



KOSOVO

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Security Mission to Kosovo Faces Local Reluctance

By Ian Johnson, Wall Street Journal

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122877290688889167.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

Civilian law-enforcement officials from the European Union, the U.S. and a handful of other countries began working in Kosovo Tuesday to bolster shaky police, courts and customs systems.

This unprecedented mission in a country recognized as a major conduit for smuggling drugs and weapons into Europe faces steep challenges. A bombing in Kosovo's capital of Pristina and a murky spy affair involving German agents highlight some of the diplomatic difficulties as the EU begins the ambitious effort in the Balkans.

Three German intelligence agents were charged in a Kosovo court on Nov. 22 in connection with an attack on the EU envoy's office there. The incident bared tensions over an international mission to boost rule of law in Kosovo.

"It's an extremely difficult situation for the EU," says Dusan Reljic, a fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin. "They are testing their capability for state-building in an area that is riven by factions and crime."

The mission, dubbed EULEX, is the result of a complex series of agreements between the EU, Russia, Serbia and Kosovo that gives a legal mandate for nearly 2,000 law-enforcement officials to operate in Kosovo. The mission received €205 million (\$260 million) from the EU for an initial 16 months, but is expected to be extended for several years.

Kosovo, which has a population of around 2.1 million, has officially welcomed the EU's involvement, but many there oppose the program.

The operation is resented in Serbian-inhabited areas of Kosovo because, by bolstering Kosovo's ability to police itself, it strengthens its independence. Russia and Serbia opposed Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia earlier this year.

Some ethnic Albanian Kosovars are also against the EU mission, arguing they don't need what is effectively an overlay of foreign police, judges and prosecutors.

EU officials concede they are walking into a tricky situation, but say they have good relations overall with Kosovo and are optimistic.

Nevertheless, at the end of November Kosovo expelled three agents working for Germany's BND intelligence service after courts alleged they were part of an effort to blow up an EU office in Pristina supervising Kosovo's independence. After the blast Nov. 18, which caused light damage and no injuries, Kosovo police arrested three men taking photographs. They turned out to be BND officers.

This material was originally featured on the Kosovo Compromise website.

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Germany acknowledges the three men are BND agents, and said they were innocent. BND officials have said they should have sent an intelligence officer with a diplomatic pass -- and thus diplomatic immunity. Beyond this, German officials say they did nothing wrong.

However, the BND has been critical of the Kosovo government, producing a 2005 report to the German government that accused Kosovo's leaders of links to organized crime and extremism. That has led to speculation in German political circles and in the media that the agents were arrested in revenge for the report.

In the BND report, a copy of which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci is linked to paramilitary groups, cigarette smugglers, extortion rackets and drug dealers. The report details connections among the ruling elite to Islamist militants who helped Kosovars, who are mostly Muslims, to fight in a guerrilla war against Serbian forces.

Similar allegations have been circulated by Serbia. But the charges have more credibility coming from Germany, which took a lead in securing international recognition for Kosovo's independence and is Kosovo's second-largest foreign-aid donor, behind the U.S.

Kosovo officials say the allegations against Mr. Thaci in the report and any links between the report and the BND agents' expulsion are unfounded. "These charges are pure speculation and the issues are not linked," says Memli Krasniqi, the prime minister's spokesman. "The government's position was that [the bombing] is an issue that shouldn't be politicized and should be investigated by the legal authorities. We stayed completely out of it."