



Working to prevent
violent conflict

Saferworld briefing

Potential for renewed violence in Kosovo and the region

23 April 2012

This briefing contains an analysis of the current context in the Western Balkans region and highlights key data from Saferworld's latest annual perception survey in Kosovo. Both the context analysis and the survey data show a marked deterioration in attitudes and an escalation of tensions which have the potential to result in renewed violent conflict.

The survey data was collected in December 2011 as part of a Kosovo-wide public perceptions surveyⁱ. It will be followed by a full report with analyses of all the data, which will be available in May 2012.

Current context

Kosovo has continued to make progress in the development and adoption of major legislative acts directed towards strengthening the rule of law, including the adoption of a new Criminal Code, a new Law on Courts including the recruitment of additional judges, and the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Council chaired by the President. In early 2012, the EU started a dialogue with Kosovo on a visa-free travel regime and a feasibility study for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement is also underway. However, EU accession depends on Kosovo making further progress on the EU's reform agenda; this has been conditioned on the implementation of the agreements reached as a result of EU facilitated talks on improved relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Despite this progress, Kosovo has been facing some of its biggest challenges since the end of the war in 1999. Political crises in late 2010 and early 2011 undermined public support for its government; the EU-facilitated talks between Kosovo and Serbia in the second half of 2011 have broken down over contentious issues; and violent clashes in the north of Kosovo - including the death of a Kosovo police officerⁱⁱ, the destruction of

the customs point in Jarinjë/Jarinje, widespread barricades on roads in the area and a number incidents during which KFOR soldiers have been injured by firearms - have all raised tensions.

More recently a series of events in Kosovo, Serbia and the wider region have further escalated tensions:

Inflammatory rhetoric by senior government representatives and political leaders in Belgradeⁱⁱⁱ, the announcement to hold Serbian-run local elections^{iv} in the north of Kosovo in May 2012 and the arrest of Kosovars by Serbian authorities have contributed significantly to deteriorating relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The arrests of Kosovo citizens and Kosovo police officials by Serbia in border areas have raised tensions in particular, and have been largely viewed as politically motivated and arbitrary in nature. These arrests and political statements surrounding them^v have provoked reactions in Serbia, Kosovo and internationally^{vi} including increasing support to the calls in Kosovo and the wider region to put an end to the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia until the latter begins the implementation of the agreements reached during the talks and plays a constructive role towards Kosovo.

Statements in Serbia^{vii}, including those by a number of former and current diplomats, calling for a political dialogue on a special status/autonomy for the north of Kosovo, have provoked different reactions in Kosovo and other countries of the region. These statements have been strongly opposed by both the Government^{viii} and opposition parties in Kosovo who have asserted that there is no other solution to the north except through the Ahtisaari Proposal.

Adding to these political tensions are recent cases of violence^{ix} and intimidation against Albanians in Macedonia which are leading to deteriorating relations between Macedonian and Albanian

communities in Macedonia and have provoked further reaction in both Albania and Kosovo.

The situation in the north of Kosovo remains tense. A more recent episode of violence against a Kosovo Albanian family that resulted in the death of one person^x and injuries to his family members has sparked reactions by members of the Albanian community living in both the north and the rest of Kosovo. The potential for further violence is high.

People's perceptions on the ground – survey data

Saferworld has conducted annual surveys in Kosovo since 2005 in order to establish what the perceptions of ordinary people are on issues such as security, conflict, Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and public confidence in security institutions. The most recent survey that concluded in December 2011 shows that people feel more negatively about the security situation in Kosovo than they did in 2010. For example, even though in late 2010 and early 2011 people were still hopeful that the EU facilitated talks between Kosovo and Serbia would be constructive, they were also concerned that the outcome could put further strain on inter-ethnic relations, which could in turn lead to a deterioration of the security situation or even renewed violent conflict. Thus the more recent events may only serve to exacerbate these concerns, and indicate an even greater likelihood of renewed violent conflict.

Key survey findings

An increase in the number of people who believe that a renewed violent conflict in Kosovo is more likely in the next five years. 43.8% of all respondents, including 73% of Kosovo Serbs, considered that a renewal of violent conflict was “likely” or “very likely” compared with 38.1% and 64.5% respectively in 2010. The data indicates that the three factors most likely to cause future conflict in Kosovo are the North of Kosovo/problems related to the North which was highlighted by 17.6% of all respondents, followed by the problem of Mitrovica (14.5%) and unemployment (5.3%).

Strong antagonisms even among Kosovo Serbs towards the possibility of any form of special status for the north of Kosovo.

54.9% of all respondents said that the security situation would get worse and only 5.7% saw any prospect for improvement if a special status is granted to the north of Kosovo. The figures in 2010 were 42.4% and 20.7% respectively.

People have lower expectations of the EU sponsored dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia with fewer people believing that the security situation will improve as a result of talks and more people believing that their security situation will get worse. Whereas 36.4% expected their security to increase by “a lot” or “a little” in 2010, only 17.9% now express that view. The percentage of those who believe that the dialogue will make security a “lot worse” or “somewhat worse” more than doubled from 7.3% in 2010 to 18% in 2011. Although several agreements have been concluded, survey respondents pointed to a lack of transparency in the process and a lack of information on its proceedings.

Deeply negative perceptions of and lack of trust in EULEX - decline in support for its continued deployment. In terms of public perception and trust, EULEX has had a disastrous 2011. Only 13 per cent of survey respondents had any element of trust in the Mission and more than half felt that it was making no contribution to enhancing the rule of law in Kosovo. Only 27.2% of all respondents felt that EULEX should stay in Kosovo compared to 42.4 % in 2010.

Levels of trust in the government of Kosovo and judiciary follow a negative trend with a significant drop in the levels of trust compared to the previous survey.

Survey data collected in December 2011 show that 53.8% of all respondents trust the Government of Kosovo ‘not at all’ or a ‘little’ compared with 41.9% in 2010 and 22.8% in 2009. Trust in judiciary follows the same negative pattern with 49% of all respondents trusting it ‘not at all’ or ‘a little’ compared with 27.7% in 2010 and 22.3% in 2009. More generally, there can be no comfort for the Kosovo Government, police, judiciary and customs services in the survey results. Although trust in municipalities has shown an improvement over previous years, only 20.4% of people have faith in central Government. Corruption continues to be perceived as endemic among the police, judiciary and customs officials. More still needs to be done to deliver improvements in the old, familiar fields of impartiality and speed of delivery. Despite progress in enacting legislative and administrative measures to tackle these areas, implementation still lags behind and people say that they have seen few, positive results on the ground.

When these findings are put in the context of recent political and security developments in Kosovo and the region generally, including the

deteriorating tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, they reveal a worrying trend which should trigger urgent and appropriate responses by key actors in Brussels, Belgrade and Pristina.

Recommendations

Brussels:

The EU Institutions should:

- **Continue to use their leverage and make it clear that EU accession is conditioned on improved relations between Serbia and Kosovo - including the implementation of agreements reached during the EU facilitated talks.**
- **Ensure coherent messages on the purpose of the dialogue and its outcomes and actively promote the dialogue as a means of ensuring progress towards a long-term sustainable peace in the Western Balkans region.**
- **Address the perceptions of the public on the lack of transparency and information in the dialogue process and the impact that the dialogue and the implementation of the agreements is expected to have in people's everyday lives.**
- **Take urgent action to seriously address people's perceptions of and improve their trust in the EULEX Mission. In particular, EULEX should develop a communication strategy to clearly communicate its rule of law mandate and mission objectives in Kosovo and ensure that communication channels with the public are open during periods of tension. The recently approved Strategic Review of EULEX Mission that is expected to have an impact on its mandate provides a good opportunity to also address people's perceptions before any changes on the mandate take place.**
- **EULEX and KFOR in cooperation with the Government of Kosovo should be alert and undertake all necessary precautions before, during and after May elections in Serbia to reduce further escalation of tensions and minimise the potential for violence in Kosovo.**

Serbia:

Political parties and government representatives in Serbia should:

- **Refrain from inflammatory statements and ethno-nationalist rhetoric that fuel the existing tensions.**
- **Adopt a long-term approach to developing relations with Kosovo rather than concentrating on short-term political gains.**
- **Consider using the election process in May 2012 to promote Serbia's recent achievements, including the progress made towards EU accession. Engage positively on remaining issues and challenges, encouraging continued support for Serbia's European aspirations and the EU accession process.**
- **Put an end to supporting statements of certain political parties and their leaders to organise Serbia-run local elections in Kosovo that have the potential to further aggravate tensions and an increase in violence.**

Kosovo:

The Government of Kosovo should:

- **Initiate a dialogue with Kosovo Serbs living in the north of Kosovo to identify and address the issues that would contribute towards reducing the existing tensions and improving the economic and rule of law situation.**
- **Seriously and urgently address the lack of people's trust in the Government institutions through regular assessments of the performance and progress of those institutions and the identification and implementation of measures to address weaknesses.**
- **Ensure transparency and improve information provision on the purpose and outcomes of the EU facilitated talks and the expected impact on people's everyday lives. Also provide regular updates on the progress made in the implementation of the agreements.**
- **Kosovo Police, judiciary and customs should:**
- **Consistently address the perception of the public on corruption, impartiality and speed of delivery by identifying the weaknesses, undertaking remedial measures and regularly communicating their progress.**

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international NGO. We work directly with local people, as well as governments and international organisations, to prevent violent conflict and encourage co-operative, people-centred approaches to peace and security. We believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

While we are not a traditional development agency, we seek to understand and influence the relationship between conflict, security and international development.

We work in over 15 countries in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. We have over 80 staff, based in Bangladesh, Kenya, Kosovo, Nepal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda, as well as in London, Brussels and Vienna. Our funding for 2010-2011 was around £6.8 million – mainly in the form of government grants from Canada, Denmark, the EU, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK.

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ⁱ The survey undertaken by Saferworld in December 2011 is the seventh in a series since 2005 of tracking changes in public perceptions over time on security, conflict, SALW and public confidence in security institutions. 1250 questionnaires and 10 focus groups discussions have been conducted to collect the data which take into account the role of different characteristics, such as ethnicity, geographic location, gender and age, in shaping people's perceptions on the above mentioned issues.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14332936>

ⁱⁱⁱ SNS leader Tomislav Nikolic: "This burden can be carried only by the whole of Serbia. I will not put the load on you, I won't be telling you to put up barricades and then show up and be the first to beat you. If I tell you to put up barricades, I'll be spending nights there. If somebody wishes to beat you, they'll have to hit me, as Serbia's president, first".

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^{iv} http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2012/03/14/feature-01

^v Balkan Insight accessed on 13 April 2012
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