



**EUNPACK**

A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF  
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH  
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

## POLICY BRIEF

# Public Perceptions of the EU's Role in Crisis Management in South Mitrovica

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## Summary and Recommendations

A key challenge for the EU in Mitrovica is the discrepancy between how the population in the now legally divided North and South of Mitrovica perceives the role of the EU in this conflict area. While the population in North Mitrovica is moderately to highly sceptical of the EU's involvement (see Bátorá et al 2017), citizens in South Mitrovica are more positive about the Union's role. While the EU enjoys relatively high levels of approval in South Mitrovica, life in the town remains relatively segregated, which continues to hamper the normalisation of relations between the people of both municipalities.

The current brief presents findings from a survey on the local population's attitudes towards the EU in South Mitrovica, carried out in July 2017. The survey builds on the overall research design of the EUNPACK project, which combines institutional analyses of the EU's crisis management apparatus, with anthropological approaches from peace and conflict studies that focus on the EU's field-level contribution to conflict resolution in various parts of the EU's neighbourhood.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section provides a brief historical overview of the development of the crisis locally in Mitrovica, focusing on the southern part of town and the EU's engagement in managing the crisis there. The second section presents the methodology and data. The third section contains key findings and policy recommendations.

Building on the data presented here, the following policy recommendations can be proposed for the EU's engagement with South Mitrovica:

- **The EU should support locally conditioned dynamics of cooperation**, including making sure that medical services and meeting points such as the shopping centre in South Mitrovica (close to the Railway bridge) continue to be accessible and safe to all populations from both parts of town;
- **The EU should (continue to) support civil society organisations' efforts to establish and run trust-building activities between citizens from North and South of Mitrovica** – and across the rest of Kosovo;
- **The EU should focus its support in South Mitrovica on building trust, not only towards institutions in Pristina but also towards governance institutions in North Mitrovica.** Parallel structures of governance in North Mitrovica will not be disbanded quickly and local interactions should not be hampered by their existence.
- **The EU should step up the conflict-sensitive approach in its interaction with citizens of Kosovo** – and show that it is not only interested in stabilisation between Kosovo and Serbia but also in good governance within Kosovo and Serbia.

## South Mitrovica – background and challenges to EU engagement on the ground

Once administered as a single and ethnically mixed municipality, Mitrovica was de facto divided immediately after the end of conflict in Kosovo in 1999, when Kosovo-Serbs of the south and Kosovo-Albanians of the north were displaced and found refuge on respective sides of the city. Until Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, and due to the immediate risk factors involved, the NATO-led Kosovo Protection Force (KFOR) and the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) were the primary international actors involved on both sides; the EU did not have a significant role. Following Kosovo's independence, however, the EU's role in Mitrovica grew through the deployment of its largest ever civilian mission deployed abroad – the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). The EU inherited many of the problems left unresolved by previous international actors present in the area. Perceived as a supporter of Kosovo's independence, EULEX had difficulties operating in the northern part of Kosovo. It had difficulties in establishing itself as a legitimate actor, especially, as its operations were rejected by the local population in the north through various organised groups (e.g. The Bridge Watchers). EULEX began to slowly gain ground in the area, only after the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia commenced in March 2011. In addition to funding various projects on both sides of the city, the EU continued to be more heavily involved at the grassroots level. More recently, the EU helped to fund the reconstruction of the infamous main bridge, which has been a symbol of the dividing lines, not only between the city itself, but also between the two communities, the Kosovo-Albanians in the south and Kosovo-Serbs in the north (for more see Kursani 2014).

## Methodology and data collection

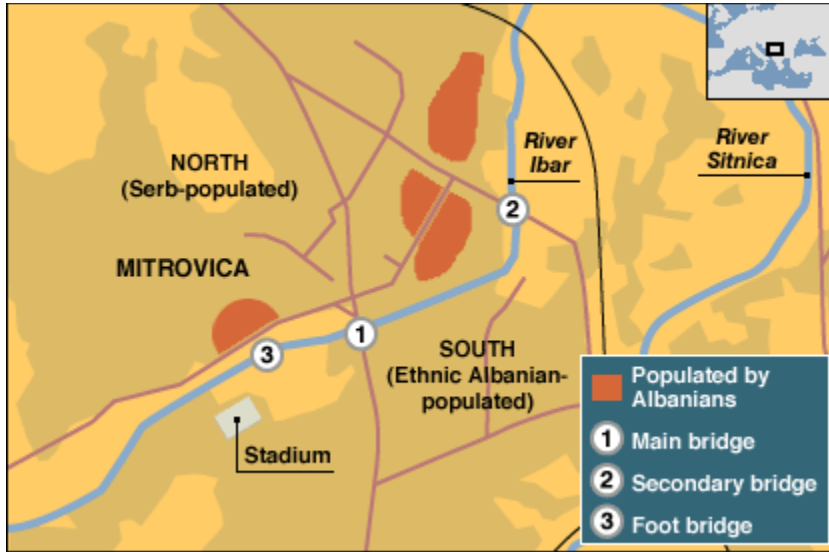
The EUNPACK WP5 team has developed a survey questionnaire of public attitudes based on a template used in all other EUNPACK research. In part, the questionnaire had to be adapted to fit local circumstances in Kosovo and, more specifically, in South Mitrovica. Survey teams coordinated by the Kosovo Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) were deployed in South Mitrovica on 10-11 July 2017 and collected responses from 100 respondents. The four field researchers randomly chose passers-by in locations close to the bridges in the town centre, which divide the northern and the southern part of the city – now the two municipalities (see Figure 1). For comparative purposes, an identical survey was conducted in North Mitrovica by researchers deployed by the Belgrade Center for Security Policy (BCSP). The survey was conducted by four field researchers on the same dates.<sup>1</sup> Respondents were of various ages.

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<sup>1</sup> Findings from this survey are reported in Bátorá 2017b.

Figure 1. Location of bridges in Mitrovica



Source: BBC.com.

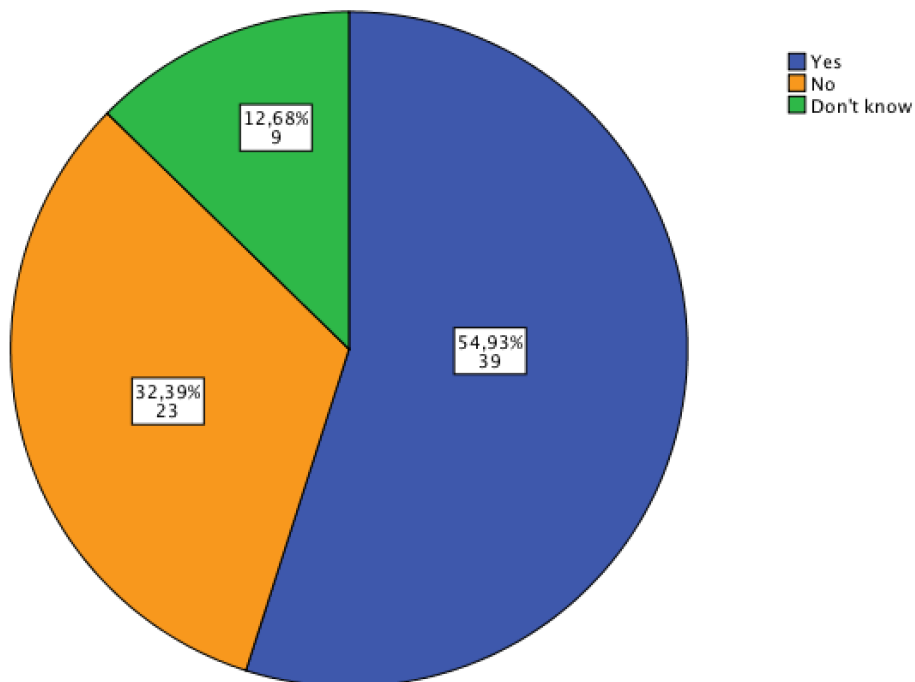
## Findings

### Perceptions of the EU in South Mitrovica

Citizens in South Mitrovica are relatively satisfied with how the EU has been distributing assistance in Mitrovica (see Figure 2). This is profoundly different from the population in North Mitrovica, where as many as 67 out of 100 respondents said that they did *not* think the EU knew where assistance was needed in their town.

Figure 2. EU's understanding of where assistances needs to go (numbers out of 71 valid responses)

**Does the EU understand where assistance and support need to go here in Mitrovica?**



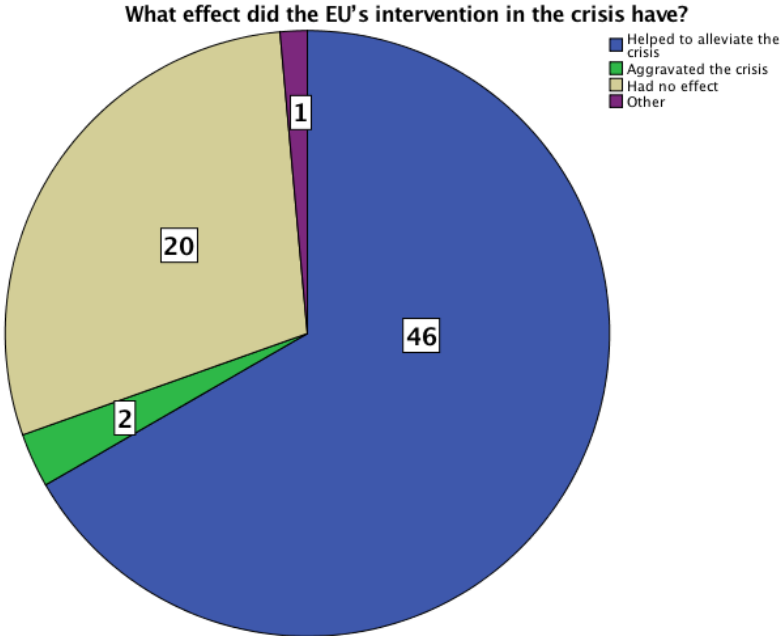
Second, it seems that the Kosovo-Albanian population (the majority of the population in the South) tends to have more positive attitudes about the EU’s aid than the Kosovo-Serbs. As shown in Table 1, 32 out of the 52 interviewed respondents in the South, or 62 percent, believed that the EU understood where assistance and support needed to go in Mitrovica. While 21 of the 65 respondents in the North, or 32 percent, believed the same.

Table 1. Perceptions of the EU’s understanding of local development aid needs in Mitrovica

		Ethnicity				Total
		K-Albanian	K-Serb	Both KA and KS	Other	
Does the EU understand where assistance and support need to go here in Mitrovica?	Yes	32	21	7	1	61
	No	22	44	22	2	90
Total		54	65	29	3	151

Third, most citizens in South Mitrovica view the EU’s role in local crisis management in a positive light, compared to those living in North Mitrovica. For instance, as shown in Figure 3, the majority, or 46 out of the 69 respondents, claimed that the EU’s intervention helped to alleviate the conflict. While 20 out of the 69 respondents believed that the EU’s involvement had no effect.

Figure 3. South Mitrovica population views on the effects of the EU’s intervention in the crisis



**Practices around bridges across the Ibar: South Mitrovica perspective**

The river Ibar has acted as a boundary between ethnically structured divisions in Mitrovica. Bridges across the Ibar have been a source of contention and – to some extent – sites of violent protest and conflict between the two communities in recent years. It is interesting that there are significant



differences in how the population from the two sides of the river chooses to use the bridges in their daily lives. Several findings on South Mitrovica can be reported here.

First, there are substantial differences in the reasons why Kosovo-Albanian and Kosovo-Serbs cross the bridges. For instance, more people from the South cross the bridge to go to the North to seek medical help, compared to those from the North doing the same in the South. Also, given that there are still a number of Kosovo-Albanian villages in the North, crossing the bridge for family visits happens more frequently among those living in the South. See Table 2.

		Ethnicity				Total Count
		K-Albanian Count	K-Serb Count	Both KA and KS Count	Other Count	
Medical help	Yes	5	1	1	0	7
	No	4	22	18	0	44
	Total	9	23	19	0	51
Shopping (groceries)	Yes	19	12	10	0	41
	No	3	12	9	0	24
	Total	22	24	19	0	65
Shopping (Luxury items)	Yes	1	7	3	0	11
	No	3	17	16	0	36
	Total	4	24	19	0	47
Visiting family/relatives	Yes	11	4	7	1	23
	No	2	20	12	0	34
	Total	13	24	19	1	57
Leisure and fun	Yes	18	10	2	0	30
	No	2	19	17	0	38
	Total	20	29	19	0	68
Other	Yes	4	7	8	0	19
	No	53	25	11	1	90
	Total	57	32	19	1	109

*Table 2. Reasons for crossing the bridges*

Second, there seems to be an ethnically conditioned divide in terms of the frequency of using bridges. Kosovo-Albanians use all bridges and the likelihood of their using the Main bridge is substantially higher than the Kosovo-Serbs from North Mitrovica. See Tables 2, 3 and 4. Also, the fact that a major shopping centre is located on the southern side close to the Railway bridge may explain why that bridge is used more often than the Main bridge.

*Table 3. Frequency of crossing the Main bridge: number of respondents (data from both North and South Mitrovica)*

		Ethnicity				Total
		K-Albanian	K-Serb	Both KA and KS	Other	
Frequency crossing Main Bridge	Never	2	40	13	1	56
	Rarely	17	18	12	0	47
	Once a month	6	4	2	0	12
	Once a week	7	5	3	1	16
	Daily	31	5	2	1	39
Total		63	72	32	3	170

*Table 4. Frequency of crossing the Main bridge: percentage of respondents (numbers from both North and South Mitrovica)*

		Ethnicity				Total
		K-Albanian	K-Serb	Both KA and KS	Other	
		Column N %	Column N %	Column N %	Column N %	Column N %
Frequency crossing Main Bridge	Never	3,2%	55,6%	40,6%	33,3%	32,9%
	Rarely	27,0%	25,0%	37,5%	0,0%	27,6%
	Once a month	9,5%	5,6%	6,3%	0,0%	7,1%
	Once a week	11,1%	6,9%	9,4%	33,3%	9,4%
	Daily	49,2%	6,9%	6,3%	33,3%	22,9%
	Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

As the tables show, the Kosovo-Albanian population from South Mitrovica is more likely to cross both bridges in Mitrovica than the Kosovo-Serbs in North Mitrovica. This ethnic divide has to do with factors such as the possibly higher quality of medical services in North Mitrovica or the Kosovo-Albanian ethnic composition of villages around North Mitrovica.

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