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Between Facts and Interpretation: The March Pogrom of 2004 in the Reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations^[2]

Abstract: This paper analyses the reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations concerning the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) that address the March 2004 Pogrom, with the aim of determining how this international organisation presented these events. The research employs a qualitative methodological approach, primarily based on the critical discourse analysis with a particular emphasis on the framework, complemented by the normative analysis and the provision of the historical context. Prior to examining the reports, the author seeks to present the situation in Kosovo and Metohija from the middle of 1999 until the outbreak of the March Pogrom in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the continuity of the intolerable living conditions experienced by Serbs and other non-Albanians during that period. Taking all that into consideration, the findings indicate that, although the reports contain a relatively detailed account of the events and their consequences, their use of terminology that mitigates the character of the violence, coupled with the absence of broader contextualisation, contributes to the relativization of the scale of the suffering endured by Serbs and other non-Albanians. By overlooking the necessity of a broader understanding of the circumstances, the reports portray the March Pogrom as an isolated security incident rather than a culmination of years of violence and suppression of fundamental human rights to which Serbs and other non-Albanians have been subjected since the deployment of the international missions (UNMIK and KFOR). The paper therefore concludes that, although these reports constitute an important source of information, they must be interpreted critically and compared with other relevant sources and the wider body of scholarly literature in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the March Pogrom.

Keywords: Kosovo and Metohija, March Pogrom, United Nations, UNMIK, KFOR

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[2] The author, expressing a personal viewpoint while adhering to the applicable legal framework—the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006) and United Nations (hereinafter referred to as: UN) Security Council Resolution 1244 (199), maintains that the Province of Kosovo and Metohija (hereinafter: Kosovo and Metohija) constitutes an integral part of the Republic of Serbia enjoying substantive autonomy, and that nothing in this paper should be construed as calling into question the sovereignty or territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia. In this regard, the unilaterally declared and internationally disputed entity that has existed since 2008 within the territory of Serbia's southern province, and whose status remains the subject of divergent positions within the international community, will, for the purposes of this paper, be referred to as the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština (hereinafter: PISG in Priština), and in cases where this designation is not feasible, an alternative qualifier will be employed ("so-called") when it comes to any status-sensitive term.

1. Kosovo and Metohija following the end of the aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The signing of the Military-Technical Agreement at Kumanovo and the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) in June 1999 brought to an end both the months-long NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereinafter referred to as: FRY) and the armed conflict in Kosovo and Metohija. At the same time, these instruments marked the beginning of the establishment of a new security and political order in Kosovo and Metohija, which entailed the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army and the police forces of the Republic of Serbia from the province and the deployment of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) under the UN mandate. Alongside the establishment of the international military presence, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was also established under the auspices of the United Nations. It was entrusted with administering the province and creating the conditions necessary for the stabilisation of its political and social circumstances. Its activities were organised around four pillars, which included civil administration, the establishment of democratic institutions, reconstruction and economic development, and the provision of humanitarian assistance to the population affected by the consequences of the conflict (Caplan, 2015, p. 619).

However, the immediate post-conflict period proved extremely difficult for the Serbian and other non-Albanian communities, as they were left entirely unprotected from attacks by Albanian extremists.

In this regard, „the result of the joint criminal enterprise of NATO and Albanian terrorists gathered around the KLA was the expulsion of approximately 250,000 Serbs and other non-Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija immediately following the arrival of KFOR forces in 1999” (Šuvaković, 2015, p. 39). The Serbian cultural and religious heritage were not spared either, suffering extensive devastation during the first years of international civilian and military administration in Kosovo and Metohija. Cultural heritage in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija comprises approximately 1,300 Orthodox churches, monasteries and other religious sites, of which 110 were destroyed between 10 June 1999 and 1 March 2004 alone. Furthermore, during the initial and most intense waves of violence carried out by Albanian secessionists, led by soldiers, who had not been demobilized, and commanders of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (hereinafter: the so-called KLA), entire Orthodox cemeteries, gravestones, and monuments dedicated to prominent figures in Serbian history—primarily located in urban areas—were destroyed (Stevanović & Đurđević, 2021, p. 197).

The remaining Serbian population, which had nevertheless decided to remain in Kosovo and Metohija, continued to live in rural and isolated communities. A notable exception was the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, which remained the only significant urban centre where the Serbian population, through its own efforts, succeeded in preventing frequent attacks by Albanian groups. By contrast, Serbs living south of the Ibar River found themselves in a hostile environment and faced numerous security challenges, severe restrictions on freedom of movement, brutal physical assaults, and

kidnappings (Stevanović, 2018, p. 61).^[3] During the first ten months (from 10 June 1999 to 30 March 2000), while the international civilian and military administration was still laying the foundations for its future operations, 4,564 terrorist attacks carried out by members of the so-called KLA and other Albanian extremist groups were recorded. The consequences of these attacks were devastating: 936 people lost their lives, 876 were injured, and 866 were abducted, while the overwhelming majority of the victims were Serbs, although Albanians who had previously been employed by the institutions of the FRY and the Republic of Serbia were also targeted. In addition to the loss of life, more than 50,000 houses—predominantly owned by Serbs, but also by other non-Albanians—were destroyed, burned, or severely damaged (Guskova, 2014, p. 352).^[4]

In full view of the international community, and particularly the collective West, which at the close of the twentieth century celebrated what it regarded as the zenith of the rule of law and the protection of human rights, a systematic campaign of persecution was carried out without anyone being held accountable. Where the international presence was intended to serve as a guarantor of security, the Serbian and other non-Albanian populations were, with only rare exceptions, left to fend for themselves and compelled to rely on their own resources for basic survival (Šuvaković, 2010). Consequently, the

avoidance of confrontation with members of the so-called KLA and the failure to prosecute those responsible for crimes committed both during and immediately after the war not only constituted a serious failure and demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the international presence, but also encouraged Albanian extremists to organise a new wave of violence, this time employing considerably more sophisticated methods.

2. The March Pogrom – the events leading up to it

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Following the consolidation of the international military and civilian administration from the middle of 2001 onwards, a partial decline in high-intensity ethnically motivated attacks was recorded. However, although the number of such attacks decreased, this did not signify a substantial improvement in the situation of the Serbian and other non-Albanian populations. On the contrary, more serious incidents merely gave way to lower-intensity forms of violence, particularly physical assaults, arson, livestock theft, and the stoning of vehicles transporting members of non-majority communities. These frequent forms of low-intensity violence perpetuated a constant atmosphere of fear and insecurity among Serbs and other non-Albanians,

[3] One of the gravest crimes for which no one has been held accountable to this day is the massacre in the cadastral area of the village of Bujance near Lipljan, where, on 23 July 1999, only a few weeks after the arrival of the international military and civilian administration, members of the so-called KLA murdered 14 Serbian harvesters from the nearby village of Staro Gracko while they were engaged in seasonal agricultural work.

[4] In addition to the killings, kidnappings were also frequent, with one of the most brutal of them being the abduction of the monk Hariton Lukić on 15 June 1999, whose decapitated and mutilated body was discovered more than a year later in the vicinity of Prizren.

resulting in an exceptionally low level of confidence in the international administration. A similar conclusion is reached in the report of the International Crisis Group, although it goes a step further by observing that the decline in violent incidents was also partly attributable to the significant reduction in the Serbian population. Those who remained succeeded in regrouping into small, compact, and relatively secure communities in rural areas, although their freedom of movement throughout Kosovo and Metohija continued to be severely restricted (Friedrich, 2005, pp. 233–234; Lađevac, 2009, p. 36). It would soon become evident, however, that even such „safe areas” offered no absolute guarantee against violence, and this was demonstrated by the murders of the Stolić family in Obilić and of four Serbian youths on the Bistrica River near Goraždevac during 2003, incidents that signalled Kosovo and Metohija’s descent into a new cycle of ethnically motivated violence.

The failure to prosecute those responsible for these crimes gradually became a defining feature of post-conflict Kosovo and Metohija. In such circumstances, following a brief period of relative calm, Albanian extremists increasingly made it clear that they had no intention of abandoning the objective first articulated by the so-called KLA – the creation of an ethnically homogeneous Kosovo and Metohija in which there would be no place for either Serbs or other non-Albanians. This sentiment was further reinforced by growing frustration over the fact that the process of secession was not advancing at the pace demanded by Kosovo Albanians (Rakić, 2009).

The convergence of these two factors brought the security situation in Kosovo and Metohija to a boiling point in March 2004.^[5] On the night of 15 March 2004, at the entrance to the village of Čaglavica, a Serbian boy, Jovica Arsić, was wounded by gunfire. Shortly thereafter, Serbs from Čaglavica and Gračanica spontaneously gathered on the Priština–Skopje main road and the Priština–Gnjilane regional road, blocking both routes and demanding an immediate response from KFOR units and the UNMIK Police. The following day, 16 March, during the afternoon, three Albanian boys from the village of Čabra (Municipality of Zubin Potok) drowned in the Ibar River, while a fourth managed to reach the riverbank safely. The surviving boy claimed that he and his three companions had allegedly been chased by Serbs with dogs, forcing them to seek refuge in the river. This account was subsequently disseminated extensively by the most influential Albanian media outlets. In addition, Albanian politicians and public figures competed in issuing inflammatory statements that placed sole responsibility for the tragedy on the Serbian community. Despite appeals by the spokesperson for the UNMIK administration, Kakuk György, and the spokesperson for the UNMIK Police, Tracy Becker, urging the media to report more cautiously because there was no evidence that the incident constituted an ethnically motivated crime, anti-Serbian hysteria continued unabated (Aleksić, 2025, pp. 21–23). One month after the end of the pogrom, these statements were further reinforced by another spokesperson for the Police and Justice Department of the international

[5] On the evening of 19 February 2004, near Lipljan, Albanians fatally shot Zlatomir Kostić and Milijana Marković with gunfire from automatic weapons.

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Breaking of the cross on an Orthodox church
in Podujevo in 2004 during the March Pogrom

Photo: RTS screenshot



Nuns from the Devič Monastery
during the March Pogrom in 2004

Photo: Wikipedia



The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviš in Prizren after being set on fire during the March Pogrom in 2004

Photo: Office for Kosovo and Metohija



The Monastery of the Holy Archangels in Prizren after being set on fire during the March Pogrom in 2004

Photo: Office for Kosovo and Metohija

interim administration, Neeraj Singh, who pointed out that there were significant inconsistencies in the testimony given by the surviving boy during two separate interviews, adding that the child had been subjected to intense pressure from Albanian media outlets, which had effectively suggested what he should say. Consequently, the boy's allegations were ultimately found to be logically inconsistent with other evidence that had already been established during the investigation (UN News, 2004). Nevertheless, this did not prevent Albanians from organising a violent protest in the southern part of Kosovska Mitrovica the very next day and advancing towards the northern part of the city with the apparent intention of doing there what had already been done in other urban areas where Serbs had lived prior to 1999. The flames ignited by Albanian extremists on the bridge over the Ibar River quickly spread throughout Kosovo and Metohija, engulfing and devastating numerous Serbian communities, including Obilić, Svinjare, Bresje, Kosovo Polje, villages around Lipljan, Štimlje, Potkaljaja in Prizren, and many others. During the three-day outbreak of violence involving, according to various estimates, approximately 60,000 Albanians, 19 people were killed (11 Albanians and 8 Serbs), while 954 individuals—most of them Serbs—as well as 126 members of the international security forces, sustained injuries of varying severity. More than 1,000 properties belonging to Serbs and other non-Albanians were burned and looted, while 35 Orthodox churches, monasteries, and other monuments of cultural heritage were destroyed or severely damaged (Serbian Government for Kosovo and Metohija [2004]; Rakočević, 2025; *Failure to Protect: Anti-Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004*, 2004; S/2004/348).

As the foregoing demonstrates, the March Pogrom constituted a carefully planned and coordinated campaign of violence which, in the space of only 72 hours, inflicted immeasurable and lasting consequences upon the Serbian people and their centuries-old cultural and spiritual heritage in Kosovo and Metohija. Precisely because of the scale of the destruction and the climate of fear established as early as 1999 and 2000, the overwhelming majority of internally displaced persons never returned to their homes, which is why the province to this day has the lowest rate of returnees in the world, with fewer than 2% of displaced persons having returned (Serbian Government for Kosovo and Metohija [2004] – *Documentary Films by TVNS Radomir Grujić*). Particularly concerning is the fact that no one was adequately prosecuted for the events that took place between 17 and 19 March. Although dozens of proceedings were initiated before the judicial authorities of UNMIK and the PISG in Priština during the following year, only a small number of those who had participated in the attacks, arson, and persecution were brought to justice, and even fewer received sentences proportionate to the gravity of their offences. The penalties imposed were, as a rule, merely symbolic, thereby reinforcing the prevailing pattern of impunity that had existed even before the pogrom itself (Gudžić, 2025, p. 162). From the perspective of the Serbian people as a whole, these atrocities were met with profound indignation, not only because of the devastation they caused but also because of the persistent silence of Europe, whose foundations are rooted in Christianity and which failed to respond as Orthodox places of worship were destroyed and the traces of an entire people's historical presence were systematically

erased from its own continent. However, regardless of how clearly these events were perceived by the Serbian people, the question of how the March Pogrom was recorded and interpreted beyond the borders of the Republic of Serbia remains equally

important, since, among other factors, the reports of international organisations played a significant role in shaping international perceptions of the events in Kosovo and Metohija.

Table 1. Casualties and material damage during the March Pogrom of 2004

Category	Number
Fatalities	19 (8 Serbs and 11 Albanians)
Injured	954 (predominantly Serbs and other non-Albanians)
Burned or looted immovable property owned by Serbs and other non-Albanians (houses, flats, land, agricultural holdings)	More than 1,000
Destroyed or severely damaged property of the Serbian Orthodox Church (churches, monasteries, and cultural monuments)	35
Injured members of the international missions (KFOR and UNMIK Police)	126

Source: Source: Human Rights Watch (2004) Report; documentation of the Government of the Republic of Serbia; Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (S/2004/348).

3. Reports of the United Nations Secretary-General on the work of UNMIK in Kosovo and Metohija

The subject of analysis in this section consists of the regular reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), submitted to the United Nations Security Council during 2004 and 2005. Particular attention is devoted to Report S/2004/348 of 30 April 2004, followed by

Reports S/2004/613 of 30 July 2004 and S/2004/907 of 17 November 2004, as well as Kai Eide’s Comprehensive Review of the Situation in Kosovo, annexed to the Secretary-General’s letter S/2005/635 of 7 October 2005.

Specifically, Report S/2004/348 provides an account of UNMIK’s activities and the overall security and socio-political situation during the period from 1 January to 31 March 2004. Accordingly, this is a report that the Secretary-General, in coordination with his Special Representative, submitted—and continues to submit—to the United Nations Se-

curity Council in accordance with the procedures governing the operation of United Nations-mandated missions.^[6] Undoubtedly, the most significant event marking the reporting period was the March Pogrom, a fact acknowledged in paragraph 2 of the report, which states that „the defining event [...] was the widespread violence.” For this very reason, the report constitutes an important source. However, its interpretation must take into account that it is a document reporting on a period during which the UNMIK system, and indeed the United Nations itself, suffered a profound failure. Consequently, a tension runs throughout the text between acknowledging the scale of the crimes and the need to minimise the responsibility of the mission. This observation becomes even more significant when one considers that, although differing in certain respects, UNMIK and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) have been the two most complex United Nations missions to date, both mandated to assume comprehensive control over a post-conflict territory, facilitate its recovery, and establish an entirely new administrative and governmental framework (Kondoch, 2001).

At the outset, attention should be directed to the terminology employed in the report. Specifically, in paragraph 2 of document S/2004/348, the events are described as „an organised, widespread and targeted campaign of violence” directed against the Serbian, Roma, and Ashkali communities, while paragraph 52 also refers to the existence of „a desire

to expel the Serbs.” These two examples—among several others throughout the report—demonstrate that the authors consistently avoided using terms such as „pogrom”, instead opting for more neutral expressions such as „violence”, „unrest”, or „conflict”, terminology that can scarcely capture the scale and consequences of the crimes committed. For example, paragraph 3 states that 954 individuals were injured „during the conflict.” The use of the term „conflict” is particularly problematic because it implies the existence of two relatively equal opposing sides, thereby obscuring the one-sided nature of the violence, which was directed exclusively against the Serbian and other non-Albanian populations. Even in places where Serbs resisted Albanian extremists, such as Čaglavica, Gračanica, and the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, those involved constituted a vastly outnumbered group of people who had gathered spontaneously in an effort to protect their own lives, the lives of their families, and their communities from destruction. The attempt to create an appearance of symmetry between Serbs and Albanians is also reflected in the manner in which the victims are presented. The statement in paragraph 3 that „19 people were killed, including 11 Albanians and 8 Serbs” is formally accurate, however, presented without any contextualisation, it creates the impression that the fatalities, together with the other losses and damage, resulted from clashes between two ethnic communities. The actual circumstances were markedly different. Serbs and their property were the exclusive targets of

[6] Until 2020, four reports per year on the work of UNMIK and the situation in Kosovo and Metohija were submitted to the United Nations Security Council. From that year onwards, this reporting schedule was consolidated into two semi-annual reports.

Albanian extremists, whereas the deaths and injuries sustained by Albanians resulted from actions taken by the UNMIK Police and KFOR forces in self-defence while responding to attacks against them and attempting to protect members of the non-majority communities. In addition to these figures, the other statistics presented in the report also correspond relatively closely to those contained in the official Serbian reports (summarised in the previous chapter), however the analysed document fails to provide clear content for them as well.

108 | With regard to the immediate trigger of the violence, the UNMIK report demonstrates a certain degree of caution. In paragraphs 5 and 38, concerning the drowning of the Albanian boys in the Ibar River, the report correctly states that „the circumstances of the incident have yet to be established” and further notes that the violence was exacerbated by subsequent „inflammatory and biased media reporting.” However, rather than explicitly emphasising that there was no evidence whatsoever of an ethnically motivated crime, which was a position publicly maintained by senior UNMIK officials even at the time, the report leaves the issue unresolved, and in doing so, it has, to this day, allowed room for the development of a false narrative concerning the „continuity of Serbian crimes”, which for nearly three decades has served as the foundation upon which efforts have been made to construct a national myth and the so-called statehood of Kosovo. Even if one accepts that the report correctly identifies the immediate triggers by referring to the shooting of the Serbian youth in Čaglavica and the tragedy in the village of Čabra, its analysis ends there and fails to examine the underlying causes of the violence. These consisted precisely in the deeply rooted hatred

of the leading Albanian political and paramilitary structures towards the Serbian population and the Republic of Serbia, supported by the financial, military, and propaganda resources of the leading powers of the collective West both during and after the conflict in Kosovo and Metohija; in the weak and unsystematically established security apparatus of the KFOR forces and the UNMIK Police, as a result of which Serbs and other non-Albanians were continuously left as easy targets for Albanian extremists; and in impunity, which served as a reward for crimes committed against Serbs and other non-Albanians both during the war and subsequently in the post-conflict period.

A similar pattern can also be observed in the sections dealing with the organisation of the unrest. Thus, when describing the attacks on Serbian communities in Kosovo and Metohija, the report states that they were „apparently spontaneous at the very beginning”, but that they were „quickly taken over by organised elements” interested in provoking tensions along ethnic lines. This carefully formulated sentence only partially confirms the thesis of well-organised and coordinated violence, as it nowhere identifies who the actual instigators were or who stood behind the extremists, despite the fact that certain individuals were already, at that time, either part of the UNMIK system or known to the UNMIK Police as former leading figures of the so-called KLA. A clear example of this is certainly Jakup Krasniqi, who at the time served as Minister of Public Services in the government of the PISG in Priština. His significant role in organising and carrying out violent actions against Serbs and KFOR forces in Kosovo and Metohija was exposed by representatives of the United States mission in

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Photo: Freepik

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Kosovo and Metohija during the pogrom itself. In addition to his case, the example of Jetulah Dibrani is also noteworthy. He was one of the first commanders of the so-called Kosovo Protection Corps (hereinafter: the so-called KPC) of the PISG in Priština and a former member of the so-called KLA, who organised the attack on and burning of the village of Svinjare. The fact that figures from almost all influential institutions of Albanian society in Kosovo and Metohija participated in organising the pogrom is further demonstrated by the information that representatives of the Islamic Religious Community of the so-called Kosovo also played a role in preparing the armed activities. During religious gatherings, they encouraged Albanians to participate in the uprising, the expulsion of Serbs, and the forced removal of the UNMIK and KFOR administrations. This group largely consisted of

imams such as Samed Xhezairi from Prizren and Musa Ademi from the vicinity of Vitina, who were known to have links with radical Islamists and mujahedeen (BIA, 2024, pp. 12–13).

Perhaps the most substantial criticism to be raised in this paper concerns the almost complete absence of self-criticism regarding the collapse experienced by the UNMIK and KFOR systems during the pogrom. Not only was there no acknowledgement of their own responsibility, but paragraph 8 states that „UNMIK and KFOR quickly launched efforts to arrest those involved in the violent actions”, and that the heads of these two components of the international presence in Kosovo and Metohija established a „senior crisis team” as well as a „crisis management body”. However, all of these claims describe exclusively the measures undertaken afterwards, once the rampage by Albanian extremists

was already in full swing, skilfully concealing the reasons why the violence had not been prevented through an earlier response. In other words, how was it possible for approximately 60,000 people to spend three full days burning, destroying, and expelling people without obstruction, in front of armed members of KFOR and the UNMIK Police?! The passivity of these formations is perhaps best illustrated by the burning of the Monastery of the Holy Archangels, the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviš, and the Prizren Theological Seminary in full view of members of the German KFOR contingent, and precisely because of this perceived cowardice, the influential German newspaper *Der Spiegel* referred to them as the „*rabbits of Kosovo*” (*Der Spiegel*, 2004).^[7] It is also paradoxical that paragraph 9 records that, once the majority of the destruction had already been completed, „approximately 2,000 additional troops were deployed” and that checkpoints were temporarily re-established in Serbian communities. Rather than interpreting this information as evidence that the initial deployment of forces had been incapable of fulfilling the primary task defined by the mandate, the report obscures its significance through the use of vague and inadequate terms such as „increasing visibility and presence”, with the apparent aim of concealing the extent of the failure. The failure to provide adequate protection undoubtedly had lasting consequences for the position of Serbs and other non-Albanians, as confirmed in paragraph 26, which states that following the pogrom they became „more isolated

than at any time during the previous three years”, and that many, particularly elderly persons, no longer wished to move around „without the exclusive escort of KFOR forces”. This only confirmed the thesis that Serbs and other non-Albanians could rely solely on KFOR forces and the UNMIK Police, despite the fact that these were units that lacked agility and were insufficiently trained to operate in crisis situations.

The favourable attitude towards the PISG Police Service in Priština, as well as towards the so-called (KPC), was also problematic. Regarding the Police Service, paragraph 41 states that „many members acted professionally under difficult circumstances”, while only briefly and conditionally mentioning that „some members may have done nothing to prevent the violence or, even worse, may have participated in it”. Specifically, there is not a single piece of evidence that could substantiate the claim that members of the PISG Police Service in Priština responded adequately anywhere. On the contrary, wherever they were able to do so, such as in the case of the burning of the Health Centre and the Russian Military Hospital in Bresje, they tacitly allowed attacks against Serbs and other non-Albanians to take place (Dimitrijević & Bisenić, 2025). Similarly, with regard to the so-called KPC), an organisation predominantly composed of former members of the so-called KLA, the report states in paragraph 43 that the organisation „operated professionally”, despite acknowledging that „some members had active links

[7] Although the conduct of KFOR forces, viewed as a whole, was catastrophic, there were also positive examples of adequate responses, such as the members of the Italian KFOR contingent who succeeded in protecting the Visoki Dečani Monastery and the Patriarchate of Peć from extremist attacks.

with extremist organisations”. Such contradictions indicate an effort by the authors to avoid a more critical assessment of the security structures of the PISG in Priština and to avoid establishing their responsibility during the pogrom. At the same time, there was undoubtedly also a desire on the part of the international interim administration to avoid direct confrontation with Albanian political and paramilitary structures, whose influence on the ground at the beginning of the twenty-first century often exceeded the formal boundaries of institutional control.^[8]

The desire to place Albanian extremists and Serbs on the same level, similarly to the use of the term „conflict”, was also evident in the conclusion. Specifically, paragraph 52 characterises the destruction of Orthodox religious sites as an act deserving „particular condemnation”, only for the authors, in the very next sentence of the same paragraph, to refer to alleged Serbian retaliation, emphasising that „the burning of mosques in Belgrade and other parts of Serbia must also be condemned”. Although every attack on any place of worship is deserving of condemnation and criminal sanction, by making such a comment, UNMIK undoubtedly exceeded the scope of its mandate by addressing internal political developments in central Serbia. Furthermore, the suggestion by the authors of the report that such an uncivilised act also required condemnation did not correspond to the facts, given that, as early as the

following day, 18 March 2004, almost all relevant political actors strongly condemned the burning of the Bajrakli Mosque in Belgrade and the Islam-aga Mosque in Niš. The incidents also received judicial resolution through the imposition of prison sentences on three young men (*Politika*, 2004). The late Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije Radović also took part in the efforts to prevent the burning of the mosque in Belgrade. Unlike the imams in Kosovo and Metohija who encouraged Albanians to expel Serbs, his actions represented a powerful example of responsibility and a call for peace and mutual understanding (RTS online portal, 2020). Therefore, establishing a direct connection between the aforementioned events evidently served the purpose of creating the impression of mutual responsibility and guilt on the part of Serbs and Albanians, which in no way corresponded to the scale, nature, and consequences of the March Pogrom.

In an attempt to present the mechanisms of their response in a favourable light, the authors of the report stated, rather optimistically, in paragraph 10 that more than 260 arrests had been carried out, and that from the end of the pogrom until the publication of the report, more than 45 cases had been brought before UNMIK courts and more than 100 before the courts of the PISG in Priština. It is now known, however, that the majority of these proceedings ended with symbolic

[8] For the purpose of obtaining a clearer understanding of the attitude of leading Albanian political figures towards Albanians loyal to the FRY and the Republic of Serbia, Serbs, and the temporary international military and civilian administration during the first decade of the twenty-first century, see the documentary film *Infinite War (La Guerra infinita)* produced by Italy's national broadcaster (*Radiotelevisione Italiana*), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=du1to5RHctA&t=2397s>, as well as the report by Dick Marty, *Inhuman Treatment of People and Illicit Trafficking in Human Organs in Kosovo*, presented before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2011, available at: <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/12608/html>.

or suspended sentences, or that no penalties were imposed at all. This only confirms the position expressed at the time by Werner Wnendt, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and Metohija, that the entire judicial system „was not strong enough” to address the majority of the challenges it faced at that time (OSCE Mission report examines response of Kosovo’s justice system to the March 2004 riots, 2005). Finally, with the exception of the introductory remarks, the report examines the March Pogrom primarily through the prism of a political process, namely the implementation of the „standards before status” policy. This can particularly be observed in paragraph 52, where it is assessed that „the violence represented a serious setback in efforts to build a democratic, multi-ethnic and stable Kosovo”, as well as in paragraph 54, which states that it „called into question the timetable for the successful implementation of the standards”. Such subordination of human suffering to political considerations can further be observed in paragraph 60, which states that „Kosovo still has a long way to go in meeting the standards”.^[9] Moreover, the entire subsequent engagement is framed around the demand that „progress (in Kosovo) must be restored”, thereby implicitly suggesting that the greatest damage caused by the pogrom was the slowing down of a political process, rather than the expulsion of 4,000 people and the destruction of cultural heritage, parts of which date back as far as the fourteenth century.

However, it is particularly indicative that, despite the depth and lasting nature of its consequences, the March Pogrom had already begun to recede into the background during the second half of 2004. While the consequences of the destruction and displacement remained more than evident, the focus of the subsequent three reports gradually shifted towards the necessity of accelerating the commencement of negotiations on the future status of the province. Within this context, a narrative increasingly gained prominence—one that remains dominant today and was shaped both by Albanian political elites and by those who support them. According to this narrative, the March Pogrom was not a pre-planned and well-organised campaign of expulsion, but rather a consequence of Albanian dissatisfaction and frustration arising from the unresolved status of the territory in which they lived. In other words, this narrative suggests that once the status issue was finally resolved, Serbs and other non-Albanians would be able to exercise, without obstruction and to the fullest extent, all rights granted to them under the future legislation of the PISG in Priština (Ker-Lindsay, 2011, p. 179). In this way, responsibility for the violence was gradually shifted from the perpetrators to the dispute over status, while the so-called independence was presented as the ultimate solution for overcoming ethnic tensions.

It was precisely this approach gained the support of a significant part of the international

[9] The document Standards for Kosovo was presented in December 2003 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Harri Holkeri, and was subsequently endorsed by the United Nations Security Council. It represented a set of political benchmarks that the PISG in Priština, in coordination with UNMIK, were required to fulfil before any negotiations on the issue of the territory’s future status could begin.

community. This is also reflected in document S/2005/635, prepared in 2005 at the request of the Secretary-General of the UN by Special Representative Kai Eide. As Eide himself states in the introduction, the purpose of the entire report was to assess „whether the conditions had been met for launching and conducting the process concerning the future status”. Bearing this in mind, his answer to that question was affirmative, despite the fact that the standards—including issues related precisely to the return of internally displaced persons, the protection of Serbs and other non-Albanians, and the preservation of religious and cultural heritage—had not been fulfilled. Thus, once again in the section concerning future status, Eide concludes in paragraph 62 that, although „there will never be a good time to resolve Kosovo’s future status”, „the overall assessment leads to the conclusion that the time has come to launch this process”. The author of the report explicitly acknowledges that progress in implementing the standards had been „very uneven”, but immediately adds in paragraph 64 that „it is unlikely that postponing the process related to future status would lead to further and tangible results”. Thus, the failure to meet the standards was transformed from an obstacle into an argument in favour of initiating the process of determining future status. In this way, the „standards before status” policy, which the April 2004 report still upheld, was effectively abandoned, while the Eide report paved the way for future negotiations (Bataković, 2015, p. 366).

366). The United Nations Security Council subsequently provided full support for the commencement of negotiations in October 2005, and only a few weeks later appointed Martti Ahtisaari as Special Representative. This was followed by the unsuccessful Vienna negotiations, during which the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement was presented, and for the Serbian side, this proposal was almost entirely unacceptable, as it envisaged the creation of a new state on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, contrary primarily to Article 2(4) of the UN Charter and UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)..^[10] However, disregarding international law, as had also been the case in 1999, Kosovo and Metohija Albanians, with the open support of the United States and leading Western European powers, carried out an act of unilateral secession in February 2008 and unlawfully declared independence on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, and in doing so they completed a process in which the March Pogrom constituted an important component. In this manner, the paradox was confirmed that violence committed against the Serbian and other non-Albanian populations, instead of being subject to strict punishment, was rewarded through the acceleration of the secessionist process, which, viewed from the perspective of developments since 1999, opened a Pandora’s box and produced far-reaching consequences for respect for the fundamental rules of the international order embodied in the UN system and its Charter.

[10] In February 2007, the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia formally rejected, by a majority vote of its members, the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement: <https://www.parlament.gov.rs/akti/ostala-akta/doneta-akta/u-sazivu-od-14-februara-2007>.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the work of UNMIK and the events of March 2004 demonstrates, above all, that documents produced by international organisations, regardless of how frequently they are perceived as neutral sources, are not created in a political vacuum. On the contrary, they are inevitably shaped by the institutional framework within which they are produced, as well as by various, and often conflicting, interests of leading powers. For this reason, their reliability and objectivity must be subject to continuous scrutiny, as their significance lies not only in the chronological presentation of events but also in the manner in which facts are described, presented, and interpreted.

In this regard, the analysis conducted in this paper has confirmed the fundamental premise from which the research was initiated. Namely, in the aforementioned documents, and particularly in the report from April 2004, despite a relatively detailed factual account of the events and their consequences, the very nature and scale of the March Pogrom were not presented adequately. A careful examination of the terminology employed, the manner in which victims were presented, the conduct of international security structures, and the broader political framework within which the violence was situated reveals that the suffering of the Serbian and other non-Albanian populations was relativised at multiple levels throughout the report. Thus, the report clearly reflects the interplay of two parallel objectives. On the one hand, its authors could not entirely disregard the violence, the number of victims, the destruction of homes and property,

the devastation of religious sites, and the profound consequences that remained. On the other hand, there was a discernible effort to present the events in a manner that would in no way call into question the credibility of the entire system of international military and civilian administration in Kosovo and Metohija. It is precisely in this discrepancy between facts and interpretation that the essence of the document lies. The more evident the consequences of the March Pogrom became, the greater the need to politically and institutionally lessen their substantive significance. Consequently, the report neither denies what occurred nor provides a clear and comprehensive account of the events. By omitting the broader historical context and seeking to characterise all acts of violence in an inadequate manner, the report attempts to create the impression that the events constituted an isolated security crisis rather than the culmination of a prolonged process that had begun in the canteens of the student halls of residence in Priština as far back as 1981. In this way, the issues of responsibility, accountability, and, most importantly, how such attacks were allowed to occur at all were entirely marginalised. By following this course, supporters of the so-called independence of Kosovo gradually shifted the focus away from the suffering of the victims towards the perceived necessity of accelerating political processes whose ultimate objective was the attempted detachment of the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

It should also be borne in mind that the extent of the (lack of) success of the international interim administration and the KFOR mission cannot be assessed solely on the basis of a single document, but also by what has remained unchanged ever since. More than two decades after the March Po-

grom, the obstacles and hardships have not been overcome. Serbs, as well as other non-Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija, continue to live in conditions of uncertainty, with minimal trust in the mechanisms of the international presence and under persistent tensions fuelled by the activities of the authorities in Priština. In recent years, crises in the north of Kosovo and Metohija have become particularly pronounced, marked by unilateral and escalatory actions by the authorities led by Albin Kurti, frequent arrests followed by politically motivated trials, incursions by the special units of the Priština police into predominantly Serbian communities, and a series of other incidents that have further deepened the sense of insecurity. At the same

time, numerous ethnically motivated attacks, the desecration of the heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and pressure exerted on the Serbian population rarely receive attention commensurate with their frequency and significance. Viewed from this perspective, the March Pogrom belongs not only to the past, nor can it be reduced to a single tragic episode in recent history. Regrettably, it remains a lasting reminder that violence which has not been fully investigated and adequately sanctioned cannot truly be overcome. Instead, it continues to endure through the consequences it has left behind, permanently shaping political processes, relations between communities, and everyday life long after the last flames of its destruction were extinguished.

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