



Press Briefing Notes

29 March 2006

Special Briefing by UNMIK Police Commissioner Kai Vittrup on the stabbing of a Kosovo Serb youth in north Mitrovica on 28 March

Kai Vittrup: As Police Commissioner, I along with the International Police and KPS Staff strongly condemn this senseless act of violence.

Without exception the relations between North and South Mitrovica has been steadily improving over the past years. This has been thanks to the Serbian community and the Serbian community leaders and the Albanian community and Albanian community leaders on both sides of the Ibar River who have helped improve these relations in a dignified manner.

We will not rest until those responsible for this attack on the Serbian youth are brought to justice. I have ordered the Main Headquarters Serious Crimes Unit to conduct an intensive investigation into finding those criminals responsible for this crime.

I have further ordered the Regional Commander that all officers working in the South Mitrovica understand their responsibilities at bringing safety and security to the area.

Two KPS Officers, one Serbian and one Albanian, have been suspended from duty pending an investigation by the Main Headquarters Professional Standards Unit for allegations that they did not act properly during the incident.

Finally, when the Ibar Bridge reopens KPS Officers whom International Police Officers will monitor will be at the bridge to insure safety and security for the public.

Reuters: Is there any indication where these attackers came from, the south or the north part or from Bosniak neighbourhood, because we have been getting different reports?

Kai Vittrup: Yes, I have seen in the press that there are many reports. A number of young Kosovo Albanians came from the south side, went to the northern side. In the first place, those number were stopped and went back again. Later on, four young Kosovo Albanians came from the south side, went north and approached some young Kosovo Serbs on the north side. So they came from the south and went into north.

Reuters: So does this mean that this was the result of a fight between Albanian and Serb youngsters?

Kai Vittrup: There were Kosovo Albanian juveniles and Kosovo Serb juveniles on the spot and then this incident took place. We have some videotapes which confirm this and we are working very strongly to identify the suspects. And in this respect I very much ask for help from the public to support their police to find those suspects.

BBC: Mr. Vittrup, can you please be more specific, is this inter-ethnic conflict or what kind of conflict you consider this to be?

Kai Vittrup: The only thing I can say at the moment is that it is a conflict. Because we know that Kosovo Albanians were involved, Kosovo Serbs were involved, but the reason, the motive, for this is what makes it either inter-ethnic or not inter-ethnic. So we have to be very careful when we are talking about inter-ethnic crimes.

BBC: In general how would you describe the situation in Kosovo, as tense, as stable, or how?

Kai Vittrup: In general, from an overall point of view, I find it is stable. We have seen an increased number, you have seen an increased number, of the use of EODs and explosives, but in spite of that, in general, stable. This incident that happened yesterday is, as I see it, an isolated incident, and I condemn very much those who took the initiative to cross the bridge and start up that kind of activities, that won't serve anyone, neither Kosovo Serbs nor Kosovo Albanians. And that is why I find, and I am very happy to see that there is a lot of support to the police to find those suspects, from both sides by the way. I am very satisfied with that.

KiM Radio: Mr. Vittrup, this is not the first incident in Kosovska Mitrovica, since we know that several UN vehicles have also been targeted by unknown perpetrators and graffiti written on them. Has anyone been arrested in that regard?

Kai Vittrup: We have charged a number of youngsters for making graffiti on our cars. But it is a minor violation of the legislation, that is why we do not arrest them and bring them to detention. But a number of them have been charged for this. We know who they are, because it is almost the same every time, so it is quite easy for us to find them and charge them.

Zeri: Mr. Vittrup, can you tell us any specific reason why you have suspended two police officers?

Kai Vittrup: Two reasons: I think it was two months ago, in this place, I announced a strong reaction against any intimidation from the police side against the public. This has resulted in more than 30 suspensions since that day. A strong reaction. Both KPS senior staff and I do not want that kind of behaviour. In this case, there is some doubt about those standing at the bridge, if they did what they could to stop this or to arrest the suspects. In that case I suspend those officers immediately pending the investigation, to send the signals that if you are police officer, it does not matter what colour you have, it doesn't matter what ethnic background you have, or what language you speak, you have to act as police officer all the time, wherever you are, in this case in Kosovo, wherever you are. And if you don't do that, the reaction will be very prompt, it will happen immediately like in this case. As I said, more than 30 have been suspended since I announced this and more will follow.

BBC: Is this particular incident in link with any political reason? Is there any connection with any visit to Mitrovica today, in this yesterday's incident?

Kai Vittrup: I can't inform you about that for two reasons: one, this incident is quite new, we have just started up the investigation; and two, I do not want to go into any speculation on this, it is of course very sensitive. But the fact that a number of youngsters from the south is moving towards north has caused some concerns. That is why we intend to increase the international presence up in the north within the next 48 hours. There will be a number of international officers patrolling the area up north.

BBC: Are you going to ask KFOR to help you in this case and does this mean that you are going to block this bridge between south and north?

Kai Vittrup: First of all KFOR is always there to help us and support us. But the agreement between KFOR and the Police is that we want KPS to be in the lead, which means that the people of Kosovo need to see their police take action, also in a case like this. The next echelon will be the international police which will go up there, but I can assure you that if anything happens, KFOR will be there to support the police to maintain overall security. Second, the bridge is closed for the moment, it will be opened again, we will on the political level decide when, and as I said at that time when it happened, international police will monitor the traffic together with KPS.

Kosova Sot: You said that there is a video recording of this incident. I am interested to know who did the monitoring or recording of this event, was it accidental or is it a place that is monitored all the time?

Kai Vittrup: It is a permanent video monitoring.

Kosova Sot: And what conclusions can you draw from it?

Kai Vittrup: I do not think any conclusions, because the video just shows a part of the reality. What we need is to investigate and go through the entire video and then, in relation to the investigation itself, to find out what happened. So the videotape is just one part of the entire investigation. We do not base our investigation or our judgment just alone on the video.

Reuters: Does it mean that based on this video two police officers were suspended?

Kai Vittrup: No it is not according to the video. The video, as you know, and the television gives us only one part of the truth.

Zeri: Apart from the video, do you have any witness who will explain what happened?

Kai Vittrup: The investigation, I am sorry to use this expression, the investigation is ongoing, and I sure hope that the first witnesses have moved forward. But of course we need all the witnesses we can get hold of, and that is why I have asked the people of Kosovo, especially of course in that area, to move forward and to support their police.

RTK: Just to clarify on the KPS suspensions, is there a sound basis to doubt that they failed to perform their duties, is that what you're saying?

Kai Vittrup: Yes

Kosova Sot: You said that the location is under permanent surveillance; how many such control points are located in Mitrovica which are considered as sensitive or hot points, which may cause incidents?

Kai Vittrup: The bridge is under surveillance, and that is all I want to confirm.

Regular Weekly Joint Press Briefing

UNMIK Spokesperson Neeraj Singh
KFOR Chief PIO Col. Pio Sabetta
OSCE Spokesperson Florence Marchal
EU Pillar Spokesperson Mechthild Henneke

UNMIK Spokesperson Neeraj Singh

Good Morning. As you are aware the Kosovo Government decided yesterday to launch the tender for the second mobile telephony operator in Kosovo. UNMIK welcomes this decision and we are prepared to support the Government in the way ahead, keeping in mind the need for full transparency.

Voluntary relocation to the safer environment of Camp Osterode for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Internally Displaced Persons currently residing in the three camps in the north of Mitrovica is currently underway. The relocation is being carried out in batches of up to 10 families a day. Until yesterday, 47 families from the Kablar and Cesmin Lug camps had been moved to Osterode. 14 other families have currently registered to be moved to Osterode.

The relocation so far has been smooth and incident-free. UNMIK welcomes the support and cooperation of the IDPs, the camp leaders and of the neighbouring communities, all the role players involved in the exercise. This relocation of the IDPs is a temporary health emergency measure. Reconstruction of the Roma Mahala is being vigorously pursued to enable permanent return of the IDPs to their homes.

Deputy Status Envoy Albert Rohan is currently on a visit to Kosovo. Tomorrow he will address a press conference in the UNMIK Headquarters at 14:30 hours. *[Note: the time of the press conference has since been moved to 12 noon]*

To end, I would like to correct a misreporting by some media of the statement of the Director of Justice in the press conference yesterday on the credit cards issue. And this is very important, so please hear me out carefully. The Director of Justice Albert Moskowitz said: "We know for example that at least one bank has issued over 20,000 Visa Cards recently and are dealing with 50,000 Euros of fraud each month..." Now some media reported this as implying that a particular bank in Kosovo has issued 20,000 false or illegal credit cards. That is NOT, and I repeat, NOT what Mr. Moskowitz implied. The number 20,000 represents legally issued legitimate credit cards which he gave as an example of how the credit card market is growing in Kosovo. And then he gave an example of how this bank is having to deal with credit card fraud to the tune of 50,000 Euros per month and he gave this as an example of how with the growth of the credit cards market, the opportunities for fraud are also increasing in Kosovo, just as in other parts of the world. I would request you to clarify this point to the readers so that there are no unfounded apprehensions in the public about the banking and credit cards system in Kosovo, which is working very well. For those of you who may want to check out the statement of Mr. Moskowitz, we issued a written transcript of the press conference yesterday afternoon and the original audio version is available on the UNMIK website: www.unmikonline.org.

KFOR Chief PIO Col. Pio Sabetta

The commander of Multi-National Brigade East, in cooperation with United States Army Europe and KFOR, has finalized a plan to reduce the scope of operations at Camp Monteith by the end of this month. Most of the MNB (E) forces stationed at Camp Monteith are

currently being re-located to Camp Bondsteel. The process may eventually bring a decision to close Camp Monteith altogether later this year.

This is purely and simply an effort to use military facilities and resources more efficiently. NATO is not planning to reduce its overall operational capability in Kosovo. KFOR remains ready and able to respond to any situation affecting the safe and secure environment in Kosovo.

Task Force Houston will maintain a smaller presence at Camp Monteith until a final decision on whether or not to close the camp is made at a later date. Liaison and Monitoring Teams will still have offices in this region and will maintain partnerships and community ties.

The possible closure of Camp Monteith is obviously an important question for the local community, as it will impact civilian jobs. That's part of the reason why we want to maintain transparency in case a decision on closure is made so that contractors and employees will have time to make appropriate plans.

OSCE Spokesperson Florence Marchal

The 7th review on the Criminal Justice System in Kosovo will be made public this Friday at 11.00. This Review has been prepared by the Department of Human Rights and Rule of Law of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo.

The OSCE has monitored the justice system since 1999. During this period, OSCE has issued reports and almost 200 recommendations.

The first part of the review illustrates the impact of OSCE recommendations and acknowledges the progress that has been made during the last six years. In its second part it analyses the recommendations that have not been successfully implemented.

Media representatives are invited to attend the official presentation at 11.00, in the OSCE Headquarters.

EU Pillar Spokesperson Mechthild Henneke

At the moment, the STM meeting is taking place in the Germia building. The STM is the main instrument of the European Commission for monitoring Kosovo's progress in the EU Stabilisation and Association Process, which has the aim of bringing Kosovo closer to the EU. The most recent European Partnership was designed to accommodate all of the most important aspects of the Kosovo standards and European standards. The PISG and UNMIK have started the process of developing a Single Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Partnership.

Press Point for the STM is at 14.00 in the Germia Building. Please be there ahead of time.

Tomorrow, at 14.00, the next EFC will be held. Procedures for approving and reporting of budget expenditure for the status negotiations and the report on the budget expenditure for the status negotiations in the first quarter of 2006 are on the agenda. There will be a photo-op at 14.00 and the press point at 15.00 at UNMIK Main HQ first floor. Thank you.

Neeraj: Thanks Mechthild. Any questions?

RTK: Question for Pio. Is the US reducing its military capability by possibly closing down camp Monteith?

Col. Sabetta: As I told you before with the statement, there is no plan to reduce any of the overall capability, operational capability, from the US side. It is just a form of reducing the camp, it is just reshaping the logistics structure.

RTK: What about troops?

Col. Sabetta: The troops, they are not going to be reduced, they are just going to be relocated in camp Bondsteel at the moment.

RTK: I am not a military person, but militarily speaking, if you have two military camps and you possibly close one down, does that mean that you are reducing your military capabilities?

Col. Sabetta: No it is not. It is not related to the military capabilities, it is just a logistic issue, just a question of costs.

Zeri: Is it part of KFOR reorganization plan, or is it unilateral American decision?

Col. Sabetta: It is not part of the reorganization that we are already conducting. It is just the US deciding to reduce the logistic costs, national budget.

Zeri: Does this affect your plans to reorganize KFOR?

Col. Sabetta: I want to stress again, we are not going to reduce in any case operational capability; this is not going to affect absolutely KFOR operational capability.

RTK: Again with Camp Monteith, have the US troops or KFOR at least done an evaluation of what the impact would be for civilian jobs?

Col. Sabetta: Sure, as I said, we want to be absolutely transparent with the people. They have already been talking to the contractors, because you know that at the end the contractors they are responsible for the people working in there, trying to minimize as much as possible the impact on the civilian people. Of course there will be an impact, but we try to minimize as much as possible.

Neeraj: Any more question? Thank you.