

Canadian NATO
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
canadienne de l'OTAN

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
Visit to Belgrade and Pristina by the Committee on the Civil
Dimension of Security (CDS) and the Sub-Committee on
Future Security and Defence (DSCFC)**

Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

**Belgrade and Pristina
April 21-24, 2008**

Report

The Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association has the honour to present its report on the Visit to Belgrade and Pristina by the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security (CDS) and the Defence and Security Committee's Sub-Committee on Future Security and Defence (DSCFC), April 21-24, 2008. The delegation also visited the city of Mitrovica, an ethnically divided municipality in Northern Kosovo. The visit was led by Michael Clapham (UK), and the delegation consisted of 20 Parliamentarians from different NATO countries. The Canadian delegation was represented by Mrs. Cheryl Gallant, M.P.

The delegation visited during a transitional period marked by uncertainty; Kosovo had declared independence on February 17, and adopted a new Constitution, which is to take effect on June 15th. Before that, on May 11, Serbia will hold important parliamentary and local elections, which many consider to be decisive for the future course of the country.

BELGRADE

Discussions in Belgrade focused on the upcoming local and parliamentary elections of 11 May 2008; Serbia's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions; defense reform; and Belgrade's reaction to Kosovo's declaration of independence.

THE MAY 11 ELECTIONS

The visit took place in a particularly sensitive political environment. Following major disagreements within the ruling coalition about how to react to the recognition of Kosovo's declaration of independence by a majority of EU member states, early parliamentary elections were called for May 11, on the same day as local elections. This context strongly influenced the delegation's discussions in Belgrade.

EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

Some 70% of the population in Serbia is in favour of EU accession and all political parties generally support Serbia's integration in the EU in the long-term. However, relations with the Union have recently become a bone of contention in connection to Kosovo's declaration of independence and its recognition by a majority of EU member states. Some political forces argue that further integration should only be pursued if the EU unambiguously reaffirms its commitment to the territorial integrity of Serbia and to UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244. Parliamentarians from the DS-led bloc argued on the contrary that Kosovo should not be used as an excuse to derail the process of EU integration and that the two issues should be separated. In their view, it would be unrealistic in the short term to expect EU countries to annul their recognition of Kosovo. Serbia needs closer integration in the EU to be better able to defend its interests and arguments.

Integration into NATO remains a very delicate issue in Serbia, mainly as a consequence of NATO bombings in Serbia in 1999. Public opinion support for NATO membership is very low, at around 25%. However, support for the Partnership for Peace (PfP) process

is higher, including among supporters of those political parties strongly opposed to NATO membership.

Serbian officials and foreign diplomats both confirmed that practical co-operation between Serbia and NATO was good. NATO maintains a Military Liaison Office in Belgrade, which supports the Ministry of Defense in its efforts to reform the defense sector and transform the armed forces. Co-operation with KFOR is also good and continues even after Kosovo's declaration of independence.

Nevertheless, obstacles remain to a full co-operation in the framework of PfP. Both foreign diplomats and defense officials regretted in particular that Serbia has still not signed a Security Agreement on the exchange of classified information with NATO, and is therefore unable to participate in all PfP activities. Several speakers underlined that this is evidence that, whatever the quality of practical co-operation, relations with NATO are primarily a political issue in Serbia.

DEFENSE REFORM

Officials of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff, as well as independent experts, highlighted the important steps that Serbia has already taken in reforming its defense. Civilian control over the armed forces has been established. Important documents have already adopted in order to adapt the legal framework, including the Strategic Defense Review (SDR), completed in July 2006, and the laws on the armed forces and on defense, adopted in December 2007.

Authorities have also started a process of transformation of the armed forces, cutting military personnel from 105,000 in 2000 to 27,000 today. The focus is now on quality rather than quantity. The new force structure was implemented in 13 months. It includes the General Staff; land forces (including four army brigades, one special brigade, one artillery brigade, and one river flotilla); air forces (including one brigade, two bases, and one air defense centre); and a training command. Forces are also being modernized and a new value system has been introduced.

Nevertheless, a number of challenges remain. Independent experts underlined that Serbia has still not decided on its long-term strategic orientation. Two competing strategic cultures coexist in the country and are supported by different political parties and groups in the society. One important dividing line is between those who support Euro-Atlantic integration, and those who favor relations with Russia or a policy of neutrality.

Another challenge is to reinforce democratic control over defense issues. Independent experts stressed that the role of parliament remains limited. Important decisions are taken within political parties, and not as a result of debates in parliament. The parliament also lacks in resources and administrative capacity. Additionally, Serbia's political system has been particularly unstable in past years, thereby undermining the continuity of reform. Changes in the leadership of the Ministry of Defense have been particularly disruptive. According to independent experts, other complicating factors include the unclear division of responsibility on defense matters between the President and the Prime Minister, as well as a certain radicalisation of Serbia's public opinion, demonstrated by the steady growth in support for the Radical Party.

PRISTINA AND MITROVICA

PRISTINA'S PRIORITIES FOLLOWING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Kosovo declared independence on 17 February 2008. Since that date, authorities in Pristina have intensified the process of consolidation of Kosovo's legislative framework and institutions, adopting a new Constitution on 9 April.

Asked about the constitutional process, Jakup Krasniqi, President of the Assembly of Kosovo (AoK), who had been a member of the constitutional Committee, suggested the Constitution had been drafted over two years, with extensive support from foreign experts. Minorities, and all political parties, participated in the drafting, which was largely based on the Ahtisaari plan and reflected its emphasis on the rights and freedoms of minorities. Dzezait Murati, a Bosniak parliamentarian, suggested that his 7+ party had fully participated in the political process, including the drafting of the Constitution, which he considered to provide sufficient guarantees of minority rights.

Several Kosovar officials, including Mr Krasniqi, explained that the principles of the Ahtisaari plan were enshrined in the newly adopted Constitution, and that a package of laws further implementing the plan was moving through the parliamentary process (19 out of 34 planned laws had already been adopted under expedited procedures). These laws, including for example measures on official languages, the protection of minority cultural heritage, and the protection of the Orthodox Church, were intended to secure human rights and freedoms for all citizens of Kosovo, with special emphasis on minorities and the Serb community. The Assembly President pledged that the laws would all be in place in June. International officials repeatedly suggested that these initiatives represented among the highest guarantees of minority rights in Europe and lamented the negative (and often uninformed) view of the Ahtisaari plan among the Kosovo Serb population.

Several speakers underlined that the poor state of Kosovo's economy should be a major priority for the new institutions. Kosovo's struggling economy is characterized by high unemployment, a lack of reliable energy production, poor infrastructure, water scarcity, and the rising price of basic goods, including food. Kosovo is also characterized by an underdeveloped education system and a significant presence of organized crime. Representatives of minority communities also underlined that, from their perspective, the single greatest problem facing Kosovo was the economic plight of the population, and especially that of minorities. They appealed for economic assistance in order to ensure development and eventual security in minority area.

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS AND THE EXAMPLE OF MITROVICA

Kosovo is ethnically over 90% Albanian. Serbs represent the largest ethnic minority. An important part of the Serb population is located in the north of Kosovo beyond the natural dividing line of the Ibar River. However, a majority lives in 'enclaves' throughout central and southern Kosovo. Other minorities include Bosniak, Turkish, Rom, Egyptian and Alkali communities.

Kosovo's declaration of independence has further strained relations between Albanian and Serb communities. Serbs in the north of Kosovo live in quasi-isolation from the rest of the territory of Kosovo. However, several speakers underlined that Serbs in enclaves

elsewhere tended to be more willing - or maybe compelled - to seek accommodation with the ethnic Albanians they have lived next to for decades.

In order to best assess the situation on the ground, the delegation visited Mitrovica, including its main bridge over the Ibar River, which marks the de facto dividing line between the Serb-dominated North and the Albanian-dominated South of Mitrovica. The delegation learned about the challenges of keeping the peace in the area, including the widespread availability of weapons in the general population. The delegation observed that the city was for all intents and purposes divided and would likely remain so for the foreseeable future, and that KFOR's presence there was crucial to preserving order. Colonel Pascal Langard, Commander of the French base in Mitrovica pointed out some examples of the daily provocations on both sides of the river. Since February, regular demonstrations are organized on the Serb side against Kosovo's independence. Violent incidents also took place in March when international forces intervened to evacuate the courthouse in Mitrovica, which was occupied by Serb employees. One UNMIK policeman from Ukraine was killed in these events.

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

UN, EU and OSCE

Meetings with representatives of international institutions underlined the major uncertainties that affect the future of the international presence in Kosovo. UNSCR 1244 organized a progressive transfer of responsibilities from UNMIK to Kosovo authorities; however, under previous arrangements, UNMIK retained ultimate authority. Kosovo's declaration of independence has created a new situation, yet the UN Security Council has been unable to agree on the future of the international mission in Kosovo. As a result, international institutions are left without clear guidance as to how to deal with this new situation.

The delegation received a comprehensive brief from Ambassador Tim GULDIMANN, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, and his team, on the OSCE's wide-ranging role in Kosovo. The Ambassador suggested that the mandate of the mission could be revoked at any moment, but for the moment no OSCE country has objected to its continued operation, despite some expectation that Serbia or Russia might take such action if Kosovo declared independence. The OSCE judged that recently passed laws on the protection of minority rights and on decentralization were positive, but that implementation would be the critical measure of success. The OSCE was supporting the Assembly of Kosovo, and noted as signs of progress the development of oversight committees for the security sector (and soon for intelligence). Additional OSCE support went to police training activities and fighting organized crime.

NATO KOSOVO FORCE (KFOR)

NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) was universally recognized as a neutral force, and seen as playing a positive role in Kosovo. Kosovar officials including President Fatmir SEJDIU expressed gratitude for the contribution of NATO forces to the security and stability of Kosovo, as well as for the numerous development projects KFOR has undertaken involving bridges, hospitals, and cultural projects. Deputy Prime Minister

Kuqi stated that his government fully agreed with all KFOR actions since the declaration of independence.

The delegation met with KFOR's Deputy Commander, German Major General Gerhard Stelz, who described how KFOR fulfills its objective of maintaining a safe and security environment throughout Kosovo. He summarized KFOR's position by explaining that although it could accomplish this task, KFOR could not solve the underlying political issues at the heart of the problem.

KFOR's roughly 15,000 troops are organized into five Multi-National Task Forces (MNTFs). KFOR's daily tasks include Kosovo-wide operations such as patrols, not least to demonstrate 'presence' throughout Kosovo; static tasks such as guarding sensitive areas such as the airport or UN buildings; and patrols and checkpoints that allow for a clearer understanding of the situation in particular communities. The delegation inspected a KFOR Vehicle Check Point run by a German-Austrian battalion. The checkpoints, which can be permanent or mobile, are run jointly by KFOR with Kosovar police and UNMIK. They allow KFOR to search for illegally held weapons and ammunition, and control access to an area. By demonstrating KFOR's presence and effectiveness, they also serve as a general deterrent to illegal activity.

KFOR's 'walk and talk' policy involved direct, face-to-face interaction with locals (through hundreds of interpreters hired by KFOR), as well as numerous civil-military cooperation activities such as the construction of schoolhouses, and an information campaign through local media. KFOR also undertook joint border patrols with neighboring countries as a confidence-building measure.

KFOR's emphasis on better understanding the populations it works with relies on the use of 34 Liaison Monitoring Teams (LMTs), groups of up to 15 soldiers who are permanently based in a community in order to interact with local authorities and provide and receive accurate information.

General Dexter of KFOR's Multinational Task Force North confirmed that there were no political limitations or caveats on his ability to move forces throughout his area without going to national capitals for authorization. The Deputy Commander agreed that this applied to the whole of KFOR, which featured almost no caveats that have any impact on the Commander's flexibility. The Commander had authority under the Reserve Force Concept to move forces from a more stable area to a potential flashpoint.

Finally, KFOR was tasked with standing up the future Kosovo Security Force, and standing down the Kosovo Protection Corps with dignity. The Deputy Commander suggested that this additional comprehensive tasker engendered a need for new resources if it was to be accomplished within planning timelines.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Leon Benoit, M.P.
Chair
Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)

TRAVEL COSTS

ASSOCIATION	Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association (NATO PA)
ACTIVITY	Visit to Belgrade and Pristina by the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security (CDS) and the Sub-Committee on Future Security and Defence (DSCFC)
DESTINATION	Belgrade and Pristina
DATES	April 21-24, 2008
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mrs. Cheryl Gallant, M.P.
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$9,092.69
ACCOMMODATION	\$791.96
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$345.10
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$10,229.75