

MEDIA RELEASE:

Former colleagues from international organizations question the fairness of the upcoming trial of Oliver Ivanović

In a joint statement former senior leaders from the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union have raised questions about the prosecution of Oliver Ivanović for alleged crimes during the Kosovo War. An earlier U.N. investigation carried out in 2000-2003 found that Mr. Ivanović had no connection to the killing of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The current indictment was brought by the European Union Rule of Law (EULEX) Mission in Kosovo.

"This is the wrong time and the wrong person to indict," said William L. Nash, a former U.N. administrator in Mitrovica and currently a visiting lecturer at Princeton University. "These old charges come fourteen years after the event and they have been levelled against the one Kosovo Serb who even The Economist has called a "leading force for ethnic reconciliation in the north."

Some of Mr Ivanović's former colleagues said they fear the allegations against Mr. Ivanović are politically motivated and amount to little more than recycled rumours that have already been addressed.

The trial of Kosovo-Serb politician Oliver Ivanović, indicted for alleged war crimes against ethnic Albanians in April 1999 and February 2000, is due to begin in Mitrovica late January 2015 before an international EULEX judge.

The indictment says "there is well-grounded suspicion" that on 14th April 1999 during the NATO bombing of Serbia and the invasion of Kosovo - Mr Ivanović incited police and paramilitary groups to murder nine Albanians, three of whom were subsequently shot dead.

EULEX prosecutors also allege that on 3rd February 2000 Mr Ivanović, and former Mitrovica Police Commander Dragoljub Delibasić, incited or ordered police and paramilitaries to expel ethnic Albanians from their homes in northern Mitrovica "with the eventual intent to murder or inflict bodily injury upon them".

Mr Ivanović, who has denied all charges at earlier hearings, was arrested and gaoled on 27 January 2014, but charges were not presented until August 2014. Now, nearly twelve months after his original detention, he still remains imprisoned. His trial is due to begin in late January 2015. This breaches European norms on pre-trial detention; norms which EULEX is seeking to establish in Kosovo.

In the interim EULEX itself has been under fire for allegedly covering up bribery and corruption at top levels in the mission. Maria Bamieh, a British EULEX prosecutor was dismissed last October for 'gross misconduct', soon after making these allegations.

European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly reported last month that allegations of irregularities with EULEX had been set out in 2012 in a report by a EULEX prosecutor but which had disappeared. She noted "the Ombudsman trusts that the question of how such an important document could disappear...will be examined when looking at possible shortcomings in the EULEX operations." O'Reilly has reserved the right to revisit this matter **once a criminal pre-trial investigation and / or experienced expert have presented their conclusions.**

Mr Ivanovič has declared the charges against him are 'political' and has pointed out that investigations conducted by UNMIK Police and prosecutors in 2000-2003 found that he had no connection with the killing of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

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