



**Report**  
Wilton Park Conference WPS06/1  
**MITROVICA'S FUTURE**

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**Summary**

Measures to address Mitrovica's socio-economic crisis, including the options for a new donor-funded non-profit university, were considered at a one-day conference co-organised by Wilton Park and the European Stability Initiative (ESI). Ways of addressing the immediate concerns of the Kosovo Serb minority community, by creating a separate North Mitrovica municipality, while also ruling out partition, were also discussed. This summary covers the key points discussed. It is not a consensus document. Kosovar Albanian invitees were unable to participate and have been invited to comment. Their views are not represented in this version. A set of proposals on Mitrovica are due to be outlined by ESI in their own report, which will be available from [www.esiweb.org](http://www.esiweb.org).

**1. Addressing the concerns of Mitrovica's Minority Community now:**

A set of arrangements for Mitrovica should be addressed sooner rather than later. Such arrangements will not in any way depend on what Kosovo's overall political status will be. They should be implemented as soon as possible. Short-term tensions could be eased by a proposal that North Mitrovica will not be ruled by South Mitrovica municipality. One option proposed by ESI is for a Serb majority municipality of North Mitrovica and

Zvečan. However it was said that North Mitrovica Serbs want their own municipality of North Mitrovica, remaining separate from Zvečan.

As the decentralisation talks at the Future Status negotiations reach their conclusion, there is only a short time for a proposal to be formulated. The session on the delineation of municipal boundaries due on May 4 2006 could be the opportunity for the Kosovo Albanian side to make a proposal on a separate North Mitrovica. A statement from the Serb side that a North Mitrovica municipality will not lead to a partition of northern Kosovo is also needed to allay Kosovo Albanian concerns. An alternative approach would be for the international community to make a proposal on North Mitrovica itself.

At the Future Status talks there are a number of potential creative solutions; for example on creating additional municipalities and/or sub municipal units. There is already some discussion about passing a law on sub municipal units in Pristina. A similar law for Mitrovica could also be passed and implemented rapidly, before the creation of other municipalities where it's more complicated.

Well sourced press reports from Pristina suggest that the new arrangements for a North Mitrovica municipality are part of the proposal for Mitrovica being developed by former Prime Minister, and former Mitrovica Mayor, Dr Bajram Rexhepi. The aim of the proposals is apparently to maintain Mitrovica's integrity while also addressing Kosovo Serb concerns. The exact details are still being discussed.

## **2. Rising Tensions:**

Tensions are already rising as was shown by the reaction to the stabbing of a Kosovo Serb man on Mitrovica's bridge in late March. People have been moving out during periods of tension and Kosovo Serbs, in particular, are reluctant to return to live in their homes, for example, in two mixed areas; the Bosanska Mahala neighbourhood and the Tri Solitera, the Three Towers apartment blocks. The plight of Mitrovica's Roma community is also an

important issue for consideration. The tensions around the Roma neighbourhood and the issue of lead contamination cannot be ignored.

No-one doubts that Mitrovica is potentially the biggest potential flashpoint in the Future Status (FS) process.

### **3. Mitrovica's importance**

A secure future for Mitrovica could give Kosovo's Serbs a sense of a long-term future in Kosovo. Mitrovica is the only urban centre where the Serbs live. At the same time, Kosovo Albanian concerns about partition of Kosovo also have to be addressed. A well-thought-out plan for Mitrovica will help to prevent a partition of Kosovo.

Prime Minister Agim Çeku has made Mitrovica a priority. He is due to visit for talks on building stability. On his first visit, soon after his appointment as Prime Minister on March 15 2006, he said: *"it was not by accident that I chose Mitrovica as the first town that I am visiting as Prime Minister, because Mitrovica is one of Kosovo's greatest challenges...we must be realistic and admit that even though the situation is quiet and stable, not enough has been done to integrate the town of Mitrovica, in building trust between citizens and a lot remains to be done"*.

### **4. Providing accurate public information:**

An effective public information campaign, explaining decentralisation and the final arrangements in a future status settlement is needed urgently to try to take the initiative from radicals on both sides who thrive on uncertainty. The proposal for a Kosovo-wide Serb language radio and TV station, to be based in North Mitrovica, first made by the International Crisis Group, was also cited.

### **5. Improving Security now:**

Concern was expressed about the lack of a permanent NATO KFOR base north of the River Ibar. A sense of personal security is key to reducing the risk of a Serb exodus in the longer term. Without this sense of security it will be impossible to create the conditions for effective economic and political

development. While NATO and the EU will have their roles, the sooner that local organizations take on ownership of providing a secure environment, the better it will be. A strong and effective Kosovo Police Service (KPS) is required. Mitrovica is still run by an international police officer. Responsibility for local-level security should be at the local level. This should be done as soon as possible, and before municipal boundaries are redrawn. Others called for a large short-term presence in the centre by the international police, CIVPOL, at stress moments, for example, if a separate North Mitrovica municipality were to be announced. In the longer term, after the status settlement is determined, there should be a larger presence of KFOR troops in Mitrovica and northern Kosovo.

#### **6. Addressing the specific concerns of Mitrovica's Serbs:**

- Property claims across municipal boundaries must be addressed.
- An office of the UN successor institution could be established in Mitrovica to oversee decentralisation.
- A Serbian-interest/government office could be based in Mitrovica. Kosovo Serbs will continue to need services provided by/through the Serb government in Belgrade.
- Transfers from Belgrade in the form of public sector salaries, salary premiums and pensions are important to make it financially viable for Kosovo Serbs to remain. The sustainability of these transfers has to be factored into economic planning.
- Certain ministries/government institutions could be located in Mitrovica (less than 40 km from Pristina). This might also spur improvements to the road.
- Improvement of the hospital in North Mitrovica is also a priority as it doesn't meet all the medical needs of the Kosovo Serb community.

#### **7. Addressing common local problems jointly:**

Links between North and South Mitrovica, built around shared interests and common problems should be further encouraged on issues such as improving water supplies, garbage collection, environmental clean-ups, district heating

and creating a joint industrial zone. Serbs do not reject some institutionalized co-ordination for their municipality of North Mitrovica and the municipality in the south. Some of these issues are starting to be addressed by the heads of the municipalities in northern Kosovo under the auspices of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Investment in infrastructure, in telecoms and railways are other areas for potential co-operation. The role of the Serbian power provider, Elektro Kosmet and its relationship to the main power supplier in Kosovo, KEK, should be resolved. The status not only of Elektro Kosmet, but also of mobile phone operators, and banks, which together employ several hundred people in North Mitrovica, has to be regularised. Economic decentralisation is an important part of the decentralisation package.

#### **8. Economic Support for all Mitrovica's communities:**

The problems of economic decline are shared by all communities. The precise level of unemployment is not known. Some put it as high as 60-70%. Additional economic development is needed as Mitrovica has no significant industrial production. One option is quick-impact projects; roads/power transformers, district heating plants etc. Other suggestions included a regional development agency to create longer-term economic impact. A special economic development forum could also be set-up in Mitrovica.

The European Commission (EC), through the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) and Pillar IV of UNMIK, has been giving special attention to economic development in Mitrovica. The EU is in the process of assessing its future role after Future Status. Since October 2005 EAR has been running a 10.5 million euro programme which aims to create 2,000 jobs in North and South Mitrovica and neighbouring Zvečan. EAR could also try to tap into unspent resources, and identify local level projects to target ongoing assistance programmes. The EC is also considering how to raise the profile for economic development in Mitrovica.

#### **9. The Trepča question:**

One of the biggest concerns for people in Mitrovica is the future of the Trepča combine. Trepča is the worst case of post socialist industrial collapse in the Balkans. Now Kosovo's rules on bankruptcy are clear, Trepča needs to be treated as an 'insolvent' company with an administrator examining creditors' claims. Selected business units can then be privatised, including the mines and flotation plant that are now operational. They may be viable without a working smelter/processing plant as concentrate does not need to be processed locally. It can be done abroad for example, in Mexico, at a time when metal prices are high. Trepča's battery recycling and zinc oxide plants also have some potential.

Trepča's ore reserves have not been explored for nearly twenty years, so there is no reliable information on their potential. The current two year assessment programme of the Kosovo Trust Agency needs to be accelerated. Some participants urged caution given high local expectations and the volatility of metal prices. The reality is that no more than 1,500 jobs at best could be created, a fraction of those once employed. However, with such high unemployment, even this would be an improvement. For each job at Trepča, two to three jobs could be created as a result in the local economy. Attracting new investment to Mitrovica is essential. The location north of Pristina on a main route to Serbia could provide some potential in the longer term.

#### **10. Making Mitrovica a centre of academic excellence?**

One way to provide hope and significant employment in the short-run would be to create a trilingual non-profit university in Mitrovica, with funds raised by a respected international figurehead. Could it act as a symbol of the international community's commitment to Mitrovica? The new university could be similar in aims, but smaller in scale, than the South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo, Macedonia. Advice is being sought informally from Max van der Stoel, the mentor of SEEU when he was High Commissioner on National Minorities.

#### **11. Establishing a feasibility study?**

The idea of Mitrovica as an academic centre of excellence has been discussed over the past three years, for example, at the first Wilton Park-ESI Mitrovica conference in January 2004. It was strongly advocated by the then Rector of Mitrovica University, both as a means of capitalising on the town's strengths, and also as a catalyst for economic regeneration. Over the past three years, the former Prime Minister, Dr Bajram Rexhepi, and Dr Enver Hoxhaj, the Chairman of the Kosovo Assembly Education Committee, have also been developing their own concepts of a university in South Mitrovica, possibly based on the SEEU. The details are yet to be published. ESI, which re-launched its own university concept at a meeting in March 2006 organised by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), and hosted by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is addressing the university proposal in their forthcoming Mitrovica report. The next step for interested potential donors, possibly led by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is to consider commissioning tertiary education experts, who know Kosovo well, to do a feasibility study. There also has to be extensive consultation to ensure local ownership and engagement.

## **12. Key issues for a feasibility study:**

The establishment of a new donor-funded university is clearly a complex project to realise. The questions for consideration by the international community regarding the potential funding of a new university include: Is there sufficient potential international funding? Could the university be self-sustaining in the long term? Should it cover subjects such as environmental studies and business studies, or vocational subjects, which require more costly facilities? How could it be staffed, given the need to create a new generation of academic staff? And how can the employment effect be maximised for Mitrovica?

Concerns were expressed about creating a "gas factory;" an institution with no purpose or local need. The essential questions are; is there is sufficient local student demand, and what do people in Mitrovica want?

There is demand in the majority Kosovo Albanians community where 30,000 turn 16 each year. The state-funded Pristina University cannot cope with demand from the Kosovo Albanian community. There are thought to be 15 private universities in Kosovo, charging annual fees of up to 5,000 euros, with a total income of some 10m euros.

Demand from the smaller Serb community is a more complex issue; many fewer Serbs than Albanians have the other community's language as a second language. Not only are the two communities almost completely segregated, increasingly the younger generation in both communities no longer speak both languages. The location of the faculties/facilities of a new Mitrovica University is crucial to attracting Serb students. They might initially be reluctant to attend the new proposed university if it is located in the south. But if its degrees were recognised in Serbia, Kosovo Serbs might study by correspondence and might be drawn to it later. There is also the question of the impact on the existing Mitrovica University currently based in North Mitrovica and two other locations north of the Ibar in northern Kosovo.

An alternative approach would be to fund specific faculties at the existing Mitrovica University. The University serves a wide catchment area in Serbia, including Novi Pazar and Niš. 10,000 students are registered, with between 1,500 and 3,000 students studying full-time and/or living locally/on-site. However, as Mitrovica University is currently run by the Milošević-era former Rector of Pristina University, it is perhaps an unlikely candidate for co-operation. There are some parallels with Tetovo on which a feasibility study for a new university in Mitrovica could draw, given the complex relationship between the SEEU and the pre-existing Tetovo University, now Tetovo State University.

It is clear however that the situation in Mitrovica is even more complex. Taking into account all these difficult issues, and also the importance of addressing Mitrovica, a number of participants from the international community expressed interest in a feasibility study being commissioned.

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