

## REPORT ON MITROVICE/KOSOVSKA MITROVICA MARCH 2001

### Alleged destruction of books in Serbian in Mitrovice/ Kosovska Mitrovica

By Carsten Frederiksen and Frode Bakken (note)

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#### 1. Background

On February 13 2001 Politika, a newspaper based in Belgrade, Serbia published an article "An Albanian burned eleven thousand of Serbian books" written by M. Laketic. The article is available in English at: [www.serbia-info.com/news/2001-02/13/22385.html](http://www.serbia-info.com/news/2001-02/13/22385.html)

The article makes the allegation that books in Serbian language and books related to Serbian culture of the Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica public library were sent for destruction at a waste paper factory in Vladicin Han, Serbia by the present director, Mr Hajrullah Mustafa, who is an ethnic Albanian.

Another Serbian newspaper "Jedinstvo" published an article on this case on January 29. No translation of this article has been available to us, but we have been informed that the basic story is the same though there are variations in the details.

This report is an attempt to present the facts and issues of this case as obtained during our meetings on March 6 and 10 2001 in Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica with the directly involved parties in an organised and constructive manner.

#### 2. Our presence in Kosova/Kosovo Metohia

We visited Kosova/Kosovo Metohia in the period March 4 to March 12 2001 in connection with a business meeting and professional seminar carried out by the Kosova Library Consortium. The business meeting and the seminar was coordinated by IFLA (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions). Carsten Frederiksen, was present as Deputy director of the IFLA/FAIFE Office, co-author of the report from 2000 and as an official representative of Council of Europe (<http://culture.coe.fr/indexeng.htm>) at the business meeting and at the seminar. Frode Bakken was present as co-author of the report from 2000 and as an official representative of EBLIDA - European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations ([www.eblida.org/](http://www.eblida.org/)).

UNMIK Department of Culture, Ms Sophie Massal, arranged our meetings with the parties involved in this case.

On March 6 we had 2 meetings: one in the library of Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica located in Southern part of the city with both the present director Mr Hajrullah Mustafa, Mr Haki Shkreli, director of the House of Culture, Mr Sabit Idrizi, head of the Culture department and library employees, and another with Ms Olivera Stevic, director of the Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica public library until the end of the war in 1999, librarian Dajana Gocmanac and other library professionals in the library of the Technical School

located North of the river.

At the meetings on March 6 also Sophie Massal from UNMIK Department of Culture in Pristina, Svetlana Pencheva, Civil Officer in UNMIK regional office in Mitrovice/ Kosovska Mitrovica and Mr Samba Sane of the UNMIK municipality of Mitrovice/ Kosovska, CAO Education, Culture and Sports took part.

On the March 10 we had two more meetings: one with Olivera Stevic and Dajana Gocmanac, and one with Hajrullah Mustafa. At the meetings on March 10 also Sophie Massal took part.

### 3. Conclusions

Our conversations with the above mentioned persons can be summed up in the following:

#### 3.1 Based on information from Hajrullah Mustafa:

- a. Mr Hajrullah Mustafa denies that any actions have been taken by him to bring books in Serbian language out of Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica Public Library in his period as library director after the war in 1999.
- b. On February 15 Hajrullah Mustafa produced a 3-page statement titled "Reaction" as a response to the Politika article. Both Sophie Massal and we have copies of this document.
- c. Hajrullah Mustafa informed us that the ethnic Serb library professionals in Northern Mitrovice/ Kosovska Mitrovica in July 2000 asked to have the books in Serbian language brought from the library in the South to the Northern part of the city. Mr Hajrullah refused this request stating that this would enhance segregation rather than integration.
- d. When asked on which basis the number of books in the library is fixed Mr Hajrullah Mustafa explained that the accessible historical data in this context can be questioned as there has not for many years been a complete reexamination of the inventory of books in the library.
- e. During our meeting Hajrullah Mustafa stated that he would estimate the number of books in Serbian language to be approximately 10,000 less than the official figures indicates. He estimated the collection at present holds 42,000 books in Serbian language.
- f. Hajrullah Mustafa informed us that books from the library could be identified by: The library stamp and an inventory number on the back of the title page, library stamps on page 17 and the last page, and the classification code on the back in the top to the left.

#### 3.2 Based on information from Olivera Stevic and Dajana Gocmanac:

- a. Olivera Stevic and Dajana Gocmanac claim that many books in Serbian language have been removed from Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica public library after the war.
- b. Olivera Stevic and Dajana Gocmanac denies that there has been any contact with the journalist M. Laketic, who wrote the article in Politika. According to Olivera Stevic the journalist is well known and lives in Zvecan. They can not explain how he has got his information for the article. The article refers both to Olivera Stevic and Dajana Gocmanac.

- c. The priest mentioned in the article is unknown to them. They believe that there is maybe a misunderstanding between the Serbian word "Pop" (priest) and FOB, the name of the factory in Vladicin Han.
- d. It was established during our meeting with Olivera Stevic and Dajana Gocmanac that the number of books mentioned in the Politika article - more than 11,000 – can not be confirmed by them. When asked on what basis this number was reached they could give no explanation. (Our comment: The number 11,000 does not match the weight of the paper transport. Dividing the weight of 18,700 kg by 11,000 indicates that on average each book should then weigh 1,7 kg and books in this region are normally without hardcover binding and therefore weighs much less.) According to Olivera Stevic the truck may have carried other things as well.
- e. Olivera Stevic received a telephone call from the library director in Vladicin Han Miroslava Nolic on January 25 2001. Nolic informed her about a smaller part of the books which had been found in the waste paper factory FOB.
- f. On January 29 2001 Dajana Gocmanac visited the library in the Southern part of Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica to check the stocks. She was escorted by KFOR (a Belgian commander named Haubent, who left Kosova/Kosovo on February 15).
- g. Dajana Gocmanac informed us that she had visited the library in June 2000 and at that time the books from the directors office were in the basement corridor.
- h. Dajana Gocmanac claims that many books are missing on the shelves based on her visit on January 29 2001. She especially mentions the following categories (decimal groups) of foreign literature (French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Polish and Czech), books on Serb history and law books.
- i. On January 29 Olivera Stevic went by car to Vladicin Han to fetch the remaining approximately 400 books.
- j. Olivera Stevic has her own photographs of herself in front of the factory and some boxes of these books. These books have later according to her been brought to Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica by her and are now in the library in the Technical School in North Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica.
- k. In Vladicin Han Olivera Stevic got a copy of a transport document dated January 19 2001 issued by "Elhan Commerce" on transportation of 18,700 kg of paper by a specified vehicle. Sophie Massal and we have a copy of this transport document.
- l. Olivera Stevic was informed that the books had arrived on January 20 and that the books were wrapped in paper and held together with wire.
- m. Olivera Stevic and Milodrag Orovic, vice-president of the Serbian Municipal assembly of Kosovska Mitrovica sent a protest letter on February 8 2001 to UNMIK regional administration. Massal and we have a copy.
- n. Olivera Stevic has informed the Serbian Ministry of Culture and the National Library in Belgrade of the incident. On February 27 she asked the Ombudsperson institution in Kosova/Kosovo Metohia to look into the matter.

Our meetings with the parties directly involved in this case provides no basis for a decisive conclusion, but have eliminated some elements in the article published in Politika.

What still remains though is in short the claim of Ms Olivera Stevic and Ms Dajana Gocmanac that a considerable number of library books in Serbian language have been sent for destruction, while Mr Hajrullah Mustafa states that no such destruction has taken place.

#### 4. Recommendations

Our recommendations include the establishment of a small and efficient body with high credibility, a commission, and a series of investigations following two directions. Furthermore the launch of a general initiative to develop stock management policies in the libraries of Kosova/Kosovo Metohia should be considered.

#### *4.1 Commission*

An ad-hoc commission consisting of representatives of the ethnic Serbian and ethnic Albanian library professionals, UNMIK and an independent international expert should be formed to make a thorough analysis of this case. The objective should be to establish a consensus on the facts in this matter as far as possible on the basis of common investigations. The commission should perform the investigations outlined. The outcome should be a report stating areas and issues of consensus and disagreement.

#### *4.2 Investigations*

Two major lines of investigations or checking should be considered: 1) the actual book stocks in the Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica Public Library and 2) the books claimed to be sent for destruction.

Both lines of investigation involves uncertainties because both parties either have or have had the responsibility for the book collection and the statistics - and mutual claims can therefore be made that discrepancies are caused be the other.

##### 1. Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica book stocks:

- a. General book stock statistics should be collected and evaluated. It should be determined to what extent those figures derive for estimates, accumulated acquisition added to earlier revision or actual counting (revision):
  1. The present library statistics on book stocks before and after the war - and on losses suffered during the war.
  2. The latest official pre-war statistics.
- b. Specific titles / decimal groups should be examined and compared to acquisition protocols:
  1. Titles mentioned in Politika: Dostojevski, Encyclopedias, Serbian and Montenegrin history and the Jasterbov collection (20 works)
  2. Decimal groups mentioned by Dajana Gocmanac: 8.40 French literature, 8.50 Italian literature, 8.60 Spanish literature, 8.82 Russian literature, Polish literature, Czech literature and 9.3 and 4 Serb history - in fact books from 9.3 to 9.9 including law books. Furthermore books that used to be exposed in the windows were claimed missing.
- c. Options for library books beyond the control of the Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica library should be surveyed:
  1. It should be verified if the library in the North, Ms Olivera Stevic, holds other books from the Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica Public Library
  2. It should be investigated if books from branch libraries or other municipal libraries in the region could be involved.
  3. It should be investigated if books borrowed by ethnic Serbs in Northern Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica before the war could be involved.

##### 2. The books claimed to be sent for destruction:

- a. The books should be taken into UNMIK custody and listed with relevant data: author, title, language, publisher, year and place of publication, verification of Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica acquisition (stamps on title page and page 17,

acquisition number etc.).

- b. It should be investigated what effects from the Mitrovica/Kosovska Mitrovica library were brought to the Northern part of Mitrovica/Kosovska Mitrovica by Olivera Stevic and her colleagues (protocols, stamps etc.)
- c. The journalist of Politika, M. Laketic, should be contacted and questioned about his sources and the accuracy of his report.
- d. The director and the driver of the transport company, Eejhani Commerc in Bujanovac, should be contacted for verification of story and additional information on the nature and content of the waste paper shipment.
- e. The factory, FOB in Vladicin Han, should be contacted for verification of story and additional information on the nature and content of the waste paper shipment.
- f. The chief of the library in Vladicin Han, Miroslava Nikolic, should be contacted for verification of the story.

### **4.3 Stock management policies**

Library stocks in Kosovo/Kosova Metohia generally contain many old, unattractive, irrelevant and little used books, which professionally can be considered candidates for withdrawal or, at best, a relegation to a store out of the public gaze. We therefore recommend that the UNMIK administration initiate a process to establish the procedures, which should be adopted to develop stock managing policies which are free from political motives or the suspicion of political motives. Such policies will be even more needed as the libraries move towards the open access concept, where modern and attractive shelf stock is even more essential in providing a user-friendly layout.

## **5. Considerations**

There are at least three possible solutions or answers to this matter:

1. a number of books in Serbian language have been sent for destruction by the library as alleged by Ms Olivera Stevic,
2. no books in Serbian language have been sent for destruction by the library as claimed by Mr Hajrullah Mustafa, or
3. books from the library have by chance or on purpose been sent for destruction by other parties without the knowledge or approval of Mr Hajrullah Mustafa.

True or not true - in all cases a serious investigation has to be made to make clear that neither the destruction of books nor unfounded allegations are acceptable and that such matters are taken seriously by the international community. It should be emphasised that the aim of this investigation is not to apportion blame but rather to separate fact from rumour and to provide a foundation for confidence in the professionalism of all libraries and librarians in the region.

It is quite evident that the case of the alleged destruction of books is poisoning the already highly tense political climate of Mitrovica/Kosovska Mitrovica and the region as such - and may be used by political forces to intensify confrontation rather than co-existence and reconciliation.

It is important to settle the case by tracing all relevant facts in a way which can contribute to provide a basis for professional co-operation in the library field of

Mitrovice/Kosovska Mitrovica. A thorough investigation of this case will be important for any future building of confidence among all relevant parties at the professional level.

We therefore strongly recommend that the above mentioned measures - or equivalent qualified initiatives - are immediately initiated by UNMIK and other authorities in Kosova/Kosovo Metohia to clarify the facts of this matter.

Carsten Frederiksen  
Frode Bakken

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**Note:**

Carsten Frederiksen, Deputy Director of the IFLA/FAIFE Office (International federation of Library Associations and Institutions / Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression) and Frode Bakken, President of the Norwegian Library Association carried out a mission in Kosova/Kosovo Metohia in the period from February 25th to March 7th 2000 in order to assess the situation of libraries in Kosova/Kosovo Metohia after the war in 1999 and give recommendations for a short and medium-term plan development plan for libraries. The mission was carried out on behalf of UNESCO, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, IFLA. A full report in both English and Albanian is accessible on this website and the printed IFLA/FAIFE report in English published in June 2000 can be ordered from [faife@ifla.org](mailto:faife@ifla.org).

Efforts to rehabilitate libraries in Kosova/Kosovo Metohia are coordinated in a Kosova Library Consortium.

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