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