

The Coordinating Body of the Council of Ministers and the Government of the Republic of Serbia for the Bujanovac, Presevo and Medvedja Municipalities was set up on 16 Dec 2000 and entrusted with the main task to coordinate the activities of the public authorities and the bodies of local self-government conducive to settlement of the crisis brought about by the activities of armed groups of Albanian extremists in the mentioned municipalities.

At the proposal of the Coordinating Body, the Government of the Republic of Serbia (on 6 February 2001) and the Federal Government adopted (on 7 February 2001) the Programme for the Peaceful Settlement of the Crisis in the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja Municipalities which was, *inter alia*, supported also by all the relevant factors in the international community, on 14 February 2001 at the NATO Council in Brussels and on 15 February 2001 at the OSCE Headquarters in Vienna. The mentioned Programme specified the tasks, organization, membership and the financial resources of the Coordinating Body. The most important task mentioned in the introductory sentence was primarily to establish security of all citizens and their properties and their full and unhindered freedom of movement, which necessitated that Albanian terrorist groups be disbanded and disarmed and that after that the number of special military and police forces previously mobilized under an emergency procedure in the region be reduced. After that it was necessary to work towards the integration of the Albanians into the political, state and social system of the Republic of Serbia and the municipalities concerned, develop a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society based on democratic principles, ensure respect for human and minority rights of all citizens in accordance with modern standards and, finally, after completing these previously mentioned tasks effectively, work to secure prosperity and fast economic and social development of the region in the interest of all its citizens.

In this first stage of its activities, the Coordinating Body had its head office in Bujanovac. The Body was directed by its Chairman who was answerable to the Federal Government and to the Government of the Republic of Serbia. The Coordinating Body had regular and open-ended sessions, it had permanent and *ad hoc* members.

The Federal Government's 12th session held on 16 Dec 2000 appointed Dr Nebojsa Covic, the then Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, as Chairman of the Coordinating Body, and Mr Rasim Ljajic, the then Federal

Minister for National and Ethnic Communities, as Deputy Chairman. On that occasion, the session also appointed the following as permanent members of the Coordinating Body: Milovan Coguric, Bozo Prelevic, Stevan Nikcevic, Slobodan Tomovic, Zoran Nikolic, Sead Spahovic, Dragan Subasic, Ivica Dacic, Biserka Matic-Spasojevic, Bogoljub Pejic, Veljko Odalovic and Milisav Markovic. The Coordinating Body also had 5 committees/divisions and a Secretariat which included representatives of federal and republic authorities. The permanent members of the Coordinating Body were hence the following: the Chairman; the Deputy Chairmen; the representatives of the Police Force and the Army (VJ); the chairmen of the 5 committees; the secretary; and the members of the Secretariat. The *ad hoc* members were the representatives of other ministries, bodies and citizens serving on the committees and in the local self-government.

With the establishment of the Coordinating Body and through its activities, the activities of the VJ and the Police Force and of other agencies of government administration were significantly enhanced and better coordinated and the spreading of violence by groups of Albanian extremists was halted, the VJ was redeployed throughout a major part of the Land Safety Zone (LSZ), all with the help and support of the international community.

In order to ensure effective and efficient protection of citizens, settlements and properties and establish durable peace in the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja municipalities, the Coordinating Body made a proposal, which the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted on 6 Mar 2001, for the Joint FRY/RS Security Forces (JSF) to be established in the mentioned municipalities. The Joint Security Forces were made up of specially designated military and police forces which were directed by the Coordinating Body. All measures implemented by the Coordinating Body, the Joint Security Forces and other authorities were in tune with the programme and the plan for the settlement of crises in the Pcinj District. In order to familiarize the bodies of local self-government and the local population with the substance and essence of the Programme, the Coordinating Body members organized 26 panel discussions in the period from 16 Dec 2000 – 9 Apr 2001 at the municipal assemblies and in the settlements inhabited by Albanians and by Serbs in the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja municipalities.

On 20 Feb 2001 an invitation was extended to the political representatives of the Albanian national community to engage in a dialogue on ways to manage the crisis in Southern Serbia by peaceful means. On 12 March 2001 the Ceasefire Statement was signed between the Commander of the FRY/RS Joint Security Forces and the Personal Envoy of the NATO Secretary General which was fully adhered to with the dislocation of tanks and heavy weaponry.

On 23 Mar 2001 at the KFOR base in Merdare, in the presence of the Personal Envoy of the NATO Secretary General and the political adviser of the KFOR Commander, a dialogue commenced between the FRY/RS team and the Albanian national community. After that, in keeping with the decision of the NATO Council on conditional and phased entry of the Joint Security Forces into the LSZ and the documents signed on 12 and 23 March, our military units entered the first sectors of the Land Safety Zone.

At the initiative of the Coordinating Body, a working group was set up in order to control the legality of police activities. The working group initiated disciplinary proceedings against 22 officers of the Secretariat of Internal Affairs in Vranje, criminal charges were brought against 4 police officers and 146 police employees were assigned to other duties outside the territories of the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja municipalities.

Measures were undertaken to start integration of the Albanians into the public authorities and the bodies of local self-government. In the Bujanovac municipality, by the decision of the Municipal Authority, the number of members of the Executive Committee was increased from 9 to 15. Within a short time period, the Executive Committee admitted to membership an appropriate number of ethnic Albanians. In the period from 4 Feb 2001 – 24 Feb 2001 the councils of local neighborhood communities were set up in the settlements inhabited exclusively by the Albanians in the Medvedja municipality.

At the proposal of the Coordinating Body, the formal impediments to employment of Albanians by the Police were eliminated and the issue of doing military service was settled with respect to those Albanians who had not done their military service in the Army of Yugoslavia.

On 4 Apr 2001 the Concept of Education and Training of a Multi-national Police proposed by the OSCE Office was endorsed. In the Presevo

Municipality, the local Police Department took on ethnic Albanians who now work there. As a result, nationally heterogeneous police patrols have started doing their rounds in Albanian settlements.

On 14 Feb and on 2 Mar 2001 the National Assembly of RS and the Federal Assembly adopted the Amnesty Laws suspending prosecution of a number of RS citizens and granting pardon to a number of other RS citizens who were already serving time in prison (these were the perpetrators of the following criminal offences: armed rebellion; incitement to violently overthrow the constitutional order; and association for the purpose of performing a hostile activity).

All the persons kidnapped after 21 November 2000 were returned by 17 Apr 2001 to their respective families.

Work was initiated to carry out the first projects for economic development of the region and, in particular, for development and reconstruction of the road network, the power utilities, water management system, health care, education, child care, culture and information. The first and the most difficult stage in the activities of the Coordinating Body was thus brought to a successful completion in early summer of 2001 when the new circumstances called for new forms of organization to be introduced. To that end, in June 2001 the Command of the JSF was transformed, on 15 Jun 2001 the Government paid tribute to the Coordinating Body and all military servicemen and police officers for exceptional results achieved over the observed period and particularly to Generals Krstic and Jelic.

Bearing in mind the impact of the actions undertaken to date, the Coordinating Body proposed, and the Governments of RS and FRY accepted on 30 Aug 2001, that the Coordinating Body be downsized in terms of its organization and membership. On the basis of that decision, the Coordinating Body was transformed and from then onwards it included its Chairman and an appropriate number of associates decided by the Chairman. The hitherto Deputy Chairmen and members of the Coordinating Body were re-assigned to their basic duties and to their previous work posts on 1 Sep 2001. From then on, it was the Chairman of the Coordinating Body that directly coordinated the activities of the public authorities and the bodies of local self-government in terms of cooperation with the representatives of the relevant neighborhood communities.

After the above period, the Coordinating Body shifted its focus from security issues to political and economic affairs. In this context, and at the proposal of the Coordinating Body, the Government of RS passed on 28 February 2002 a decision to dissolve the Municipal Assemblies of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja and to set up the Municipal Councils of the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja municipalities. After that the Federal Government adopted on 14 Mar and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on 15 Mar 2002 the Agreement on the Basic Principles for Holding Early Municipal Elections in Southern Serbia. On 15 Mar 2002 the Government of RS adopted the Conclusion to pardon 5 persons belonging to the Albanian nationality resident in Southern Serbia who committed the criminal offences of armed rebellion from 28 Jun 2000 – 16 Feb 2001.

On 30 May 2002 the Chairman of the Coordinating Body signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the UNDP. As a result, issues of economic development of the municipalities in Southern Serbia became definitely the focus of attention of the Coordinating Body.

On 28 Jul 2002 the elections for councillors to the local Municipal Assemblies and for Presidents of the municipalities (Mayors) were held in a fair and democratic atmosphere. The political representatives of the Albanian community scored a victory in the election to the Municipal Assembly of Presevo and to the Municipal Assembly of Bujanovac. As a result, the democratically elected authorities were formed and the Coordinating Body took a leading role in supporting and helping implement the political stabilization and economic development programme in these three municipalities in Southern Serbia. To that end, the Federal Government tasked on 27 June 2002 all Federal Ministries with designating their representatives to the Coordinating Body.

On 1 Jul 2002 the Government of RS designated the representatives of all the Ministries to the Coordinating Body.

The Coordinating Body adopted the Programme for Political-Security Stabilization and Economic-Social Development of the Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja Municipalities for the Period from 1 Jan 2005 – 31 Dec 2007 which was adopted by the Government of RS at its session held on 6 Nov 2003. The Programme envisages changes in the organization and structure of the Coordinating Body which, first and foremost, require the involvement of the competent line Ministries with the (implementation of) the programme

for economic and social development of these municipalities in Southern Serbia.

Given that Dr Nebojsa Covic, Chairman of the Coordinating Body was at the same time holding the office of President of the Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohia, by the decision on the restructuring of the Coordination Center adopted at the Government of RS session on 29 Dec 2004, the Coordinating Body Service was established as an internal section of the Coordination Center.

On 20 Jan 2005 the Government of RS appointed Dr Nebojsa Covic as Chairman of the Coordinating Body as well as 6 Deputy Chairmen of the Coordinating Body, notably: Rasim Ljajic, Ninoslav Krstic and Milisav Markovic, the Mayors of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja and members of the Coordinating Body who represented the competent line Ministries.

In that period the Coordinating Body resumed its operations in accordance with the Programme for Political-Security Stabilization and Economic-Social Development of the Bujanovac, Presevo and Medvedja Municipalities.

On 1 Sept 2005 the session of the Government of RS appointed Mr Rasim Ljajic as Chairman of the Coordinating Body and then, the taking of the Decision on the Regulation of the Coordinating Body and the issuance of the Decree Establishing the Coordinating Body Service on 10 Nov 2005 marked the start of a new period in the operations of this public authority. Messrs Ninoslav Krstic, Dragan Lazic and Dusan Spasojevic were appointed as Deputy Chairmen of the Coordinating Body. The setting up of the Coordinating Body Service 5 years after the establishment of this political body marked a new stage in the process of management of the situation in Southern Serbia. In this manner, the state has exhibited its resolve to deal with the problems besetting Southern Serbia in a systematic and methodical way and, what is more, over the long term.