

Transcript- MNB (E) Press Conference 17 June 2004

Good morning and thanks for attending our monthly press conference. I have just a few short comments and then I can take your questions.

Our activities remain consistent with our basic mission to provide for a safe and secure environment and to assist in the transition to civil authorities. In accordance with our mission we are conducting joint patrols with the KPS. This offers training opportunities for both our soldiers and the police officers, but more importantly works toward that transition to civil authority. Eventually the KPS will be responsible for safety and security here in Kosovo. Also, we continue to do a number of MEDCAPs and VETCAPs throughout our area and include a multi-ethnic array of local medical service providers. These programs and services are very well received by all ethnicities and vitally important to many Kosovars who don't have ready access to medical care. Also many of our soldiers are working with schools, assisting with supplies and discussing the dangers of unexploded ordinance and weapons as well as traffic safety.

Last month I had the honor to address the latest graduating class of the KPS academy. It is good to see the KPS grow and become an experienced law enforcement agency. My comments to the new police officers included: They work for the people. Their salary is paid by tax dollars, they enforce the laws as passed by their legally elected officials, and they are not above the Rule of Law; second is that they are first line of defense for the people. Kosovo is not crime free. There are those out there who want to gain at the expense of others and they are there to patrol the neighborhoods and keep the area safe

and secure; and lastly that in their careers they will be confronted with situations not covered in their lessons. It is their core beliefs in justice, fairness and democracy that will assist them in making the right decisions. Finally I want to commend the KPS for their fine work in apprehending two suspects in the tragic murder of the young Serb man in Gracanica.

Next I have received some questions regarding the border, the Administrative Boundary Line. First, there are some Serbian operating and logistical bases along the ABL. These bases are not new and we maintain a close, professional working relationship with the Serbian authorities through our Joint Implementation Commission. We continue to provide for a safe and secure environment and I see no issues with these bases. Recently we have begun coordinated border patrols with FYROM authorities. These patrols increase the overall security of the border and further enhance our working relationship with the FYROM. Lastly, regarding the recent shooting death along the ABL we have been successful in facilitating an open dialogue between Serbian and Kosovo authorities. This incident appears crime related and as such UNMIK-P is heading up the on-going investigation.

Also, I would like to point out that sometimes the wheels of justice grind slowly. I am pleased to announce that Ejup Florjim was turned over recently to UNMIK Police by the Albanian government. Florjim was the only person to escape from Camp Bondsteel where he was being detained to stand trial for his alleged involvement in the murder of 11 Serbs who were traveling on the "Nis Express" bus that was attacked near Podujevo

earlier in 2001. This should remind us that criminals, sooner or later, will be brought to justice.

And before I finish I want to remind everyone that our Real Estate Compensation program is in its final stage for receiving applications. The program is going very well and we have received over 300 applications for reimbursement and have started payment on over 60 of these applications. The time to submit an application is over the end of this June so if you think you may be eligible please submit soon. We will end application acceptance after 30 June and then continue to process all received applications and continue payments that have been approved.

And now I will take your questions.

Q: Demush Zefaj – Bota Sot (newspaper) – Mr. General, you visited Mr. Rugova recently and we got some information but it wasn't really detailed for the local opinion. I am more interested to know if (unintelligible) transfer (unintelligible). As you know the events of March have destabilized the international situation, since there's different forces coming from the United States and Europe, these forces have returned, or are they still in Kosovo? In this context, how do you see security?

Erlandson: Those are two very long questions. I will try to answer them as well as I can separately. First I was very pleased as well as honored to have the opportunity to meet with President Rugova. It was the first time since I've been in Kosovo that I've had the opportunity to sit down with him one on one and discuss issues here in Kosovo. Those discussions centered around our mission focus here in Kosovo, which is safe and secure freedom of movement, and transition to civil authority. We had a very open dialogue together; we discussed on several different occasions the transition to civil authority and more specifically the success of the KPS. I told him that on a daily basis we were working closely with UNMIK-P (United Nations Mission in Kosovo – Police) and the KPS doing joint patrolling. We discussed the importance of "Safe and Secure" through joint patrolling and I expressed to the President that the KPS truly is a success story here in Kosovo and will be the future police force here in Kosovo. We also discussed the violence in March and agreed that it is very important to look beyond the violence and work towards the future. Overall the discussions again were very open and I truly enjoyed meeting with the President on that day. Your second question about the events of March and how it destabilized Kosovo; first and foremost I believe these actions were those of a few extremists and criminals, and we continue to assist the KPS and UNMIK-P

as they hunt down these people that caused or were instigators of the violence in March. As you know, I have said many times that the violence within MNB (E) was brought under control in less than twenty-four hours, and the credit for calming the violence within MNB (E) goes to the Soldiers who work within the brigade, UNMIK-P and KPS. The forces that were brought into Kosovo during that violent time, we received one company from SFOR within MNB (E), they were very effective in that they had been involved in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, so we were able to quickly integrate them into our they were quickly integrated into our program so we could quickly de-fuse the situation. After about five days they returned to Bosnia and have since returned to the United States. In regards to the security situation, I would assess that the security situation within MNB (E) as being calm, but still somewhat fragile. The Soldiers of MNB (E) are now back to normal operations performing patrols with the KPS and UNMIK-P like we were doing before the violence in March.

Q: Agim Kajtazi (Radio Gjilan) – In your statement it seems that the KPS takes a smaller part in the (unintelligible) context, and especially in the sentence where the KPS will actually be responsible for the safe and secure in Kosovo. Has the March events influenced your statement? And for the second question, As I mentioned before you said that the KPS will be a resident part of this province could it be expected that next (press) conference the KPC will take such a part? If so, why?

Erlandson: The KPS and the KPC are the primary services of contact for all criminal activities within Kosovo. However the KPS will not be able to do safe and secure alone. The people of Kosovo will also play a critical role in safe and secure within Kosovo as they as they abide by rule of law. We have seen in the short time that I have been here, and certainly in times with other rotations, steady improvement with the KPS. The KPS have been integrated into most peacekeeping functions in Kosovo and the process of integration will continue. It will be up to the people of Kosovo to decide what that future will be with the KPS in that when we all learn to treat each other with dignity and respect, we will be able to move Kosovo forward. I regards to what would happen to our mission, when the people of Kosovo involving the KPS in “safe and secure” become mature enough, the future will not need us here in Kosovo and we will be able to go elsewhere where there is a need. The March violence certainly influenced our moving forward in “safe and secure” but I believe that we have to move forward and work positively into the future working together with the KPS as I feel we are back to normal within MNB (E). The KPC has a role as a civil agency for natural disasters within Kosovo. We have had a number of positive experiences within MNB (E) with the KPC. The KPC played a large role with the bridge demolition project in Kacanik; they have also been involved in the reconstruction and restoration of the homes that were destroyed in March. Overall within MNB (E) they will be the future civil agents in emergency response within Kosovo.

Q: Xeladin Rexhepi (newspaper Zeri) – My questions are related more directly to MNB (E). Three days ago, you declared that the security situation has returned to normal the way it was before the March riots, I am interested in learning more about what is being done to help the conditions of the Serbs that were displaced and are trying to return

in your sector and also the other citizens who were displaced in Ferizaj, Strpce and Gjilan. Thank you.

Erlandson: We are seeing positive indications of returns within MNB (E). We are seeing return activity not only associated with the riots but, returns from the 1999 period as well. In Zegra, Serb farmers are returning to their land and are planting their crops for the first time since 1999. Soon in Ferizaj/Urosevac the Serbs who had been driven out of their homes during the March violence will return to temporary homes near where they used to live while their own homes are being reconstructed. In Babljak, return projects continue and continue to move forward and we look forward to next fall when these people will return to their homes. There are a number of other areas within MNB (E) where we have positive visibility on people returning from the March violence. MNB (E) will not tolerate violence or intimidation directed at these returnees and if we are going to move Kosovo forward to a better future, we must work towards a multi-ethnic Kosovo.

Q: Igor Savic (Radio/Television HERC) – Mr. General you have added your praises to the of the two suspects that murdered the young man in Gracanica, are you familiar at all with the ongoing investigation so far or if you know anything about the statements the two suspects have provided, how they declared themselves when first faced with the investigative body?

Erlandson: Regarding the arrest in Gracanica, I think that was a very positive aspect of the KPS's quick reaction. This was purely a murder case, UNMIK-P and KPS has the lead in all cases such as this, and I would refer specific questions regarding the investigation to UNMIK-P and the KPS.

Q: Ekrem Dullovi (Radio Kacanik) – In your statement, you mentioned coordinated patrols with the FYROM, and earlier it was reported that along this ABL there has been a lot of contraband activity. These coordinated patrols with the FYROM, are they due to the increased levels of contraband or are they coordinated to increase the security of the ABL? In this coordinated patrol, is the border police included?

Erlandson: The coordinated patrol with the FYROM authorities has two functions; first and foremost, coordinated patrols are most effective when it comes to interdicting the illegal activities that you discussed. There are times when we have indications of smuggling of illegal weapons and munitions across the borders. In developing a close relationship and coordinated patrols with the FYROM authorities helps us ensure a safe and secure environment as it helps us stop many of these weapons from making it across. We work closely with all agencies that are involved with the FYROM border as it is the border patrol and the customs agency that has the responsibility. We think it's vitally important to work together to facilitate safe and secure.

Q: Radio Tema - During the last few (press conferences) you have determined the security situation to be quiet but fragile in MNB (E), what are the indicators that make the situation fragile?

Erlandson: There are a number of indicators that cause me to indicate the situation as fragile. Many of them I cannot share with you for operational security reasons. However there is a sense as we engage the population within MNB (E), that there is concern among the population and some tension in the aftermath of the March violence. Needless to say there is a sense within the minorities in MNB (E) many of those people that lost their home and additionally the Serb Orthodox churches that were damaged those kinds of things will take time for the fear of that kind of thing to go away. So it's the overall level of tension that causes me to assess the situation as fragile. But I also believe that the majority of the people of Kosovo want to live together in a free and open society where all people no matter what ethnicity or background they come from will eventually as Kosovo moves forward have job opportunities and the ability to move about freely in Kosovo. It'll be up to the people of Kosovo to realize this future.

Q: Ekrem Dullovi (Radio Kacanik) – I would like the General's opinion on how he evaluates the security situation in Kacanik after the March events and regarding the real estate program you have started the payments to sixty applicants, how do these applicants feel, are they content and how is this process working in compensation?

Erlandson: The municipality of Kacanik first of all during the March violence remains calm. In fact both the areas of Strpce and Kacanik, the people should be commended because they remained calm during this violence. Regarding the real estate question, I would like to refer that to my PAO and Legal (dept) as I have not had a lot of feedback on the satisfaction of the people with the compensation.

Thank you very much for being here today, I thoroughly enjoyed this press conference and I hope I was able to answer the questions to your satisfaction. Thank you.