



KOMISIONERI I PËRKOZHSHËM PËR MEDIA  
PRIVREMENI KOMESAR ZA MEDIJE  
TEMPORARY MEDIA COMMISSIONER

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## **PREFACE**

On the evening of 16 March, Kosovo media reported the disappearance and presumed drowning of three boys in the Iber River near Mitrovica. Within hours, the body of one boy was recovered. Despite appeals for caution from UNMIK police, television reports quickly and firmly attributed the deaths to an attack by Serbs, giving this incident the immediate potential to heighten already tense ethnic relations in Mitrovica and elsewhere in Kosovo.

The following morning an organized protest of schoolchildren in Mitrovica, focused on this incident, turned violent. Clashes between protestors and police and KFOR spread rapidly across Kosovo as attacks began on Serb homes, community facilities and churches. Three days later, 19 people—11 Albanians and 8 Serbs—were dead, hundreds were injured, several hundred homes of Serbs and other minorities were burned or looted, 4,000 people were sheltering at KFOR bases and other havens, and some of Kosovo's most historic religious heritage lay in smoking ruins.

International community officials, including the Special Representative of the Secretary General, have held media at least partly responsible for this disaster. This report examines the conduct of the most influential media in Kosovo, the three Kosovo-wide television broadcasters, each of which currently reaches 70% of the population. It also makes certain remedial recommendations and indicates preliminary findings of violations of the TMC Code of Conduct for Broadcast Media.

Part I examines the conduct of the public broadcaster, RTK; Part II that of KohaVision or KTV; and Part III that of TV 21.

We have focused on the performance of the three Kosovo-wide television broadcasters because they are the main source of news and information for Kosovans, and to an important degree they set the agenda and tone for other media. For the sake of time, we have limited this inquiry to the critical period from the evening of Tuesday 16 March and the first broadcast of the deaths near Caber, through the spread of violence throughout Kosovo on 17 March.

Our purpose is to identify any violations of the TMC codes of conduct for media and to draw constructive lessons for the future support and development of news media in Kosovo.

We believe that the essential questions about media performance in Kosovo immediately before and during the violence that began on 17 March are:

(a) whether, or to what extent, media fulfilled their responsibility to inform the public about events while reducing the emotional or inciting elements of their coverage to an absolute minimum; and

(b) whether, and to what extent, media attempted to use all available means, including the statements of public officials and expert analysts, to encourage calm.

Seeking to identify a clear cause-and-effect relationship between media actions and public reactions is not likely to be a fruitful line of inquiry. Mobile telephones also played a role in spreading protests and violence. Simultaneous coverage of Serb protests underway in Caglavica, stemming from a drive-by shooting of a young Serb man, was also a factor in sparking public anger.

Protests and subsequent violence that broke out on the morning of 17 March in Mitrovica appear to have been to some degree organized and orchestrated, as were some attacks on Serb houses and churches elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> This does not, however, excuse errors of journalism. Prudent, calm and accurate journalism might have denied organized elements a pretext to riot, loot and burn, and might have helped lessen the scale and intensity of violence that did occur.

Some of most inflammatory material broadcast by any of the main television stations on 17 March came in the form of statements issued by Kosovo political leaders and organizations. Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi was virtually alone among Kosovo leaders in appealing for calm while assigning no blame for the children's deaths.<sup>2</sup>

The *potential* impact of media – television in particular – in volatile situations is nevertheless well established. For this reason it is essential that where ethnic tension already exists, broadcasters and print media be intensely conscious of the need to inform their audiences while minimizing the emotional

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<sup>1</sup> International observers noted that organized protests began near the bridge connecting North and South Mitrovica with a march by approximately 1,000 schoolchildren, ushered by teachers. Some carried banners protesting the killing of Albanian children. A seemingly organized group of about 100 young men appeared to shadow the march. As the children left the bridge area, the men were seen to charge across the bridge to trigger a confrontation with small numbers of Serbs on the north side. Pitched battles and gunfire quickly broke out. TMC Interview on 26 March in Mitrovica with UNMIK police media representatives Barry Pollin and Tracy Becker and UNMIK spokesman Gyorgy Kakuk.

<sup>2</sup> Statements issued on the afternoon of 17 March include one from the Party for a Democratic Kosovo (PDK) linking the death of the children to "Serb intelligence" and "Serb criminal organizations controlled by Belgrade." The Minister of Education said the "killing of the children is reminiscent of the Holocaust." President of the Assembly Nexhat Daci, in a statement to TV 21, called for calm and urged people to beware of inaccurate media reports but later told RTK that "scenes of pursuing dogs reminds me of a past of fascism." In apparent reference to Mitrovica, he added that the "denazification of that place is not done."

content of coverage and providing mature, responsible context. The factual accuracy, tone and context of reports touching on any aspect of ethnicity are particularly crucial to prevent broadcasts from becoming immediate catalysts for violence.<sup>3</sup> In the face of explosive allegations, there is no latitude in professional journalism for rumor or guessing about the truth. *If a key part of a story is uncertain—for example, the truth of an allegation of an ethnic attack—journalists are supposed to say so.*

**Pristina, 23 April 2004**

**Robert Gillette  
Temporary Media Commissioner**

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<sup>3</sup> Article 2.2 of the TMC Code of Conduct for Broadcast Media states that: “Broadcasters will not broadcast any material that encourages crime or criminal activities or which carries imminent risk of causing harm, such harm being defined as death, or injury, or damage to property or other violence.”



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## **PART I**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO RTK**

## SUMMARY

1. The presumed drowning death of three young boys near Caber, reported by RTK, KTV and TV 21 on the evening of 16 March, was a major news story that warranted prominent but accurate and careful media coverage regardless of the circumstances. The allegation—as yet unproven—of an ethnic element in the incident warranted very cautious, factual treatment of the story.
2. Television interviews with a traumatized 14-year-old survivor raise serious ethical questions. It is probably true that, if the boy had not been interviewed, allegations of Serb involvement would nevertheless have quickly surfaced. Prudent journalists, however, would have given at least equal weight to police statements that there was (and still is) no independent evidence to support these allegations. Prudent journalists would have underscored the uncertainty of what actually happened to the four boys. Prudent journalists would have sought to draw clarifying detail from the boy.
3. With the exception of brief reports from Mitrovica by one correspondent early in the evening of 16 March, RTK displayed no such prudence. Throughout the evening of 16 March, RTK minimized and eventually simply ignored police appeals for caution on the crucial point of Serb involvement. Instead, RTK attached unwarranted credence to a confused and in some respects contradictory and evolving story from the surviving fourth boy about the alleged involvement of Serb villagers. By late in the evening of 16 March, RTK had departed from even this questionable basis for a story to categorically assert that Serbs had attacked the children and caused them to drown.
4. As RTK's reporting of the story moved increasingly toward categorical assertions of Serb responsibility for the deaths, based on no new information at all, the story told by the surviving boy moved in the opposite direction. In his second interview on the night of 16 March, to KTV, the boy made clear that he and his companions had fled not from people—presumably Serb villagers—but from a dog, a point that he made still clearer in a third interview aired by TV 21 on the evening of 17 March.
5. Having departed from the story's thin factual base, RTK proceeded through the evening of 16 March to build upon its own unsupported assertion of a Serb attack to create a dangerously misleading, inflammatory context for the drownings which asserted that the three boys were merely the latest victims in the struggle of Kosovo Albanians for freedom from Serb oppression. RTK kept the story almost constantly in front of viewers with scrolling texts and special newscasts, generating an explosive atmosphere of patriotic hysteria around this tragedy which reflected itself in newspapers the next day and in statements by leading political figures who coupled calls for calm on the afternoon of 17 March with attacks on "Serb criminals" and even Belgrade intelligence agents who were presumed to have murdered the children.

6. RTK, alone among the three Kosovo-wide television broadcasters on the night of 16-17 March, created an emotional and politicized context for the story by interviews that categorically attributed the boys' deaths to "Serb bandits" and "Serb Chetnik hordes," based on no factual evidence whatsoever. An RTK presenter added to a developing ambiance of disaster with repeated questions to correspondents about how the population was reacting to what was now taken as the established fact of a Serb attack. One RTK correspondent, repeating the "Serb attack" assertion with no qualification and no reference to police appeals for caution, answered that a mood of "revolt" was growing among citizens in the Mitrovica area aimed at UNMIK police who include Serb officers among their ranks.
7. By these and other actions, RTK was chiefly if not exclusively responsible among the three Kosovo-wide television broadcasters for transforming the deaths of three boys from a tragic news story into dangerous political theater. As if seeking to underscore this event as a national catastrophe, even before it had become one, RTK ceased all advertising on the evening of 16 March and by late evening was substituting somber classical music for most of its regular programming. By contrast, KTV and TV 21 did so only many hours later when catastrophe actually occurred with the outbreak and rapid spread of civil disorder on the morning and afternoon of 17 March.
8. The skill and courage of many RTK news staff stands in contrast to the performance of RTK management, whose news judgment was frequently, if not consistently, marked by reckless disregard for the risk of inciting and exacerbating civil disorder.
9. The fundamental error of RTK senior management and some correspondents—not all—was to allow what appears to have been a distorted sense of patriotism to overwhelm professionalism. For nearly 24 hours from the evening of 16 March, journalism at RTK became propaganda.
10. As coverage of the violence began on 17 March, RTK and KTV displayed little understanding of the difference between reporting factual news and sensationalizing it with prolonged, dramatic "No Comment" segments of video of violent clashes and chaotic scenes of bloodied victims being brought into hospitals. RTK, alone among broadcasters, defiantly resisted appeals by the TMC to "lower the emotional temperature" of its reporting while continuing to provide full and factual news.

## FINDINGS OF FACT WITH REGARD TO RADIO-TELEVISION KOSOVO

1. According to RTK managers, RTK television first learned of an incident which they understood to involve the drowning of three boys in the Caber area, possibly involving Serbs, from phone calls from ordinary citizens between 18:30 and 19:00 on 16 March.<sup>4</sup> RTK telephoned UNMIK police spokesperson Tracy Becker, who, after checking on the report, called back shortly after 19:00 to advise that three Albanian children had been reported missing in the river. Ms. Becker recalls that, "I specifically asked RTK please do not use the reference to Serbs, as it will increase ethnic tension" and because the ethnic element of the story was not confirmed or corroborated.
2. Seeking further information, RTK telephoned contacts in Caber as well as Mr. Halit Barani, a well known and, in the international community, controversial, human rights activist in Mitrovica.<sup>5</sup> Mr. Barani reportedly "knew nothing" about the incident, but said that an explosion had just occurred in the Three-Towers area of Mitrovica.<sup>6</sup>
3. In its main evening news at 19:30 RTK's presenter read a brief text report saying that police were searching for three missing boys along the Iber, and that their disappearance might have been related to a quarrel between Serbs and Albanians, thus ignoring the plea for caution from the UNMIK police spokesperson. A camera crew arrived at Caber around 20:00 to seek an interview with the surviving 14-year-old boy. Police saw Mr. Barani in Caber at 21:30, following journalists and attending an UNMIK police news conference. Whether he influenced the story the boy told is not known.
4. Beginning about 20:30 on 16 March evening RTK began running a text message on screen alerting viewers to the incident and promising a special news update which aired at about 22.30. "According to the information that we have up to now, they are victims of a Serb attack in Caber village," the text message said. **[See Transcript 1]**
5. In Mitrovica, as media gathered to cover the search for the missing boys through the evening of 16 March, UNMIK police said they explained repeatedly to journalists from RTK and other media that no information was available to confirm or corroborate the story emerging from the surviving boy that Serb villagers and dogs were somehow involved in the incident. Police spokesperson Becker said " I talked to RTK and KTV not less than three times. I said, ' Do not jump to conclusions. If it is true, we will tell

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<sup>4</sup> Group interview on 26 March with RTK managers Astrit Salihu, deputy director general; Liridon Cahani, director of RTK television; Mufail Limani, chief news editor of RTK television; Elvana Prekazi, chief counsel of RTK; and Rafaela Prifti, RTK public relations representative.

<sup>5</sup> Chairman of the Council for Defense of Freedom and Human Rights in Mitrovica.

<sup>6</sup> See Note 4; Mufail Limani.

you.” She added: “I took calls from the Associated Press, from Reuters and others. I told them all the same thing: We could not confirm this story.”

6. UNMIK spokesperson Gyorgy Kakuk said that journalists simply were not listening to the cautionary pleas of internationals on the scene: “We felt that evening that it was hopeless, that the message was not going to get through.”
7. Ms. Becker set up a staging area for journalists, where they could film and receiving briefings, but would avoid interfering with search teams along the river banks. UNMIK representatives said that the RTK crew was particularly uncooperative, aggressively following search teams against police orders and attempting to film the body of the first child pulled from the river later in the evening. Ms. Becker said of the RTK camera crew: “They almost got themselves arrested. I insisted that they were not to follow the searchers, not to film the body, that we were treating this as a crime scene. But we found RTK at the body, apparently trying to film it. They were not cooperative at all, all night long.”
8. RTK aired a special news report at 22:28 that was factual and reasonably cautious. A journalist at the scene in Mitrovica, Rozafa Metaj, reported cautiously on the search for the bodies of the three missing boys who, she said, “fell into the river” near Caber. She made no assertion of blame. A 12-second sound bite followed from Ms. Becker, who was quoted in translation as saying, “Initially there were voices that the incident was ethnically motivated, but for the moment we don’t have such information, and we cannot confirm it.” **[See Transcript 2]**
9. RTK then aired a two-minute interview with the surviving boy, Fitim Veseli. Subdued and composed, seated on a bed in his home in Caber, he recalled how he and his cousins and brother were walking near the river that afternoon “when some Serbs with a dog have, for example, sworn at us from a house. We looked at them, I can identify them if I see them, and I know their house, and we tried to escape but we couldn’t because we were close to the river.” He described in harrowing detail how he tried to hold his brother on his back as they struggled across the river with two other boys, but the current swept them away. *He did not say that Serbs had chased them into the river.*
10. The RTK journalist, speaking gently, did not try to draw additional detail from the boy. Two hours later, in an interview with KTV, the boy would make clear that he and the other boys were in fact afraid of the dog, not the Serbs, who were too far away, he said, to cause them any harm. In a third television interview filmed the next day by TV 21 at the scene of the alleged attack, the boy would point to a distant house—seemingly at least 100 meters away—where he said, “because we did not see the Serbs, they swore us from that house and then we saw them and we started to run away but they released the dog, and the dog was very fast and we could not escape from it.” He was not asked why he thought the dog had

been “released,” rather than simply running after the boys on its own volition.<sup>7</sup>

11. RTK's politicization of the drownings began with its regularly scheduled Blic evening news program, which aired at about 23:15. Opening the news, the presenter flatly asserted that the three missing boys were "victims of an attack by a group of Serbs," an assertion that ignored police appeals for caution and exceeded what the surviving boy had said. **[See Transcript 3]**
12. Correspondent Petrit Musolli repeated the assertion, turning an assumption into fact: “Police, KFOR and the TMK have not yet found the bodies of the three missing children in the Iber River, who fell there [while] being chased by a group of Serbs.” Ignoring or unaware of the UNMIK police position that the surviving boy’s story remained uncorroborated, the correspondent added: “So far, police did not explain, and gave no more information than the story of Fitim Veseli, the only one found. The police say all the information they have is from the story of Fitim Veseli.” This statement implied that the boy had spoken of being chased into the river by Serbs, which he had not, and it failed to convey the message that the police were struggling to communicate: *That there was no evidence to support, let alone verify, the story told by the traumatized boy.*
13. The Blic presenter, who appeared to understand the story’s explosive potential, asked correspondent Musolli in Mitrovica, “How is the situation in Mitrovica, is it under control, how are the citizens reacting?” and repeated the question twice more in the news show. The correspondent, again emphasizing a Serb “attack” on the children, replied that, “The situation is calm at the moment” but that “almost all citizens” are heading toward Caber, while police were moving to control roads “especially close to the houses of Serbs from where the children were attacked, who were forced to jump into the river to survive.” Police had received reports that groups of people were en route to Caber, but the reference to “almost all citizens” on the move was clearly a gross exaggeration.<sup>8</sup>
14. A repeat of the interview with the surviving boy then followed, along with the 12-second sound clip from Becker, which, in translation, gave an exceedingly weak version of the cautionary message she was trying to convey. Although she gave at least two other statements that night, RTK made no use of them.

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<sup>7</sup> When the alleged incident occurred, two other boys were accompanying the four who went into the river but reportedly left the scene by another route. No media are known to have interviewed them. Police have done so, but report that the two boys claim to have seen and heard nothing. Police have subsequently visited the house indicated by the surviving boy, but say they have found no evidence of dogs or villagers fitting the descriptions the boy provided.

<sup>8</sup> See note 2. Tracy Becker recalls: “I went back to the TV crews specifically to address rumors of some Albanians coming to Caber to make trouble. I explained that people needed to remain calm, stay home and allow police to focus on finding the children instead of having deploy manpower to handle crowd control. I repeated that the rumor of Serb involvement was unfounded. I asked them to air that information, which clearly they did not.”

15. In preparation for the Blic news show at 23:00, RTK managers invited Mr. Barani to appear as studio guest on the live show. Mr. Salihu, the RTK deputy director, said they did so because they considered him to be a “neutral, objective, well-respected” advocate of human rights, and because the Blic show always features a brief studio interview with someone speaking about the day’s main story, which the drownings had now become. UNMIK police regard Mr. Barani as superficial in his approach to human rights investigations, careless with his facts, and eager to publicize any alleged wrong-doing by Serbs. Only RTK carried interviews with Mr. Barani on 16 and 17 March.
16. RTK managers acknowledge that as the Blic show was being prepared, they were aware that ethnic and political tensions were running unusually high in Kosovo.<sup>9</sup> They noted that there had been protests stemming from a recent hand-grenade explosion outside President Rugova’s house in Pristina. The same day, 16 March, a confrontation was developing in Caglavica between Albanians and Serbs—the latter blocking the main road to protest the drive-by shooting of a young Serb the day before. In addition, KLA veterans had staged marches in several locations—RTK would put the number at 27 with no attribution for this claim—to protest the arrest of KLA veterans on suspicion of involvement in war crimes.
17. RTK news chief Limani said that he was so concerned that the Caber incident might set off ethnic conflict in the Mitrovica area that he telephoned Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi at about 22:00 on Tuesday night to warn him about the developing situation.
18. Following the boy’s interview on Blic, the presenter turned to Mr. Barani, who stood next to her in the Pristina studio, and asked what he could add to the story. Mr. Barani described the deaths of the boys as the latest in a long line of “attacks” by “Serb bandits” on Kosovo Albanians, and linked the drownings at Caber to the protests under way in Caglavica, which, he appeared to suggest, might be a Serb provocation. He did not mention the specific reason for the Serb protests, the shooting of a young Serb man.<sup>10</sup>
19. Mr. Barani thereby politicized the still unexplained deaths of the boys in incendiary terms. The Blic presenter—and the show’s producers, who should have been able to speak to her through an earphone—failed to challenge Mr. Barani’s characterization of the incident as an act of “Serb bandits.” His depiction of the incident was allowed to stand during an update broadcast by RTK at about 01:00 on 17 March, and he then pro-

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<sup>9</sup> See note 4.

<sup>10</sup> From a TMC transcription and translation of Mr. Barani’s comment: “We are used to these Serb bandits. Besides that, tonight at 19:17 in the suburb ‘17 September’ they threw a bomb near the Three Towers [in Mitrovica.] We think that is revenge for the case that happened in Caglavica, the case that showed what Serbs are willing to do when the situation is calming down in Kosovo. They play at any cost. It is not to their advantage to have a stable Kosovo.” UNMIK police note that there is no evidence to support Mr. Barani’s claim of Serb responsibility for the grenade explosion.

ceeded to amplify it in a second interview broadcast a half hour later. *We are not aware that RTK has ever revisited the subject of what actually happened at Caber.*

20. The story of the drownings in Mitrovica was followed on the 16 March edition of Blic by two stories that added powerful emotional content to the newscast. One was a report of what RTK said were “two hours of nationwide protests” in 27 locations around Kosovo of former KLA fighters on suspicion of war crimes. Narrating video of protestors in Pristina, RTK, the presenter said some of the banners were directed to UNMIK, including some reading, “Stop Serbian Administration-UNMIK.” A third story with film from the scene reported growing violence in Caglavica, with injuries to an UNMIK police officer and damage to a vehicle. Police, President Rugova and Minister Rexhepi were quoted as condemning the wounding of the young Serb that sparked the protests.
21. Blic then shifted to a series of bland political stories that normally comprise the bulk of television news, including a visit of the PDK party leader Hasim Thaci in Washington, a political disagreement between the ministers of finance and public services, and a story about a meeting of NGOs to discuss methods of soliciting donations.
22. Following the Blic show, RTK broadcast a text message reporting the recovery of the body of one missing boy and promoting a later update of the story: “Body of 12-year-old found one kilometer from the scene. Special Edition to follow at 01:00.” The special edition repeated the earlier story, adding the news of the recovery of one body. It did not repeat the brief interview with Mr. Barani. Nor did RTK challenge his characterization of the incident as the work of “Serb bandits” or otherwise inject a note of caution or skepticism in the story. **[See Transcript 4]**
23. At 01:35, RTK broadcast a further news update that opened with a fresh report by Petrit Musolli, who again ignored police appeals for caution and the story of surviving boy to categorically assert that the children had been “chased by a group of Serbs who let their dogs loose” and “not being able to escape from these Serbs, were forced to jump into the River Iber.” This update deleted the Becker clip, leaving it without a police viewpoint. **[See Transcript 5]**
24. Mr. Musolli’s report set the scene for a further interview with Mr. Barani, this time not in the studio but on the sandy riverbank near Caber. Mr. Barani repeated his reference to “Serb bandits” and then went on to speculate how the local population might be expected to react. He did so in a manner that effectively invited Kosovans to express their anger, suggesting that the boys were killed by Serbs in revenge for the wounding of the Serb in Caglavica: “It is understandable what would be the reaction not just of the inhabitants of Caber to whom the tragedy happened, but also by those to whom this did not happen, but who have heard about it. Of course they are outraged, while we can suppose that this is revenge for the wounded Serb in Caglavica—while that was a ‘show’ for which the

Serbs have an affinity. Every time when the situation in Kosovo starts to stabilize, they find different ways to do this kind of thing to destabilize the situation."

25. RTK broadcast no countervailing or alternative viewpoint to Mr. Barani's incendiary speculation, then or later. On the contrary, an hour later at 02:36 on 17 March, RTK aired a further news special with Mr. Barani. This time he said nothing, but, standing by the river, he held the arm of Zaim Deliu, the grieving father of one of the boys. Like Mr. Barani, Mr. Deliu was certain that he knew what had happened. He said, "My son, on this ghastly day, was found dead from Serb Chetnik hordes....They killed him in the most miserable way, by forcing him to jump into this river." **[See Transcript 6]**
26. At 06:00 on 17 March, a video text message carried by RTK continued to misquote the survivor: "Fitim Veseli, witness of the event, has said that they were chased with a dog by a group of Serbs from North Mitrovica." **[See Transcript 7]**
27. Shortly after 07:00, RTK repeated the news of the deaths of the boys three times in general news updates, each time including excerpts of its interview with the surviving boy, but at no time injecting the cautionary perspective urged by the police the night before in Mitrovica. The interviews with Mr. Barani and Mr. Deliu were not repeated.
28. At 11:52 on Wednesday, 17 March a text scroll over a symphony orchestra announced the outbreak of violence between protesters in Mitrovica and police. A special news update quickly followed, alternating with news scrolls over classical music, to set the pattern for much of that day's coverage. The story now shifted to the developing violence, and the story of what had actually happened to the boys was abandoned.
29. At 12:28, a recorded symphony concert ended and RTK carried a text message across the top of the screen carrying further news about the growing violence. Underneath this text message, RTK editors chose to air a video of high political symbolism, as if to invite the viewing public across Kosovo to remember its patriotism at this particular moment. The video was a brief film excerpt of a concert last summer in Pristina in tribute to Fatmir Limaj, a KLA fighter regarded by many Kosovans as a hero and by the international community as a probable war criminal. He currently awaits trial in The Hague. As the text message reporting violence in Mitrovica crawled across the screen, Mr. Limaj's face appeared beneath it with the words, "Your Freedom, Our Freedom," followed by children singing and other musical salutes to Limaj for the next 22 minutes. This was RTK's introduction to its first news special of the day covering the violence in Mitrovica.
30. As the afternoon progressed, RTK aired a series of telephone reports on the outbreak of violence in Mitrovica, including reports of "gunfire from North Mitrovica," followed by film of a solemn march of children to Caber to

protest what now was unambiguously presented as the murder of three Albanian children by Serbs. In a report from Caber, RTK carried still more remarks by Mr. Barani. There was no further effort by RTK to clarify what actually had or had not happened to the dead children, and no effort to suggest, as BBC World soon reported from Kosovo, that the children had drowned “under still unexplained circumstances.”

31. Throughout the afternoon and on through the main evening news at 19:30 on 17 March, RTK coverage was marked by the use of long segments of dramatic, unedited video of violent protests and bloodied victims—some featuring closeup views of bleeding limbs and the shocked faces of victims and family members—with no explanatory narration, comment or context. It appeared that RTK had adopted a *cinema verite* approach to journalism in the midst of civil disorder without regard to its emotional impact on the audience.
32. At 14:35 the Temporary Media Commissioner issued an urgent e-mail warning to all broadcasters, noting their moral and professional obligation under the circumstances to minimize the emotional content of broadcasts so as to inform but not inflame the audience.<sup>11</sup> Between 13:00 and 14:00 on 17 March, the TMC visited TV 21, KTV and RTK to repeat and elaborate on this message in person, noting broadcasters' right and obligation to report the news fully, but asking them to do everything possible to “lower the emotional temperature” of coverage.
33. TMC specifically asked the three Kosovo-wide broadcasters to stop running dramatic “No Comment” video of violence and victims that provided no information but by its nature invited viewers to react purely emotionally. RTK ran one such uncommented, unedited video that afternoon for seven minutes. RTK ignored the TMC request, airing a chaotic segment from a hospital emergency ward at least four times during the day and inserting it into the main evening news at 19:30.
34. During the visit to RTK, the TMC affirmed RTK’s obligation to fully report news but appealed to news managers to do everything they could to urge calm. Managers said that RTK could not editorialize on the violence, lest it risk losing credibility, and said they were waiting instead for political leaders to speak out. Beginning shortly after 14:00, statements by the Prime Minister, the Assembly leader Mr. Nexhat Daci, President Rugova and others became available. RTK immediately aired these statements and did so repeatedly in special newscasts through the rest of the afternoon and evening. RTK itself provided no other source of context or analysis for the day’s events.
35. The main news at 19:30 on Wednesday, 17 March, provided an opportunity to emphasize calls for calm and order over the alarming scenes of violence and bloodshed that had dominated the day’s news coverage. How-

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<sup>11</sup> TMC efforts to e-mail an urgent warning began at about 12:30, but computer network problems delayed the transmission for nearly two hours.

ever, RTK news managers chose instead to emphasize the dramatic scenes of violence and bloodshed their journalists had captured from around Kosovo. These scenes from Mitrovica, Caglavica and elsewhere occupied the first half of the news before viewers saw Kosovan and international community leaders appealing for calm. *This was a rare, if not unique, instance in which official statements by people such as the President and Prime Minister failed to lead the evening news.*

36. The closing item on the 19:30 news was a text read out by the presenter quoting a statement issued earlier in the day by the executive director of the Association for Professional Journalists in Kosovo, Baton Haxhiu. It accused the TMC of attempting to censor the news and "camouflage the truth."<sup>12</sup>

37. In early evening of 17 March, OSCE Head of Mission summoned the managers of the three Kosovo-wide television stations to his office for a meeting from 19:15 to 19:45, which the TMC also attended. Ambassador Fieschi bluntly reminded the managers of the lesson of Rwanda, in which journalists have been held legally accountable for inciting violence, in that case, for war crimes. He made clear that media would be held accountable for their actions in Kosovo as well. The meeting came too late to affect the main RTK newscast, but later that evening the excited tone of RTK coverage moderated and its use of uncommented video ceased.

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<sup>12</sup> Mr. Haxhiu later told the TMC that he issued the statement after receiving a complaint from RTK, but acknowledged that he failed to check the facts of the matter with TMC first. The AGPK has issued no other statement or comment on the performance of journalists during the disorder.

## CONCLUSIONS WITH REGARD TO RADIO-TELEVISION KOSOVO

1. A number of RTK journalists and camera crews displayed commendable courage and poise in reporting from violent, chaotic situations across Kosovo. Regional correspondents, reporting mainly by telephone, ranged in style from calm and factual to inappropriately emotional. The latter should not have aired.
2. The skill and courage of many RTK news staff stands in contrast to the performance of RTK management, whose news judgment was frequently, if not consistently, marked by reckless disregard for the risk of inciting and exacerbating civil disorder.<sup>13</sup>
3. From the first fragmentary reports of the drowning deaths of the three boys through the main evening news on 17 March, the character of RTK news coverage appears to have been driven by an appetite for drama and sensation, and perhaps by competition with the two private stations, with no moderating sense of responsibility for the effects its broadcasts might have in a volatile political climate. RTK's conception of journalism appears to have been one of *cinema verite*, passively reflecting the violence their cameras captured, with no professional responsibility to provide context or reasoned comment until political leaders finally did so.
4. The story of the drowning deaths of three boys, whatever the cause, was unquestionably major news, as was the violence that ensued the next day. Full and factual coverage was unquestionably warranted. But so was prudence, caution and explanatory context that could have moderated reaction—or minimized the risk that the deaths could be used in the first place as a plausible pretext for the outbreak of violence in Mitrovica and elsewhere.
5. RTK news managers chose to accept the boy's story of the incident as he told it in a brief interview, as true and reliable, and to dismiss the cautious police perspective. This was reckless and unprofessional.
6. RTK managers say they found the boy's story inherently plausible, whereas the police, by neither confirming nor denying it, left open the possibility that the story was true. *Careful journalism, however, does not allow for guessing the truth. Careful journalism required clear acknowledgement of uncertainty.* Considering the acknowledged risk of an explosion of ethnic tension, and the absence of any supporting evidence for the boy's story, real prudence would have given far greater if not total preference to the cautious (and accurate) police view that there was no reliable information as to what actually had happened. As the BBC would say in its early reports, the boys drowned "in unexplained circumstances."

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<sup>13</sup> RTK managers have noted that they did restrain themselves from airing much bloodier and more disturbing videos of injuries than were actually broadcast, and generally refrained from "vox pop" interviews with people in crowds, which might have produced incendiary comments.

7. Some Kosovo journalists have subsequently blamed UNMIK police for failing to provide adequate information about the circumstances of the boys' deaths on 16 March. Police, however, cannot be expected to provide information they do not have and are not in a position to quickly obtain. *A serious journalistic error shared by all three television broadcasters on 16 March was their own failure to fully and clearly acknowledge the uncertainty of what had actually happened to the boys.* Had they done so, incendiary accusations aimed at "Serb bandits"—and by implication, at all Kosovo Serbs—might have sounded less convincing.
8. It is regrettable in the first place that the 14-year-old survivor of the Caber disaster was not at least temporarily sheltered from media exposure by parents, police or doctors. It appears that all three television stations did have parental approval for the interviews they made on 16 and 17 March, a requirement of generally accepted ethics where children are involved. It is inexcusable, however, to assume that the sole source of information in this story—a traumatized young boy who may well be feeling guilt for the loss of his brother and cousins—is a reliable source. Professional caution required journalists to recognize that boy's memory of events might not be accurate or complete, or that he was not able to tell the story well and fully, or that there was possibly an innocent explanation unrelated to ethnicity, and unknown to the boy, for why they had been chased. *Indeed, by the next day and the third interview, Serbs were not chasing the boys at all. It was down to the dog.*
9. The expressed concern of RTK management about a political situation so volatile that they felt obliged to warn the Prime Minister on the evening 16 March stands in stark contrast to material they chose to air—two separate and incendiary interviews with Mr. Barani; correspondent reports that turned a traumatized boy's unclear story into an assertion of fact that Serbs killed the children; a grieving father's bitter anger toward Serbs. Simultaneously, RTK reporting minimized then dropped altogether efforts by UNMIK police to urge caution and emphasize the absence of reliable information about what actually had happened.
10. Even the structure of the Blic news show at 23:15 contributed unnecessarily to a sense of rapidly developing, widespread threat to Albanian national interests—the deaths at Caber, the protests of war veterans, the disturbances at Caglavica. The same information could have been conveyed more moderately by breaking up this sequence with the routine political stories that were instead relegated to the back of the program.
11. No less puzzling was RTK's decision to cease advertising and substitute symphony concerts for normal programs—the kind of warning flags of grim news normally associated with the death of a leader or a national catastrophe—many hours before the catastrophe actually happened, and before KTV and TV 21 changed their programming amid breaking news about the spreading disorder.

12. As for RTK's use of the Limaj concert clip underneath text scrolls reporting violent clashes, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was a deliberate effort to heighten public emotions.
13. Through 16 March and into the next day, RTK passed up obvious opportunities to inject calm, reason and caution into the Caber story, and instead helped materially to transform the death of three boys into a flashpoint for renewed ethnic conflict.
14. Much of RTK reporting on the evening of 16 March, with its references to "Serb bandits" and "Chetnik hordes" and the casual use of the term "attack" to describe what had happened to the children—in addition to other material broadcast on 17 March—appears to conflict with RTK's own Editorial Code of Conduct in regard to the use of "emotive" or "provocative" language. The RTK code of conduct states in part: "Be sensitive to the effect of language. The tone of our reporting should be calm and moderate and the use of language should not be emotive. It is particularly important that in reporting conflict we do not use words or phrases that are emotionally charged."
15. RTK's coverage of the Caber story on 16 March arguably constitutes a violation of Article 2.2 of the TMC Broadcast Code of Conduct prohibiting the broadcast of material with a clear and immediate risk of inciting violence, and will be treated as such.
16. With its continuing coverage of the boys' deaths on the morning of 17 March, RTK sustained its failure to provide reasonable context, perspective, caution and skepticism about the Caber deaths. On the contrary, RTK aired further comments from Mr. Barani in a brief interview in Caber that afternoon.
17. As violence broke out in Mitrovica and across Kosovo on 17 March, RTK's coverage was marked by the same appetite for sensation displayed the previous night, a trait most clearly marked by the repeated broadcast of long segments of raw, uncommented video of violence and bloodied victims that provided essentially no information but encouraged viewers simply to react. RTK management ignored a specific TMC request in the early afternoon of 17 March to stop the practice, which continued through the main evening news at 19:30. In this same newscast RTK associated itself with a statement that publicly defied TMC efforts to reduce emotionalism in television coverage of the violence.
18. The emotive impact of the main evening newscast on 17 March was further heightened by its structure, which gave precedence to images of bloodshed and destruction and pushed the calls of political leaders for calm and reason to the back half of the program.<sup>14</sup> As it was, some of

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<sup>14</sup> RTK managers explained on 26 March that they debated whether to give precedence to calls for calm but decided that pictures of the continuing violence were fresher news, so should take precedence. By contrast, TV 21 reversed the order, putting political statements first, deliberately to emphasize the appeals for calm.

these statements coupled calls for calm with blame on Serbs or Serbia for the death of the children.

19. RTK's editorial decisions, management's resistance to moderation and the resulting program on 17 March arguably constitute a second violation of Article 2.2 of the TMC Broadcast Code of Conduct and will be treated as such.
20. A general lack of explanation and context in its coverage of the violence deprived RTK of much of its potential ability to stimulate rational thinking by the audience. The same deficiency was noted in coverage by KTV and TV 21. This reflects a general systemic weakness in television news in Kosovo. News on all three Kosovo-wide television stations is heavily dominated by "protocol" events—official statements, meetings and news conferences—with a notable lack of explanatory journalism on issues that affect the general public. Context and analysis are generally left to evening discussion shows, which themselves do not often provide illuminating debate. The lack of practice in quickly finding appropriate experts to provide context and explanation—one of the great strengths of broadcasters like CNN, BBC and other European public broadcasters—is most painfully felt in Kosovo in times of crisis.
21. The highly emotional and politicized coverage of events leading up to and through the initial stages of major civil disorder unavoidably raise concern about the ability and commitment of RTK to provide genuinely factual, balanced and comprehensive news coverage as Kosovo approaches elections in October.
22. RTK management has displayed a disturbing unwillingness or inability to understand that editorial independence from state control—which no one challenges—is associated with certain responsibilities, especially in conflict situations. These responsibilities include minimizing the inflammatory emotional content of broadcasting. Management's resistance to this ethical principle is especially surprising as it is clearly set out in RTK's own code of conduct.
23. There are clear indications that the RTK board of directors is unable to provide the kind of corporate guidance and supervision that the governing board of a public broadcaster should provide. One contributing factor may be reluctance on the part of RTK management to accept such supervision from its board. As an indication of the board's dysfunctionality, only four of its current eight members attended the regular monthly meeting scheduled on 24 March, at a time of crucial importance for RTK and the public it is meant to serve. The previous chairman of the board, Adem Demaci, has described the board as mainly "decorative."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Personal conversation with TMC.

24. Throughout the crisis, Serb radio and TV stations in Kosovo relied exclusively on broadcasters in Serbia for news, including state-controlled RTS. RTK currently comes nowhere near complying with the statutory requirement to provide at least 15 percent of its programming in minority languages.

## RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO RADIO-TELEVISION KOSOVO

- 1. Return a Senior International Adviser to RTK:** RTK requires urgent and sustained expert guidance in news management, pertaining especially to coverage of domestic conflict situations, and more generally to introduce explanatory, issue-oriented journalism to its news coverage. An international adviser would also increase confidence in the fairness of election coverage. We therefore recommend the prompt return of a senior international adviser to RTK at least for the remainder of this year. This position requires an individual with an unassailable reputation for journalistic integrity and experience with public broadcasters in this region.<sup>16</sup>
- 2. Review of RTK Corporate Governance:** Serious lapses of news judgment in a public broadcaster such as those observed in RTK are likely to be symptoms of systemic problems of process and decision-making in news operations and in overall governance. A review of the internal corporate governance of RTK is therefore required. The TMC recommends that UNMIK should conduct a review of the structure, functions and membership/personnel of the Board of Directors and Broadcasting Operations to ensure the presence of necessary skills, experience and temperament necessary to provide competent management and oversight of that management at RTK. Such a review should be carried out under the authority of UNMIK Regulation 2001/13, which establishes RTK. This review should in no way diminish the editorial independence of RTK.
- 3. Resist “Scapegoating” within RTK:** Organizations that are found to fail in their responsibilities tend to single out lower-ranking individuals for blame rather than candidly examining processes of management and implementation of standards, such as RTK’s own code of ethics. The board of directors and the international community should not accept sacrificial terminations as adequate remedies.
- 4. Active Implementation of the RTK Code of Conduct:** UNMIK and the RTK board should conduct an audit of the process by which the existing RTK code of conduct is made available to news staff, explained and enforced. Practical training for RTK news staff in conflict reporting should be designed and undertaken.
- 5. Expert Management Guidance for the RTK Board:** The RTK board of directors, whether or not it is restructured, will need close, expert guidance from carefully selected management consultants as it learns

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<sup>16</sup> This should not be taken as a unique or humiliating step. Virtually every other Kosovo institution already has an international adviser. They work in municipalities, in ministries and in the Office of Prime Minister. From July 2000 to December 2001, a respected former BBC journalist served as director general of RTK, and from then until August 2002 as adviser to the present Kosovan director general. An international adviser is currently in place at public radio and TV in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

to provide effective corporate governance. RTK management will also require guidance as it learns to provide appropriate information to its board and respond to its direction.

**6. Require RTK to Meet Statutory Requirements for Minority Service:**

A priority task of the RTK board should be to ensure that RTK meets its obligation under UNMIK Regulation 2001/13 to devote at least 15% of its programming to minority communities. UNMIK (including TMC) and the RTK Board should cooperate to devise a plan that meets this target. Emphasis should be on the quality, not quantity of programming. RTK should more actively contribute not merely to providing minority-language programming but programming through which majority and minority communities talk to each other.

**7. International Assistance for RTK:**

It should be recognized that RTK is one of Europe's newest public broadcasters. It is still in an early stage of development. The nearly total cessation of international assistance in late 2003 (with the exception of Swiss assistance for RTK's Radio Blue Sky) appears, in retrospect, premature. In addition to providing an in-house professional adviser and management consulting, the international community should consider a resumption of aid focused on further development of skills relevant to public service broadcasting, including co-production projects. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo and the European Broadcasting Union could play a central role as they did in the beginning.



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## **PART II**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO KTV**

## SUMMARY

1. The presumed drowning death of three young boys near Caber, reported by RTK, KTV and TV 21 on the evening of 16 March, was a major news story that warranted prominent but accurate and careful media coverage regardless of the circumstances. The allegation—as yet unproven—of an ethnic element in the incident warranted very cautious, factual treatment of the story.
2. Television interviews with a traumatized 14-year-old survivor raise serious ethical questions. It is probably true that, if the boy had not been interviewed, allegations of Serb involvement would nevertheless have quickly surfaced. Prudent journalists, however, would have given at least equal weight to police statements that there was (and still is) no independent evidence to support these allegations. Prudent journalists would have underscored the uncertainty of what actually happened to the four boys. Prudent journalists would have sought to draw clarifying detail from the boy.
3. Initial reporting by all three Kosovo-wide television stations of the disappearance of the three boys in varying degrees lacked this elementary prudence. Collectively these broadcasters contributed to an impression—not then or subsequently verified—that Serbs chased the three boys and caused them to drown. This impression provided the spark, or pretext, for demonstrations and violence that erupted on 17 March.
4. There was a qualitative difference between news coverage of events on 16-17 March by RTK and that of KTV. KTV did nothing to politicize the story or to place it in an emotional, patriotic context that recklessly risked fueling public outrage and exacerbating the situation as RTK did.
5. As with other stations, some KTV correspondents displayed poise and courage in reporting from chaotic scenes of violence and bloodshed. Others, however—notably in Gjilan/Gnjilane and Gjakova/Djakova—filed grossly biased reports that were not challenged or corrected.
6. KTV's failed to provide archive tapes of most of its programming. This constitutes a violation of the terms of its license and will be treated as such.

## FINDINGS OF FACT WITH REGARD TO KTV

1. According to KTV managers, the station first learned of an incident involving the probable deaths of three boys from an unidentified source in Mitrovica around 19:30 hours on 16 March. A telephone call to KTV's correspondent in Mitrovica produced information that an explosion had just occurred in Mitrovica but that there had been no casualties.
2. KTV's first news report of the incident was the lead story in its regularly scheduled late news program at 22:30, with a telephone report from the Mitrovica correspondent. KTV has been unable to provide an audio record of this report. TMC therefore does not know its content.
3. The correspondent report was followed by KTV's interview with the surviving boy, Fitim Veseli. In this interview, which appears to have been made about two hours after the boy spoke with RTK, he makes clear that he and companions ran from a dog, not Serbs. He says in part: "We were walking there on the other side of the river when some Serbs, that means two Serbs, wanted to attacked us, but as for them we could escape, but they had a dog. We were afraid of the dog, not the Serbs, because we could escape them as they were far away. But the dog ran too fast and we were by the river." **[See Transcript 8]**
4. The interviewer failed to ask questions that might have clarified why the boy thought the people he saw wanted to "attack" them. He told TV 21 the next day that the two Serbs had shouted from a house some distance away. It is unknown whether he or the other boys understood what the Serbs allegedly said. In any case, he alleged only that a dog had chased the boys.
5. At about 01:00 on 17 March, KTV rebroadcast scenes of efforts by police, TMK and KFOR to recover bodies of the missing children along with a repeat of the interview with the surviving boy. This report was not accompanied by narration from the Pristina studio, and no correspondent appears in the video. KTV provided a copy of this report.
6. The 01:00 report included a brief interview with UNMIK police spokesperson Tracy Becker, which ran for 22 seconds, or about twice as long as RTK's video clip with Ms. Becker. She is quoted as saying (in re-translation from Albanian to English): "Everything we know for the moment is that three children have disappeared. We received the information that four children have fallen into the Iber River, but fortunately one of them has survived and is at home. We know that the ages of these children are between 9 – 12. We are still searching for their bodies, and the reason for this incident is unknown."
7. In Mitrovica, as media gathered to cover the search for the missing boys through the evening of 16 March, UNMIK police said they explained repeatedly to journalists from RTK and other media that no information was

available to confirm or corroborate the story emerging from the surviving boy that Serb villagers and dogs were somehow involved in the incident. Police spokesperson Becker said " I talked to RTK and KTV not less than three times. I said, ' Do not jump to conclusions. If it is true, we will tell you.'" She added: "I took calls from the Associated Press, from Reuters and others. I told them all the same thing: We could not confirm this story."<sup>17</sup>

8. UNMIK spokesperson Gyorgy Kakuk said that journalists simply were not listening to the cautionary pleas of internationals on the scene: "We felt that evening that it was hopeless, that the message was not going to get through."
9. As with the brief video clip used by RTK, the KTV segment quoting Ms. Becker does not contain the emphatic appeals for caution about what had actually happened to the boys that she said she urged them to report.
10. Ms. Becker set up a staging area for journalists, where they could film and receiving briefings, but would avoid interfering with search teams along the river banks. She and other UNMIK representatives said that correspondents of both RTK and KTV were uncooperative, straying into the search area against instructions, but that "KTV was not as uncooperative; RTK was the worst."
11. KTV station went off the air as scheduled about 01:50 on 17 March with no further news updates. Like TV 21, and in contrast with RTK, KTV broadcast no interviews in its initial reporting on 16 or on the 17<sup>th</sup> that had the effect of politicizing the story of the boys' deaths or attaching high patriotic significance to the incident. Like TV 21, and unlike RTK, KTV maintained its normal program schedule and advertising through the evening of 16 March and the first half of 17 March, until violence erupted in Mitrovica and soon thereafter in other locations. KTV, like TV 21, treated the story of the drownings as normal, though tragic, news.
12. Like the other stations, KTV struggled to keep up with an entirely different story that began with the violence that erupted in Mitrovica in the late morning of 17 March and spread to numerous other locations around Kosovo. The three stations relied in varying degrees on telephone reports from correspondents. Some of these were calm and factual while others were both highly emotional and colored by anti-Serb bias.
13. A KTV correspondent reported from Gjakova/Djakova: "The criminal acts of the Serb population in the North have been condemned by the population of Gjakova during peaceful demonstrations. An end to these terrorist acts against the Albanian population was demanded. In expression of soli-

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<sup>17</sup> TMC Interview on 26 March in Mitrovica with UNMIK police media representatives Barry Pollin and Tracy Becker and UNMIK spokesman Gyorgy Kakuk.

clarity the protesters marched towards Emin Duraku street, the Serb church was protected by KFOR. The situation at the moment is calm.”<sup>18</sup>

14. Similarly, a KTV Correspondent from Gjilan/Gnjilane reported: “Thirty wounded and one dead is the toll of today’s events. The dead is a Serb, who according to witnesses came out of his house with a Kalashnikov and provoked the protesters, they then took away his gun, subsequently the Serb died of his wounds.”<sup>19</sup>
15. During 17 March, as the day progressed, KTV coverage, like that of RTK, included several long (multi-minute) segments of video without narration or comment showing scenes of violence and chaotic hospital wards with bloodied victims. Some of these segments were labelled on screen, "No comment." As they contained no information, these segments could only have invited viewers to react emotionally rather than rationally.
16. One such "No Comment" segment appeared in the main evening news program that ended at 19:50 on 17 March, more than five hours after TMC specifically asked KTV (and the other Kosovo-wide stations) not air such video without informative narration.
17. KTV's use of uncommented video, however, was less extensive than RTK's, and was not presented in the kind of political and patriotic context that RTK had built around the story of the boys' deaths over a period of many hours.
18. During the afternoon of 17 March, KTV sought and information and perspective from the KPS spokesman Refki Morina .
19. Like RTK, KTV and TV 21 carried statements of political leaders appealing for calm (in most cases coupled with attacks on "Serb criminals" who were presumed to have been responsible for the deaths of the children.) However, KTV began carrying such statements from President Rugova and others at about 14:50 on 17 March, or nearly an hour later, and less extensively, than RTK.
20. The sequence of news items in the main evening news program that began at 19:00 on 17 March began with Prime Minister Rexhepi's appeal for calm, and then alternated between reports of the day's violence and calls for calm. This was an emotionally neutral structure, emphasizing neither the drama in the streets nor the political response.

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted transcripts from KTV correspondents from tapes recorded by TMC.

<sup>19</sup> According to the OSCE Freedom of Media report of April 2004, quoting a senior local official in Gjilan/Gnjilane, the victim had a weapon but did not fire it. After being disarmed, the victim was "stabbed and then beaten to death for almost half an hour by dozens of young Albanians, cheered by the crowd. What had happened in reality was a crowd lynching, which the media presented as a very 'clinically clean' sudden death."

21. KTV carried a long interview later that evening with Veton Surroj that injected a major element of rational analysis into the day's news coverage.

## CONCLUSIONS WITH REGARD TO KTV

1. KTV's reporting of the apparent drowning of the three boys on 16 March gave unwarranted credence to the surviving boy's story. In doing so KTV failed to adequately represent the uncertainty of what had happened, as police were urging. The net effect was to contribute to the general impression, unsupported by verifiable fact, that Serbs had driven the children to their death in the river.
2. KTV's interview with the surviving boy showed that the children, according to the survivor, fled from a dog, not people. But KTV itself did nothing to draw attention to this important revelation, which appears to have gone largely unnoticed in the storm of outrage that developed around the deaths. Thus KTV missed an important opportunity to alter public perceptions of the event before violence broke out the next day.
3. As with other stations, some KTV correspondents displayed poise and courage in reporting from chaotic scenes of violence and bloodshed. However, some KTV correspondents—notably in Gjilan/Gnjilane and Gjakova/Djakova—filed grossly biased reports that were not challenged or corrected.
4. KTV's failure to provide archive tapes of most of its programming constitutes a violation of the terms of its license and will be treated as such.
5. KTV displayed a stronger preference for drama and sensation in its reporting of the violence than TV 21 did. But it did nothing to politicize the deaths of the three boys or to create the kind of patriotic hysteria around the story that marked the coverage of RTK.

## RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO KTV

1. **Training and Discussion of Conflict Reporting:** Like most Kosovo media, KTV would benefit from specific training for correspondents and editors in the technique and ethics of conflict reporting. The importance of seeking, and fully representing, an official police point of view in any incident involving death or injury—especially when ethnic factors may be involved—cannot be overemphasized.
2. **Review of Local Correspondents:** KTV should conduct an immediate and thorough review of the qualifications of its local correspondents and remove those who are unable or unwilling to meet the basic ethical standards of fairness, balance and freedom from ethno-cultural or political bias.
3. **Maintenance of a Broadcast Archive:** TMC may impose sanctions for the failure of KTV to maintain a 21-day archive of all its broadcast programming. KTV would be well advised to implement such a system within the next 30 days at the latest.



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## **PART III**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD To RTV 21**

## SUMMARY

1. The presumed drowning death of three young boys near Caber, reported by RTK, KTV and TV 21 on the evening of 16 March, was a major news story that warranted prominent but accurate and careful media coverage regardless of the circumstances. The allegation—as yet unproven—of an ethnic element in the incident warranted very cautious, factual treatment of the story.
2. Television interviews with a traumatized 14-year-old survivor raise serious ethical questions. It is probably true that, if the boy had not been interviewed, allegations of Serb involvement would nevertheless have quickly surfaced. Prudent journalists, however, would have given at least equal weight to police statements that there was (and still is) no independent evidence to support these allegations. Prudent journalists would have underscored the uncertainty of what actually happened to the four boys. Prudent journalists would have sought to draw clarifying detail from the boy.
3. Initial reporting by all three Kosovo-wide television stations of the disappearance of the three boys in varying degrees lacked this elementary prudence. In its first reporting of 16 March, TV 21 failed to include an urgent message that police were seeking to convey, that there was no independent evidence to support the boy's story. Collectively these broadcasters contributed to an impression—not then or subsequently verified—that Serbs chased the three boys and caused them to drown. This impression provided the spark, or pretext, for demonstrations and violence that erupted on 17 March.
4. There was a qualitative difference between news coverage of events on 16-17 March by RTK and that of TV 21. TV 21 did nothing to sensationalize or politicize the story or to place it in an emotional, patriotic context that recklessly risked fueling public outrage and exacerbating the situation as RTK did. TV 21 in particular clearly tried in its coverage of 17 March to reduce or minimize the emotional character of its reporting while fully informing its viewers about complex and alarming events.

## FINDINGS OF FACT WITH REGARD TO TV 21

1. TV 21 first reported the disappearance and apparent drowning of the three boys in its regularly scheduled news update at 22:00 on 16 March, or about two and a half hours after the first report by RTK. The incident at Caber was the lead story. However, TV 21 did not send a camera crew to the scene until the next day.
2. The news presenter introduced the story by asserting categorically that, "Two Serbs chased four Albanian children today around 16:00 in the village of Caber, and while trying to escape them jumped into the river." There was no attribution to a source and no factual basis for this statement.
3. A telephone report by a TV 21 correspondent in Mitrovica, Mirlinda Jashari, followed. She states: "As the 13-year-old child Fitim Cerkin Veseli from this village says, he and five other children his age were walking on the other side of the Iber River. In those moments, two persons who had a dog came out of a Serb house and started chasing the children. Out of fear, four of the children jumped into the river, hoping to make it to the other side by swimming. But since the current was too strong, only Fitim Veseli made it to the other side of the river..." **[See Transcript 9]**
4. The correspondent did not actually claim to have spoken with the boy and did not identify the source of her information. She may have been briefed by other reporters at the scene, a common but risky practice among journalists covering a breaking news story. However, no prudent journalist relies entirely on colleagues to report such a story, especially one with such explosive implications.
5. In three separate television interviews with RTK, KTV and with TV 21 the next day, the surviving boy did not explicitly say that Serbs – or the people who "came out of a Serb house," as the TV 21 correspondent put it—actually chased the boys. In fact, the boy clearly stated to KTV and later to TV 21 that they ran in fear not from people but from a dog. Thus there was and still is no factual basis for the initial TV 21 report that Serbs chased the boys and caused three of them to drown. **[See Transcript 10]**
6. The TV 21 report contains no reference whatsoever to UNMIK police, who were urgently telling reporters on the scene near Mitrovica that there was no independent information to support the boy's story. By failing to quote police at all, even in the perfunctory way manner seen on RTK and KTV, TV 21 failed completely to communicate to its audience the crucial element of uncertainty in this story.

7. In Mitrovica, as media gathered to cover the search for the missing boys during the evening of 16 March, UNMIK police explained repeatedly to journalists from RTK and other media that no information was available to confirm or support the story emerging from the surviving boy, that Serb villagers and dogs were somehow involved in the incident. Police spokesperson Becker said, "I talked to RTK and KTV not less than three times. I said, 'Do not jump to conclusions. If it is true, we will tell you.'" She added: "I took calls from the Associated Press, from Reuters and others. I told them all the same thing: We could not confirm this story."
8. UNMIK spokesperson Gyorgy Kakuk said that journalists simply were not listening to the cautionary pleas of internationals on the scene: "We felt that evening that it was hopeless, that the message was not going to get through."
9. The TV 21 correspondent also reported that a loud explosion had disturbed residents of the Three Towers complex in Mitrovica shortly after 19:00, but that "it is still unknown who is behind this explosion." Here, the correspondent reported the important fact of uncertainty.
10. TV 21 reporting on the Caber incident on 16 March was limited to this telephone report, although it was repeated through the evening in regularly scheduled, hourly news updates. In contrast with RTK, TV 21 did not assert that large crowds of people were moving toward Caber. Nor did TV 21 news reports speculate on how the public might react to the deaths, let alone report a growing mood of "revolt" as an RTK correspondent asserted.
11. The incendiary emotional and political/patriotic context that RTK systematically built around the story through the evening of 16 March and into the next day were absent from TV 21 reporting. At no time did TV 21 interview Halit Barani, members of grieving families of the missing boys or other individuals who attempted to draw sweeping political conclusions about the incident as RTK did.
12. Like KTV and unlike RTK, TV 21 maintained its normal program schedule and advertising through the evening of 16 March and the first half of 17 March, until violence erupted in Mitrovica and soon thereafter in other locations. In brief, TV 21, like KTV, treated the deaths of the three boys as a normal, although tragic, news story and not as moment of great political or patriotic significance.
13. TV 21, in its 16 March evening news updates, reported on protests underway at Caglavica, where local Serbs, protesting the drive-by shooting of a young Serb man, were blocking the main road in protest. TV 21's reporting of this story, however, was far more substantial than RTK's. TV 21 carried detailed interviews with UNMIK police and KPS spokespersons as well as statements by political leaders condemning the attack. RTK devoted one sentence to these condemnations in a 33 second story during

its Blic news program at 23:00. TV 21 devoted almost half of its 7 minute 49 second report on Caglavica to this important context.

14. Similarly, TV 21 also reported on Kosovo-wide protests of KLA veterans protesting the arrest of some of their members. Whereas RTK emphasized emotive images over substance in a 39-second report on Blic, TV 21 devoted 2 minutes 11 seconds to the same story. However, TV 21's story was told entirely from the point of view of the veterans, with no balancing perspective from UNMIK police or other authorities.
15. As violence broke out in Mitrovica on the morning of 17 March, TV 21, with limited technical facilities, was slow to provide film of the first clashes in Mitrovica. Its first telephone reports of violence were carried over archive video of a peaceful, summertime Mitrovica. The result was that at least initially, TV 21 provided detailed information with a minimum of alarming or emotional images.
16. In its reporting on violent clashes and arrival of injured people at hospitals, TV 21, like KTV and RTK, made use of dramatic segments of raw, unedited, uncommented video to portray chaotic scenes, especially of injured people. TV 21 repeated one such segment three times during the afternoon. However, TV 21's use of such uncommented video—which conveys little information but invites viewers to react emotionally—was much less pronounced than that of RTK, and was not presented in the same context of political and patriotic outrage that RTK had built around the story.
17. TV 21's use of uncommented video appeared to cease shortly after the TMC visited station managers in the early afternoon to reaffirm their right and obligation to report fully events but asked them to try to minimize the "emotional temperature" of their coverage.
18. Like RTK and KTV, TV 21 carried statements of political leaders appealing for calm (in most cases coupled with attacks on "Serb criminals" who were presumed to have been responsible for the deaths of the children.) TV 21 began carrying statements from President Rugova and others at about 14:50 on 17 March, or nearly an hour after RTK.
19. In the late afternoon of 17 March, TV 21 conspicuously sought analytical perspective from Ramush Tahiraj, a senior adviser to Assembly President Nexhat Daci.
20. The structure of the main TV 21 evening news at 18:30 on 17 March differed significantly from that of RTK. Whereas RTK emphasized emotional images of chaotic violence in the first half of its main news programs that evening before repeating calls for calm from political leaders and the international community, TV 21 reversed the sequence of its news, to emphasize the appeals—even though these had already been broadcast during the afternoon. TV 21 managers say they did so deliberately to encourage viewers to react rationally rather than emotionally to the day's events.

21. TV 21, unlike RTK and KTV, made a clear effort to determine what had actually happened to the three boys on 16 March by taking the surviving fourth boy the next day to the scene of the incident for an interview. The boy points to a distant house—seemingly at least 100 meters from the river's edge—and explains that someone shouted from the house, and that it was a dog that they ran from in fear. This interview was the single most notable act of explanatory reporting that the TMC observed on 17 March. Unfortunately, it was broadcast too late (in the 18:30 evening news) to affect public perceptions of the incident that sparked, or served as a pretext, for the violence.

## CONCLUSIONS WITH REGARD TO TV 21

1. The initial news report of the incident at Caber by TV 21 at 22:00 on 16 March attached unwarranted credence to the story of the surviving boy, and did not accurately represent what he was telling interviewers. This report, which TV 21 repeated during the evening, also failed to include the crucial perspective that police were urging reporters to note, which was that there was no independent evidence to support the boy's story.
2. Thus TV 21 failed to make use of information from police—that there was no solid information, only uncertainty about what caused the boys to drown—which was readily available to TV 21's correspondent in Mitrovica. News managers should have noticed that the police perspective was missing from their reporting.
3. This failure may be interpreted as a violation of Article 7.2 of the TMC Broadcast Code of Conduct, which states that, "Broadcasters will not broadcast material unless they have undertaken a prudent and reasonable inquiry to ensure the veracity of the material."
4. As violence developed on 17 March, TV 21—like the two other stations—struggled to follow a rapidly expanding, chaotic and frightening story. Its correspondents displayed poise and courage in reporting from the scenes of clashes with police and KFOR and the burning of houses and churches.
5. TV 21 presenters approached the story in a calm manner and made commendable efforts to include rational comment and analysis as events developed on 17 March.
6. Unlike RTK, TV 21 treated the deaths of the three boys as a normal, although tragic, news story. TV 21 did nothing to politicize the story or sensationalize its reporting on 16 March and through the 17<sup>th</sup> and did nothing to attach "patriotic" significance to the deaths of the boys or the violence that followed.
7. On the contrary, TV 21 took commendable steps to learn what actually had happened to the four boys, with its interview of the surviving boy at the scene of the incident. TV 21 reported on the violence in a calm and factual manner, and on balance sought to reduce the emotional aspect of its news coverage while fully informing its audience. The character of TV 21 coverage was thus qualitatively different, and more responsible and professional, than that of RTK.

## RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO TV 21

- 1. Training and Discussion of Conflict Reporting:** Like most Kosovo media, TV 21 would benefit from specific training for correspondents and editors in the technique and ethics of conflict reporting. The importance of seeking, and fully representing, an official police point of view in any incident involving death or injury—especially when ethnic factors may be involved—cannot be overemphasized.



KOMISIONERI I PËRKOHSHËM PËR MEDIA  
PRIVREMENI KOMESAR ZA MEDIJE  
TEMPORARY MEDIA COMMISSIONER

## **ANNEX**

**TRANSCRIPTS: RTK – KTV – TV 21 16-17 MARCH 2004**

RTK

16 March 2004

20:30

***[Scrolling Text on Screen]:***

Three missing children in the water of Iber River are: Florent Veseli 8 years old, Avni Veseli, 11 years old, Egzon Deliu 12 years old. Meanwhile, Fitim Veseli, 14 years old, has been found. According to the information that we have up to now, they are victims of a Serb attack in Caber village. Our team is at the scene and soon you will be able to see the special edition of news including the interview with Fetim Veseli who is the witness of the event.

*[Repeated three times]*

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RTK

16 March 2004

22:28

***Special Edition*****Rozafa Metaj reports from Mitrovica, close to the river**

A large number of KFOR, KPS and TMK members have gathered here in the village of Binaq, Mitrovica municipality, in search for the bodies of Florent Veseli, (8), Egzon Deliu (12) and Avni Veseli (11), who around 18:00 hrs fell in the Iber river, Mitrovica municipality, the village of Caber.

*[Images of the river, police and Danish KFOR emergency vehicle][51 sec.]*

**Tracy Becker, UNMIK**

Initially, there were voices that the incident was ethnically motivated, since for the moment we don't have such information, we cannot confirm it. [12 sec.]

**Interview with Fitim Veseli**

**Journalist:** Fitim can you tell us about today's event, how did it happen?

**F:** Yes, we, some cousins of mine and some friends of mine, and me were walking and we went close to the river when some Serbs with a dog have, for example, have sworn at us from the house. We looked at them, I can identify them if I see them, and I know their house, and we tried to escape but we couldn't because we were close to the river. My brother, Florent Veseli 9 years old, was with me, he can't swim. I put him on my back, I swam 15 meters, and I couldn't swim more than that.

He fell from my back, I don't know anything more about him, and the other two swam in front of me, I don't know anything about them either. But there were another two who did not go in the Iber River, they were further away from us, i.e. further away from the bridge. It was around 4:00, 3:55hrs and there was a Serb hidden in the maize, and we tried to tell them to run away, we called them but they didn't hear us and we jumped in the Iber but they survived, I don't know how the others but my brother who was on my back fell from my back waves were big, Iber was big, he fell from my back I came out from the Iber somehow tired.

**Journalist:** Who helped you to come out of the river?

**F:** I came out myself [1.42]

*[Images by the river showing KFOR medical units]*

RTK

16 March 2004

23:15

***BLIC [Regularly scheduled late evening news program]***

**Presenter (Ramize):** Three Albanian children, Florent Veseli 8 years old, Avni Veseli 11 years old and Egzon Deliu 12 years old, went missing in the waters of the Iber river, meanwhile Fitim Veseli, 14 years old, has been found. They are victims of an attack by a group of Serbs in the village of Caber. Police, KFOR and TMK are searching for the missing children. Before seeing the material, we'll go live with our reporter, Petrit Musolli, who's at the scene.

**Presenter:** Hello, Petrit can you hear me?

**Petrit:** Yes, Ramize.

**Presenter:** Petrit, do you have any news for us?

*(Images showing people by the river on the bridge, KFOR and KPS vehicles)*

**P:** The police, KFOR and the TMK have not yet found the bodies of three missing children in the Iber river, who fell there being chased by a group of Serbs. At the moment, police, KFOR and TMK have put some nets close to the bridge of Binaq in Koshtovë in the Iber river, expecting to find the bodies of Florent Veseli, 8 years old, Avni Veseli, 11 years old, and Egzon Deliu, 12 years old. The police did not say if they are looking for the bodies of these children in other places as well. So far, the police did not explain and gave no more information besides the story of Fitim Veseli, the only one found. The police say that all information they have is from the story of Fitim Veseli. This is the latest information. The police, KFOR and the TMK are still searching for the bodies and have promised that they will let us know as soon as they have more information. Yes Ramize?

**Presenter:** How is the situation in Mitrovica, is it under control, how are the citizens reacting?

**P:** The situation in Mitrovica is calm at the moment – almost all citizens are heading towards the village of Caber to learn more about the fate of the three children missing in the Iber river. However, movements can be noticed in the city, police and KFOR movements, and especially the town is being observed by a KFOR military helicopter time after time. But, police are more focused on the road that leads to the village of Caber from Mitrovica and especially close to the houses of Serbs from where the children were attacked, who were forced to jump into the river to survive. This is the latest information.

**Presenter:** Petrit, perhaps we can contact again before BLIC is finished, in the meantime we will move on to the material about the tragic event in the village of Caber of Mitrovica. [2.16]

***Rozafa Metaj reports from Mitrovica, close to the river [Repeat]***

A large number of KFOR, KPS and TMK members have gathered here in the village of Binaq, Mitrovica municipality, in search for the bodies of Florent Veseli, (8), Egzon Deliu (12) and Avni Veseli (11), who around 1800hrs fell in the Iber river, Mitrovica municipality, the village of Caber.

*[Images of the river, police and Danish KFOR emergency vehicles] [51 sec]*

***Tracy Becker, UNMIK [Repeat]***

Initially, there were voices that the incident was ethnically motivated, since for the moment we don't have such an information we cannot confirm it. [12 sec]

***Interview with Fitim Veseli [Repeat]***

**Journalist:** Fitim can you tell us about today's event, how did it happen?

**F:** Yes, we, some cousins of mine and some friends of mine, and myself were walking and we went close to the river when some Serbs with a dog have, for example, have sworn at us from the house. We looked at them, I can identify them if I see them, and I know their house, and we tried to escape but we couldn't because we were close to the river. My brother, Florent Veseli 9 years old, was with me, he can't swim. I put him on my back, I swam 15 meters, I couldn't swim more than that.

He fell from my back, I don't know anything more about him, and the other two swam in front of me, I don't know anything about them either. But there were another two who did not go in the Iber river, they were further away from us, i.e. further away from the bridge. It was around 4:00, 3:55 hrs and there was a Serb hidden in the maize, and we tried to tell them to run away, we called them but they did not hear us and we jumped in Iber but they survived, I don't know how the others survived but my brother who was on my back fell from my back because waves were big, Iber was big, he fell from my back, I came out from Iber kind of tired.

**Journalist:** Who helped you to come out of the river?

**F:** I came out myself (1.42)

*[Images by the river showing KFOR medical units.]*

***Interview with Halit Barani [in Pristina studio]***

**Presenter:** the chairman of the Council for Defence of Freedoms and Human Rights in Mitrovica, Halit Barani, is with us in the studio.

**Presenter:** Mr. Barani, what kind of information do you have about this case?

**H.B:** Today around 16:00 in the village of Caber, Zubin Potok municipality, while 6 children of the above mentioned village were playing, a group of Serb bandits attacked these children. The Serb bandits had a dog as well, and swearing at [about?] their Albanian mother and this way they forced the Albanian children to run away. Two of them managed to hide in the roots of the willow trees by Lumëbardh river, whereas the other 4 fell in the river. It is known that Lumëbardh river, besides being very deep, has very cold water, and it's too fast. Most probably the children couldn't swim very well. There is no information about the fate of three of them whereas one survived after making it to the other side of the river.

**Presenter:** So what would your reaction, as a [representative of] the [human rights] Council, be to this tragic event?

**HB:** We are used to these Serbian bandits. Besides this, tonight at 19:17 in the suburb called '7 September' they threw a bomb near the Three Towers [a mixed-population apartment complex in North Mitrovica.] We think this was revenge for that happened in Caqllavica, a case that brought into play [showed], what Serbs are willing to do when the situation is calming down in Kosovo. They play at all costs and it is not to their advantage to have a stable Kosovo.

**Presenter:** Mr. Barani thank you,

**HB:** Not at all [1.46 min]

**Presenter:** We will continue with other news.

***"Flash News" [Remainder of program]***

**With the motto "All in protection of Kosovo liberators" on 27 centers of Kosovo the protest occurred.**

With the motto "All in protection of Kosovo liberators" at 13:00 in 27 centers of Kosovo during two hours nation-wide protests occurred. The local and international institutions were requested to stop undermining liberation war values.

The protesters were holding the pictures of former UCK fighters who are in prison, as well as placards saying, "**Down with Serbia's laws in Kosovo**" "**Stop Serbian Administration – UNMIK**" etc. Protesters called out to stop the UNMIK politics against liberators while time after time was hard a call for UNMIK to leave Kosovo. In none of the protests held in most of the municipi-

palities has there been any major incidents reported. *[Images from the protests] [39 sec.]*

### **Serbs continue with blocking the road to Cagllavica**

Hundreds of Serbs from Cagllavica still today continued blocking the road from Prishtina to Skopje, protesting after the injury of Jovica Ivic. Serbs gathered in Gračanica and Cagllavica caused certain incidents, as a consequence an international police officer was injured, and last night some KFOR troops were attacked. Also, the mob stopped a vehicle and set it on fire, and some other vehicles were damaged including one UNMIK vehicle. According to the police officials the violence against the young Serbian was strongly condemned by the President Ibrahim Rugova and Prime minister Bajram Rexhepi.

*[Images from Cagllavica – Serb protests] [33 sec]*

### **Chairman of PDK continued his visit in USA**

According to his statement, all the visits he paid to USA were focused on standards implementation. Thaqi asked the USA to support Kosovo on implementation of the standards. Uncertainty of Kosovo's status affects economic development and prosperity of Kosovo, said Thaqi. *[24 sec]*

Minister Jakup Krasniqi denied the accusation made by Ministry of Finance that during 2002 they purchased 6 single-sources which implies that they have not announced the bid. Ministry of Public Services has not got 6 bids with direct purchases of single- sources but there are only two contracts bids, said Minister Jakup Krasniqi in an interview with journalists. According to Krasniqi, all documents, contracts, purchasing orders including also the approval of single- source direct purchasing are signed and approved by the international officials. *[29 sec.]*

### **Other News**

Kosovo government, union trades and chamber of commerce held a meeting where they highlighted the issue of collective contracts for the workers of Kosovo, which will be prepared by May 12.

Kosovo in one minute  
Region in one minute  
World in one minute  
Culture  
Weather  
Time

## Update From Mitrovica

**Presenter:** we are on line again with our reporter in Mitrovica Petrit Musolli. Petrit can you hear me?

**P:** Yes Ramize

**Presenter:** Is there any news, how is the situation?

**P:** There is no news about three children drowned in the river Ibër yet. Police, KFOR and Kosovo Protection Corps are searching the river to find the bodies of the children. And the journalists are restricted in receiving direct information from the search site as police did not allow any of the journalists to follow the situation closely. So we depend on the UNMIK police spokespersons in the village of Çabër, who will inform us about the situation.

**Presenter:** Meantime after midnight we will have a special broadcast from our team that is trying directly to go live on air from Mitrovica.

*[Images showing the river, police, KFOR] [40 sec]*

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RTK

17 March 2004

01:10

**Special Edition**

**Presenter (Ramize):** About 1 km from the scene, in Koshtove village, Mitrovica municipality, in the water of Iber River was found the dead body of Egzon Deliu 12 years old. Meantime nothing is yet known about the fate of two other children who disappeared in this tragedy -- Florim Veseli 8 years old and Avni Veseli 11 years old. They were victims of an attack by a group of Serbs in Caber village. Police, KFOR and KPC are searching for the other children. We have a live connection from Mitrovica with our reporter Petrit Musolli.

**Presenter:** What is the latest news from Mitrovica?

**P:** As you said, from some of our sources, here at the scene, it is assumed that the body of Egzon Deliu 12 years old was found, one of the three missing children in the water of Iber River. But this was not confirmed by police, police have not even informed nor they have given any information related to the search. Until now it is not known yet if police have found any other body. The event took place around 3: 30 hrs when 6 children were playing and were chased by a group of Serbs who also let a dog loose. The children not being able to escape from the chase by the group of Serbs, so the only solution for them to escape was to jump in the Iber. Only Fitim Veseli managed to cross the river 14 years old, whereas the three other children Florent Veseli 8, Egzon Deliu 12 and Avni Veseli 11 are caught under the water of Iber River. This is all the information...

**Presenter:** It seems as if we lost the phone connection, in meantime we will try to get a live connection with our colleague once again. However we will continue now with the declaration of the survivor Fitim Veseli.

**Interview with Fitim Veseli [Repeat]**

**Journalist:** Fitim can you tell us about today's event, how did it happen?

**F:** Yes, we, some cousins of mine and some friends of mine, and me were walking and we went close to the river when some Serbs with a dog have, for example, have sworn at us from the house. We looked at them, I can identify them if I see them, and I know their house, and we tried to escape but we couldn't because we were close to the river. My brother, Florent Veseli 9 years old, was with me, he can't swim. I put him on my back, I swam 15 meters, and I couldn't swim more than that.

He fell from my back, I don't know anything more about him, and the other two swam in front of me, I don't know anything about them either. But there were another two who did not go in the Iber River, they were further away from us,

that is,. further away from the bridge. It was around 4:00, 3:55hrs and there was a Serb hidden in the maize, and we tried to tell them to run away, we called them but they didn't hear us and we jumped in the Iber but they survived, I don't know how the others but my brother who was on my back fell from my back. The waves were big,the Iber was big, he fell from my back. I came out from the Iber kind of tired.

**Journalist:** who helped you to come out of the river?

**F:** I came out myself (1.42)

**Presenter:** We have managed to get a live connection with our reporter from the scene, Petrit Musolli. Petrit, many citizens are waiting for the latest information for the fate of these children, how is the situation there?

**P:** At the moment the situation is calm, we can say that it is calm because all inhabitants are confused waiting to hear about the fate of these children, however there is [a mood] of revolt among the inhabitants, especially against the UNMIK police, because among the UNMIK police there are police of the Serb minority, who time after time talk aloud so they can be heard, so this way inhabitants were provoked, felt provoked, because of this, but we say that at the moment the situation is calm and everybody is confused waiting to hear about the fate of the lost children, even though as we said earlier it is said that one of them, Egzon Deliu, the dead body of Egzon Deliu is found, however it is not confirmed either by the family nor anyone else if the body has been handed over, or if it has been truly found the body of Egzon Deliu. Police did not confirm this, not even to the family.

**R:** Petrit, thank you for this information.

Dear viewers around 01: 30 hrs we expect a live update from the scene.

*[Note: No further presentation an of UNMIK police viewpoint.]*

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RTK

17 March 2004

01:35

***Special Edition***

**Petrit Musoli:** We are reporting live from the Binarc Bridge, where police, KFOR and KPC are still attempting to find lost bodies of three Albanian children in the water of River Iber. Even though according to our sources, it is assumed that the body of Egzon Deliu 12 years old was found, this was not confirmed by police. Police did not give any information related to the search for the bodies of three Albanian children who disappeared in River Iber. Police did not confirm if anyone has been arrested or if they are in pursuit of suspects who caused this tragedy. The event happened around 03:30 when these children while playing were chased by a group of Serbs who let dogs loose. The children, not being able to escape from these Serbs, were forced to jump into the river Iber. Only Fitim Veseli (14) managed to get on the other side of the River whereas three others Florent Veseli (8), Agim Veseli (11) and Egzon Deliu (12) were caught in the waters of River Iber.

**Interview with Halit Berani (RTK journalist: Petrit Musolli)**

**P:** Here to talk more on details about what happened is Mr. Halit... Can you tell us what happened?

**HB:** According to the declaration of the boy that survived the tragedy, around 16.00 while six Albanian children, inhabitants of Albanian village Caber of Zubin Potok, were playing, a group of Serb bandits who had a dog with them attacked the children by swearing from a distance [about?] their Albanian mother and when they started to run towards them, two of the boys managed to hide in some willow roots, whereas the other four because of fear, jumped in the water, so, it is not known about the fate of three children whereas one survived and managed to get onto the other side of the river.

**P:** Mr. Barani, do you have any additional information about how the search has gone, because the police said that besides what Fitim Veseli said, the only survivor, there is no other information?

**HB:** Well, according to KPC who have searched until now and are still searching also Egzon has been found, his dead body, and now he is in police hands.

**P:** It is supposed that KPC has found the body of Egzon Deliu (12); do you have any information related to this?

**HB:** Yes, I just talked with a KPC commander and he confirmed that Egzon's dead body has been found by KPC and they are searching unceasingly, KPC together with fire-brigade, KFOR and Police.

**P:** Can you tell us, Mr. Barani, what was the reaction of the inhabitants of the village Caber the moment after the case of missing three children has been announced?

**HB:** It is understandable what reaction, when in a such tragedy, it is understandable what would be the reaction not just of the inhabitants of the village Caber to whom the tragedy happened, but also by those to whom this did not happen, but who have heard about it. Of course they are outraged, while we can suppose that this is revenge for the wounded Serb in Cagllavica—while that was a 'show' for which Serbs have an affinity. Every time when the situation in Kosova starts to stabilize, they find different ways to do this kind of thing to destabilize the situation.

**P:** Thank you, Mr. Barani

**H:** You're welcome.

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RTK

17 March 2004

02:37

**Special Edition****Presenter** *[not audible]*

**Reporter:** we are reporting again live from the scene. Here with us is Zaim Deliu, father of Egzon Deliu. Egzon Deliu is Zaim's only son, born after 7 girls. Mr. Deliu can you tell us do you have any news about the fate of your son?

**Zaim:** My son, on this ghastly day, was found dead from Serbs Chetnik hordes...but they killed him in the most miserable way, by forcing him to jump in this river...

Many, many times when they went to the mountains they were threatened by them and whenever they went to our lands [territories] that we have there at Jegenice, they were chased when sometimes they went into the roads, while walking in the roads they were chased always, and today they chased them for the last time. [Remainder not audible.]

**Reporter:** can you tell us when did you receive the news, and who communicated it to you? *[remainder not audible]*

*[The father of the dead boy was filmed together with Halit Barani, who held him by the arm.]*

**Unidentified man on screen:** Half an hour ago we found the body of Egzon Deliu, so I saw it with my own eyes and I confirmed his death.

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RTK

17 March 2004

06:01

***News Video Text, Location: Mitrovica***

Three Albanian children, Florent Veseli 8 years old, Avni veseli 11 years old and Egzon Deliu 12 years old have disappeared in the water of Iber River, whereas Fitim Veseli, witness of the event has said that they were chased with a dog by a group of Serbs from North Mitrovica. He says that he managed to survive because he knew how to swim, whereas for the others he only confirms that they have fallen in the water together with him, and that he hasn't seen them since.

Police and KFOR are searching for the other three lost children. Based on information, the situation in Mitrovica is tense.

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KTV

17 March 2004

01:00

**Special Edition (5 min. 5 sec)**

*[Note: This news update appeared air with no studio introduction]*

**Reporter: Bashkim Vishaj**

*[View showing the bridge of Iber River and the members of the UNMIK police, KFOR, and the KPS, then shifts to interior of Veseli family house in Caber, showing grieving family members.]*

*(Interview with the surviving boy, seated alone on a bed)]*

**Fitim:** My name is Fitim Veseli, I'm 13 years old.

**Reporter:** Can you tell us what happened, how it happened, do you remember?

**F:** Yes, we were walking there one the other side of the river when some Serbs, that means two Serbs wanted to attacked us, but as for them we could escape but they had a dog. We were afraid from the dog not from Serbs, because we could escape them as they were far away. But the dog ran too fast and we were by the river, it was me and my brother Florent Veseli (9), and two friends of mine Avni Veseli (11) and Egzon Deliu (12).

They entered first while we were crossing the Iber, whereas I put my brother on my back because he couldn't swim and everywhere it was deep. I swum with my head inside the water, except in shallows I rise and breathe, I couldn't because he was too heavy.

Suddenly he fell off my back, and I swam fast and caught him but then it was too deep and he fell off my back again and I couldn't find him, and when I got out on the river bank I looked up but I didn't see him anywhere, and I saw Serbs on the other side looking for us by the Iber's bank, whereas two friends that didn't go in the river, Florim Veseli and Qamil Zeqiri, were walking onward us, meantime a Serb, an old one, was hidden on the corn field.

We saw him hiding and we wanted to tell them but they didn't hear us because the were very far, thus we crossed Iber river and the Serbs fortunately while looking for us didn't meet the others.

**R:** How many of you were playing and how many of you have survived from that incident?

**F:** It was six of us, and three of us survived whereas the fate of the other three is unknown.

**R:** How did you manage to come home?

**F:** I arrived by myself, nobody helped me, and I hardly came home. I was by the Iber bank when I saw Serbs looking for us. I stood up, I walk for a while and I went to my uncle's son Driton Veseli. I told him and then he called the police and KFOR and the others. (3 min)

**Tracy Becker** –*UNMIK (declaration given to the journalist)*

Everything we know for the moment is that three children disappeared. We received the information that four children have fallen in the Iber River but fortunately one of them has survived and is at home. We know that the ages of children are between 9 – 12.

We are still searching for their bodies and the reason for this incident is unknown. [22 sec]

*[Images showing the coming of the members of KPC and the KPC officer giving the order for the search and rescue]*

**Unidentified voice of KPC officer:** The fender [a screen intended to catch floating items] is set up, search and rescue is being done from the bridge. From this place, where the accident happened, you have to go down until you meet with the search and rescue team. Search, and if it is necessary dive in the river, secured with ropes, you have walkie-talkies. Report about everything. [24 sec]

*[Ends with view of members of KPC executing the order]*

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TV 21

16 March 2004

22:00

**Flash news (15 Minutes)****Main news:**

1. Serbs blocked the roads in Gračanica and Čagllavica and maltreated some Albanian travellers.
2. President Rugova and Prime Minister Rexhepi condemned the last night's attack in Čagllavicë
3. Protests with the motto "all in defending the liberation war" were held in Prishtina and other towns of Kosovo. [17 seconds]

**First news: Çabra / Mitrovica**

**Presenter:** Two Serbs have chased four Albanian children today around 16:00 in the village of Cabër and while trying to escape them, the Albanian children jumped into the Iber river. To learn more details we have our correspondent in Mitrovica, Mirlinda Jashari, on the line.

**Presenter:** Mirlinda can you hear me?

**Mirlinda:** Yes, yes I can.

**Presenter:** What is the latest information from the village of Caber?

**Mirlinda:** There is fear a severe tragedy happened today at around 16:00 in the village of Caber, Zubin Potok municipality, the only village inhabited by Albanians in this municipality. As the 13 year old child, Fitim Çerkin Veseli from this village tells, he and five other children his age were walking on the other side of the Iber river. In those moments, two persons came out of a Serb house who had a dog and started chasing the children. Out of fear, four of the children have jumped into the River Iber hoping they can make it to the other side by swimming. But, since the current was too strong, only Fitim Veseli made it to the other side of the river, whereas nothing is known about the fate of Egzon Deliu (12), Avni Veseli (11) and Florent Veseli (9). In these moments while I'm reporting from the scene, the village of Caber, KFOR, UNMIK police and KPS rescue units are searching in the Iber River, from Caber to Mitrovica, but so far nothing is known about the fate of these children.

**Presenter:** Mirlinda, there was an explosion tonight around 19:00 in Mitrovicë. What are the consequences?

**Mirlinda:** Yes, a loud explosion was heard tonight at around 19:10 in the northern part of Mitrovica, behind the Three Towers on the road to Suhodoll.

The explosion has greatly disturbed the citizens. Luckily, this explosion left no casualties or material damage. It is still unknown who is behind this explosion.

**Presenter:** Thank you. This was our correspondent in Mitrovica, Mirlinda Jashari.

(Archived images of the town of Mitrovica appeared on screen during the telephone report[ [1 min. 48 sec]

### **Second news: Gracanica and Caglavica (roads blocked)**

**Presenter:** Serbs from Gracanica and Caglavica keep the roads from Prishtinë – Skopje and Prishtinë – Gjilan blocked as a sign of revolt for the last night's attack against a young Serb, Jovica Ivic. They manifested their revolt also with acts of violence. A UNMIK police and some Albanian passersby suffered bodily injuries. Negotiations for opening the roads have not yet given results and roads remain closed. [21 sec]

### **Correspondent Shkumbin Ahmetxheka reports from the road that leading to Caglavica:**

The road Prishtina – Skopje remained blocked all day today as a consequence of protests of Serbs inhabitants of Laplasellë, who aim to show their revolt against the wounding of a young Serb from this village. Meanwhile, a large number of UNMIK, KFOR and KPS forces are located since yearly morning hours in the entrance of this village but could not de-block the traffic in this important road.

Serbs have violently protested, causing damage to vehicles passing through Gracanica and Caglavica. Nexhat Shkodra, one of the travellers who suffered damage while he was passing through Gracanica told us how he was attacked suddenly while he was driving towards Prishtina. Luckily, he was not injured.

*[Images of the road with UN, KFOR and civilian vehicles standing in line/blocked] [96 sec.]*

### **Statement of an eyewitness attacked in Gracanica while driving to Prishtina:**

The incident happened at 7:10 when I headed to Kishnicë to visit a cousin of mine. A large mob of Serbs came out at the church, at the bridge in Gracanica and started stoning. Others in front of me were injured, I was lucky to have only my car damaged. ...

*[The man is sitting inside his car while talking. Images of broken glass of in the front of the car] [76 sec]*

### **Reporter continues with images of the blocked road:**

The UNMIK spokesperson, Derek Chapel, said he condemns the criminal act of wounding the young Serb, but also condemned the violence of the Serb group who, according to him, are impeding the investigation. (8.6 sec.)

**Derek Chapel's statement (in front of UNMIK Police building):**

**Correspondent:** The case of the wounding a young Serb happened last night at around 19:00 when he was hit by the main road. The first people to appear at the scene were KFOR members, who were stoned by the Serb crowd. After this, KFOR and UNMIK police, who appeared latter, were forced to withdraw from the crime scene without being able to start a criminal investigation. Later, the crowd blocked the road and started throwing stones at cars, causing minor damages. After this, traffic was stopped and this situation lasted all night.

In the morning, a group of 200 Serbs blocked the road again and an international policeman was injured and his car was damaged as a result of their violent behaviour. Further, Chappell said that the situation changed in the afternoon hours, but according to him, only 30 Serbs are still protesting. He said that they talked to Serbs all day trying to unblock the road.

**Chapel:** "I know that this could be an emotional reaction related to last night's wounding. We condemn this act as a terrible crime but we also condemn violence. This violence is impeding us from starting an investigation and we still haven't been able to make the first step in shedding light in this act," added Chappell. He said that he hoped the road would be unblocked soon. [ images of the UN vehicles on the blocked road] [1 min. 9 sec.]

**Correspondent continues:** Besides KFOR and UNMIK police members, KPS members also participated in observing the situation. [5.2 sec.]

**Statement of Refki Morina/KPS spokesperson/in his office:** Yes, we worked together with KFOR and international police of UNMIK and we constantly work together so that security, the level of security of citizen movement is at the desired level. We have co-ordinated this work and action together with the international police, and the KPS was at locations where we thought they could give their greatest contribution in the security of citizens, their movement, and advising them not to go in certain directions because they can be endangered. [followed by the images of KPS patrol cars and policemen in the blocked road] [30.5 sec.)

**Correspondent:** Although the Serb protest ended at midday, according to police, the road here in the village of Gračanica remains blocked because of great danger. The KPS members in Gračanica, which we entered using secondary roads, told us that today's protestors were high school students and confirmed that they threw stones at travellers in morning hours. They told us that the road will not open soon because of the fear that the situation may escalate and they also warned that protests may continue tomorrow. [Correspondent speaks in front of the UN Building. Images follow of the road and vehicles blocked in Caglavica] [29.6 sec]

**Presenter in studio continues with Holkeri statement:** SRSG Harry Holkeri has condemned the attack of last night in Caglavica. He has stressed that the attacks with ethnic motivation or any other motivation do not serve either community's interests and also harms the image of Kosovo. The Chief of UNMIK condemned the closure of the roads by Serbs in Gracanica and Caglavica. "I understand the frustrating and indignation of the people, but I can not accept the violence carried out after these incidents, when some people blocked the road, set the vehicles on fire and did not allow access to police and KFOR," emphasised SRSG Holkeri. *[images of SRSG giving a press statement] [30.7 sec]*

**Presenter - Rugova statement:** Also the President Ibrahim Rugova condemned the wounding of the young Serb Jovica Ivic last night in Caglavica and asked for an investigation of this criminal act, and that the perpetrators be brought to justice. President Rugova underlined that in Kosovo there should be security for all citizens, while law enforcement agencies should investigate = criminal incidents. All citizens must behave in compliance with the provisions of rule of law, said President Rugova. *[Archive images of Rugova answering journalists' questions.] [22.2 sec.]*

**Presenter - Bajram Rexhepi's statement:** PM Bajram Rexhepi condemned last night's attack in Caglavica. Acts such as the recent one neither contributes to peace nor to democratic development in Kosovo, says the statement of PM Rexhepi. He also added that blocking the roads is not a democratic way of expressing dissatisfaction, and we appeal to the citizens to respect the law and to allow the bodies in charge to carry out their job. *[Archive image of Prime Minister give an apparent press statement] [21.6 sec.]*

**Presenter - Daci's statement:** The chairman of the Assembly, Nexhat Daci condemned yesterday's attack on a Serb citizen in a village near Prishtina and asked the respective bodies to bring to justice the perpetrators of this dirty act. Chairman of the Assembly Daci also condemned the of blocking of the Prishtina – Skopje road by the local inhabitants, considering that such acts do not help Kosovo and its stabilization. *[Image of Daci in his office] [22.2 sec.]*

**Presenter:** The chairman of PDK also condemned the attack against the Serb citizen in Caglavica. Any violent attack goes works to the disadvantage of the democratic process and efforts of Kosovo institutions to create an environment of tolerance among Kosovo citizens, assesses the leader of this party. He judges that blocking the road and the violence against passers-by was an act to be condemned, that affects the free movement of citizens. *[Image of the PDK logo only] [23.5 sec.]*

### **Third news: The protest “All in protection of the liberation war”**

**Presenter:** Today, in Prishtina and in the other centres of Kosovo, peaceful protests were held with the motto “all in protection of the liberation war.” Speakers addressing the protestors called for officers of Kosovo Protection Corps to be released from prison, as according to them, they are unjustly held in prison. [13.07 sec.]

**Presenter:** Valon Bajrami, a TV 21 journalist, reports from the protest in Prishtina: The association that emerged from the war, as a protest organiser, and hundreds of citizens who protested in front of the national theatre expressed their revolt once again because of the liberators’ arrests. Organisation council members of the protests demand local and international institutions to stop violations of liberation war values and at the same time they demand the release of the officers of TMK as soon as possible, as according to them they are unjustly held in prison.

The war of UCK has one single goal, liberation of our territory from the invaders. It had a pure liberation character and was oriented against all mechanisms of the invaders, who for centuries continuously committed crimes against our people, it was said in the protests organised in Prishtina against the arrests of the members of UCK.

Members of organisation council in Prishtina said that criminalisation of the liberation war, and disavowal of the blood of thousands of martyrs, is the highest crime that can happen today. *[Image of a peaceful protest]* [54.5 sec.]

#### **Excerpts of statements by protest organizers:**

**Faton Klinaku, Member of the Organizing Council for the protest:** Too much noise is going on in Kosovo, at all political levels, investigation and judicial. Terrible noise that is putting people, who gave so much blood to live in peace, in a very difficult and unbearable position. With the aim of fighting against these values, the main targets are entirely the former fighters of UCK and our liberation war. *[Speaks to protesters in front of the National Theatre]* [22.8]

**Sadik Krasniqi, member of the Organizing Council:** Where are those parties, those mechanisms, and those institutions of Kosovo, who abandon the war, which leave their families, invalids, war veterans at the mercy of destiny, on the crossroad of Kosovo. *[Speaks to protesters in front of the National Theatre]* [ 8.3 sec.]

**Mustafë Sopi, Association of Martyr’s Families:** It is not the first time that we are protesting in this way. However, our demands were not taken into account even once. *[Speaks to protesters in front of the National Theatre]* [21.4 sec.]

**Correspondent continues:** Protests in Prishtina ended without incident and the protesters dispersed peacefully. Protests with the motto "All in protection of the liberation war" took place also in other centres of Kosovo. [More images from the protest] [09.8 sec

**Other news items:**

- Thaci's visit in USA and his meeting with Mrs. Albright
  - Jakup Krasniqi vs. Ministry of Finance
  - Collective contracts
  - Package of the draft for electricity will soon go to the Assembly
  - Weather forecast
-

TV 21

17 March 2004

18:30

**Main News****Interview with Fetim Veseli, made by Bahtir Cakolli**

**B.C:** Here in this place started the yesterday's tragedy. Fitim Veseli was the one who survived this tragedy, but lost his brother.

**Fitim's story:**

We were walking. We have our fields also and when some Serbs with a dog that means two Serbs wanted to attack us, we were six people. Two people were ahead--Florim Veseli and Qamil Zeqiri, they both were walking, that means on the left side, whereas we were four. We all went together, me and my brother Florent Veseli 9 years old, Egzon Deliu 12 and Avni Veseli 11years old, when Serbs attacked us.

First, because we did not see Serbs, they swore us from that house [he points out the house at an apparent distance of 100 meters or more] and then we saw them and we started to run away but they released the dog, and the dog was very fast and we could not escape from it. Egzon Deliu and Avni Veseli entered here in that place of the Iber River whereas my brother and me were a bit behind, because he could not run fast.

We were on that place over there climbing down so the river was until here, very high and the waves were very fast. When I got out here once he fell from my back, here as I said before, and got three or four meters away from me then I swum fast and caught him again. Whereas the other two, when my brother and me came out here the other two had already gone before us.

Egzon Deliu and Avni Veseli, because the Iber was too fast, they were swimming and we, after I put him on my back went in the water till there, and the water threw me 20 meters away from here, maybe more 30 metres. It threw me over there and I swallowed water but not too much and then I looked, I got up after I regained some energy, I looked if I could see someone but I did not see anyone.

Then I went to my uncle's son, at Driton Veseli, his house is over there, and I went and told him what had happened. Then he called police, KFOR, KPC and others, two have been found.

*[While speaking, he points to place indicated in text] [2mn 30 sec]*