



## **DECISION AND FINDINGS**

**Date of adoption: 4 June 2020**

**Case no. 2016-17**

**Milijana Avramović**

**Against**

**EULEX**

The Human Rights Review Panel, sitting on 4 June 2020 with the following members present:

Mr Guénaël METTRAUX, Presiding Member  
Ms Anna BEDNAREK, Member  
Ms Anna AUTIO, Member

Assisted by  
Mr Ronald HOOGHIEMSTRA, Legal Officer

Having considered the aforementioned complaint, introduced pursuant to Council Joint Action 2008/124/CFSP of 4 February 2008, the EULEX Accountability Concept of 29 October 2009 on the establishment of the Human Rights Review Panel and the Rules of Procedure of the Panel as last amended on 11 December 2019,

Having deliberated through electronic means in accordance with Rule 13(3) of the Panel's Rules of Procedure, decides as follows:

### **I. PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE PANEL**

1. The complaint in this case was registered on 30 June 2016.
2. By letter of 1 July 2016, the Panel informed the Mission that this case had been registered.
3. On 28 June 2017, the Panel requested the complainant to provide additional information regarding her complaints.
4. On 20 September and 17 October 2017, the Panel sent two further requests for additional information. The Panel did not receive any response in relation to this case.
5. On 8 December 2017, the Panel transmitted a Statement of Facts and Questions to the Head of Mission (HoM), EULEX Kosovo, inviting her to submit her answers and written observations on the complaints no later than 26 January 2018.

6. By letter of 17 January 2019, the Mission was requested again to provide answers to the questions by 16 February 2019.
7. By letter of 8 April 2019, the Panel again requested the HoM to provide answers to the questions as soon as practical.
8. On 20 June 2019, the complainant was informed that the Panel was still in the process of examining her complaint.
9. The observations of the HoM were eventually received on 30 July 2019, after which they were communicated to the complainant for additional observations.
10. On 5 August 2019, the comments of the Acting HoM were forwarded to the complainant, and she was asked to submit her comments, if any, no later than 6 September 2019. She did not avail herself of that opportunity.
11. On 11 December 2019, the Panel found this case to be admissible (<https://hrrp.eu/docs/decisions/2019-12-11%20Admissibility%20Decision%202016-17.pdf>) with regard to alleged violations of Articles 2, 3, 8 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In that Decision, the Panel asked the parties to address the following questions:

1. **The complainant:** Please provide information pertaining to the following:

- i. What contact, if any, did you have with the EULEX Mission or its representatives?
- ii. Are you aware of any efforts by local authorities to investigate this case?
- iii. Has the Mission violated or contributed to the violation of the complainant's rights under Articles 2, 3, 8 and 13 of the Convention? If so, in what manner?
- iv. What are the consequences – personal, financial, legal and emotional – associated with the disappearance of your relative?

2. **The Mission:** Please provide information pertaining to the following:

- i. Why didn't the WCIU follow up on the request of the SPRK Prosecutor (see, supra, para. 32, Decision on Admissibility)? To your knowledge, was there further communication between them regarding this matter?
- ii. Why did the Mission not seek to contact relatives of Mr Avramović?
- iii. Has the Mission considered informing the relatives of those disappeared whose files have been transmitted to local, Kosovo, authorities of the existence of these files?
- iv. Has consideration been given to the possibility for the relatives of the disappeared to obtain access to those and, if so, of the conditions under which this could happen and through which authorities?
- v. The Mission's submissions of 30 July 2019 indicate that the hand-over note addressed to the (then) Chief Prosecutor of the SPRK contained an invitation to liaise with the EULEX WCIU regarding the actions undertaken in connection

to the request to conduct an investigation of July 2009. What 'actions' does the note pertain to? Has the Mission conducted investigative actions in relations to this case and, if so, which actions?

- vi. Have local authorities responded to the Mission's invitation contained in the hand-over note pertaining to this case? If so, have they sought the Mission's assistance?
  - vii. Has the Mission violated or contributed to the violation of the complainant's rights under Articles 2, 3, 8 and 13 of the Convention? If so, in what manner?
12. The parties were asked to make their submissions no later than 16 March 2020. By that time, the restrictive measures linked to the corona pandemic were in place. No new submissions were received from the complainant.
13. Due to the corona virus pandemic and the resulting suspension of postal services, it is possible that the complainant was unable to send additional submissions to the Panel. Because of the exceptional circumstances created by the current sanitary situation and having satisfied itself that the Panel could proceed without causing prejudice to the complainant, the Panel has decided to render its Decision without delay to ensure that proceedings are conducted expeditiously.

## **II. FACTS**

14. The facts, as they appear from the complaint, may be summarized as follows.
15. On 19 June 1999, at about 07.30 hours, the complainant's husband, Milorad Avramović, was abducted with four other men and a woman at St. Starca Vujadina 3/1, Tamnik, Mitrovica. At the time of his abduction, he was in the process of helping the above-mentioned woman to move house by truck from south Mitrovica to north Mitrovica.
16. The abductees were taken to another house close-by in Tamnik, Mitrovica, where they were interrogated for a couple of hours. Three of the men and the woman were then released into the custody of KFOR soldiers. The KFOR soldiers contacted UNMIK Police who took them back to north Mitrovica. Milorad Avramović and the driver of the truck were held overnight. The driver of the vehicle was released the following morning. There has been no trace of Milorad Avramović since that time.
17. The complainant reported the disappearance to UNMIK, to KFOR, to the ICRC and to local Non-Governmental Organisations in Mitrovica.
18. On 14 June 2000, a sister of Milorad Avramović provided a witness statement on the disappearance of her brother to an investigating judge at the District Court of Leskovac, Republic of Serbia. This statement and other information of relevance are contained in the case file.

## **III. SUBMISSIONS OF THE PARTIES**

### **The complainant**

19. As summarised above, the complainant is alleging that, in the exercise of its executive mandate, EULEX Kosovo should have investigated the disappearance of her husband and culpably failed to do so in violation of her and her husband's fundamental rights.

## Head of Mission (“HoM”)

20. The Mission’s submissions on the merit of this case were received on 27 April 2020.
21. In response to the Panel’s question as to why the Mission/WCIU had not followed up on the SPRK’s request of 23 July 2009 that WCIU should conduct an investigation of this case, the Mission said the following. That request was one of 900 similar requests issued by the EULEX SPRK. The Mission added:

‘Based on the information available, EULEX concludes that the WCIU was not able to follow up on this particular request to conduct an investigation, because it prioritized other cases that were more promising in terms of investigative outcomes. The Mission understands that this must be terribly upsetting and frustrating for Ms Avramović and deeply regrets that. However, given the massive amount of cases and documents handed over by UNMIK, the Mission had no other choice than to prioritize certain cases over others. To the Mission’s knowledge there was no further communication between SPRK and WCIU in connection to the request to conduct an investigation of July 2009.’
22. Asked why the Mission did not seek to contact relatives of the disappeared, the Mission responded that since it could not follow up on the 2009 request of investigation, it did not seek to contact them.
23. Regarding the possibility for the Mission to inform the relatives of those disappeared whose file was transmitted to local, Kosovo, authorities, the Mission said that it did not consider that it was required to do so. Furthermore, the Mission submitted that ‘this would also have been an impossible administrative task to complete by the deadline of December 2018. Had Ms Avramović contacted EULEX or the SPRK registry staff, she would have been informed about the existence of the case-file.’
24. Asked if consideration had been given to the possibility of giving relatives of the disappeared access to the case-files, the Mission says that as of June 2018, the files must be requested to the Kosovo institutions. The Panel takes this response as an indication that, prior to June 2018, the Mission gave no consideration to that possibility.
25. The Mission’s submissions of 30 July 2019 indicated that the hand-over addressed to the (then) Chief Prosecutor of the SPRK contained an investigation to liaise with the EULEX WCIU regarding the actions undertaken in connection to the request to conduct a investigation of July 2009. The Panel asked the Mission to explain what ‘actions’ the note pertained to and whether the Mission had conducted investigative actions in relation to this case and, if so, which actions. In response, the Mission said that the invitation was included to ensure that any possible actions undertaken just prior to the hand-over would be communicated to the Kosovo institutions and also that any further material available in the WCIU would be transmitted to these authorities. To the Mission’s knowledge ‘no such action was undertaken by the WCIU in connection to the request to conduct an investigation of July 2009.’
26. Asked whether the local authorities had reacted to the Mission’s invitation, the Mission responded that the case was assigned at the end of April 2018 to a Kosovo Prosecutor in the SPRK and encouraged the complainant to request information to the SPRK authorities.
27. Asked whether the Mission had violated the complainant’s rights under Articles 2, 3, 8, and 13 of the Convention, the Mission first makes it clear that it does not contest the competence *ratione materiae* of the Panel over this case (albeit under Articles 2 and 3 of

the Convention only). The Panel notes that the Mission does not explain why the Panel would not also have jurisdiction over Articles 8 and 13 in light in particular of the principle that it is for the Panel to determine what legal provision might be applicable (*jura novit curia*) and the fact that the case was declared admissible in relation to all four rights. See, generally, 2016-23, Admissibility Decision, paragraphs 40-42. Having failed to make submissions in relation to the last two of these rights, the Panel regards the Mission as having waived its entitlement to do so.

28. The Mission also acknowledges that 'the complainant has a right to an effective investigation into the disappearance of her husband'. However, the Mission adds, the procedural guarantee contained in Article 3 of the Convention is one of 'means' and not of result. Crucial to that assessment, the Mission suggests, is the question of whether the authorities 'have done all that could reasonably be expected of them in the circumstances of the case' (referring to the ECHR cases of *Trivkanovic*, para 78; *Borojevic*, para 57; and *Njezic*, para 69). Furthermore, it says, 'the nature and degree of scrutiny must be assessed on the basis of all relevant facts and with regard to the practical realities of investigation work' (referring and relying upon the ECHR cases: *Cindric and Beslic*, para 69; *Zdjelar*, para 83; *Velcea and Mazare*, para 105; and *Armani da Silva*, para 234).
29. On that basis, the mission invites the Panel in particular to give consideration to –
  - a) the scale of the crimes in question (in particular, the fact that the conflict made perhaps as many as 13,000 victims) meaning that not all crimes could ever be investigated; and
  - b) the state of the files inherited from UNMIK. In that regard, the Mission points to the inadequate and incomplete nature of the records that it was provided by UNMIK, which requires the Mission to invest much time and resources in reviewing and organising these. In the case of Mr Avramović, for instance, documents were split in different parts: there was a police 'war crime' file, a 'missing person' file and copies of documents held at the Department of Forensic Medicine (later the Institute of Forensic Medicine – IFM).

As a result, the Mission suggests that when, in July 2009, the EULEX SPRK Prosecutor issued a request to conduct investigation, 'she was most likely unaware that other documents pertaining to the disappearance of Milorad Avramović were available, such as those from the 'missing person' file and the ones held at the DFM/IFM.'

30. On that basis, the Mission invites the Panel to ensure that its assessment of what could be done in those circumstances should be realistic and proportionate. In particular, the Mission explains that the combined effect of a large number of cases and limited resources caused the Mission to prioritize 1200 case-files labelled 'war crimes' by UNMIK – over 'missing persons files' – and, within the former category, cases that appeared 'more promising in terms of investigation outcomes'.
31. Regarding its duty to keep relatives of disappeared informed, the Mission said the following:

'The Mission does acknowledge that, with a view to manage expectations more adequately and be more transparent, it should have done more to keep relatives and the wider public informed about the implementation of its mandate as well as its constraints and limitations. However, in the present case and in considering the fundamental obstacles presented, the Mission does not believe that the complainant's rights were violated.'

32. Regarding the change in the Mission's mandate and its effect upon this case, the Mission indicated that it retains an executive capacity to support the Kosovo Institute of Forensic Medicine in the conduct of activities such as site-assessments, exhumations and excavations and remains available should new credible information come to light.
33. The Mission also gives a general description of its monitoring activities, i.e., its observing and reporting upon cases being dealt with by local authorities, although it does not suggest that it is currently monitoring the present case.

#### **IV. DELIBERATIONS**

##### *Importance of protected rights and interests*

34. As a preliminary matter, the Panel wishes to underline the fact that the rights at stake in cases of enforced disappearance are among the most important of all fundamental human rights. In particular, such cases often involve issues pertaining to the right to life, the right not to be subject to cruel and inhuman treatment, the right to truth, the right to respect for family life, and the right to have access to justice.
35. The nature and extent of the measures to be adopted by the competent authorities to guarantee the effective protection of these rights must be commensurate to and be measured against the importance that attach to these rights and to the underlying interests which they seek to protect.

##### *Conducting a realistic assessment of the Mission's actions*

36. The rights and interests protected by Articles 2 and 3 of the Convention must be ensured and guaranteed in all cases. However, the circumstances in which this is to be done might impact what can be done in practice and, therefore, what can be reasonably expected of the authorities. As a result, while the stakes could hardly be higher for victims, an assessment of the conduct of the authorities when seeking to protect their rights must account for the relevant circumstances in which those authorities found themselves at the time. However, difficulties associated with the circumstances as prevailed at the time – for instance, a conflict situation or a post-conflict situation – must be clearly distinguished from issues pertaining to available resources. While the authorities are not responsible for the former and must do as best they can in the circumstances at the time, the latter provide no valid justification to retreat from human rights obligations. Instead, it is the responsibility of those authorities to ensure that resources are organised, distributed and used in such a way as to ensure that its human rights obligations are kept and relevant rights remain effective.
37. Expectations placed upon EULEX's ability to investigate and resolve complex criminal matters should therefore be realistic and not place upon the mission a disproportionate burden that its mandate and resources is not able to meet. See, generally, U.F. Against EULEX, 2016-12, Decision and Findings, 12 February 2020, para 60; L.O. against EULEX, 2014-32, 11 November 2015, pars 43-45; *A,B,C,D against EULEX*, 2012-09 to 2012-12, 20 June 2013, para 50; *K to T against EULEX*, 2013-05 to 2013-14, 21 April 2015, para. 53; *Sadiku-Syla against EULEX*, 2014-34, Decision on Admissibility, 29 September 2015, paras. 35-37; *D.W., E.V., F.U., G.T., Zlata Veselinović, H.S., I.R. against EULEX*, 2014-11 to 2014-17, Decision on Admissibility, 30 September 2015, paras. 72-74; see also Human Rights Advisory Panel of UNMIK (HRAP) Decision in cases nos 248/09, 250/09 and 251/09, 25 April 2013, para. 35 and paras 70-71.

38. In particular, the EULEX Mission is not a State and its ability to guarantee the effective protection of human rights cannot be compared in all relevant respects to what may be expected of a State (see, e.g., the Panel's decision in *A,B,C,D against EULEX*, 2012-09 to 2012-12, 20 June 2013, para. 50; *K to T against EULEX*, quoted above, para. 53; see also HRAP Decision in cases nos 248/09, 250/09 and 251/09, 25 April 2013, para. 35; *S.H. against EULEX*, Decision and Findings, case no. 2016-28, 11 September 2019, para. 49).
39. In this regard, the Panel notes that the task given to the Mission was in many respects daunting. The number of cases that it was expected to investigate was extremely large and those cases were complex. The resources put at its disposal were in many respects insufficient and inadequate. Furthermore, the records transmitted to the Mission by UNMIK were in a poor state and required the Mission to spend a significant amount of time and resources merely trying to make sense of those.
40. The post-conflict situation in which the Mission had to operate also complicated its work even further. See e.g. *L.O. against EULEX*, 2014-32, 11 November 2015, para. 44 and references cited therein. Cooperation was often less than forthcoming.
41. The Panel notes that Articles 2 and 3 of the Convention are non-derogable rights under Article 15(2) of the Convention. However, as noted above, what the authorities might be expected to do in a given case to secure these rights will depend in part on the circumstances prevailing at the time. In the present case, the Panel is particularly mindful of the fact that post-conflict circumstances had practical consequences for the Mission's ability to carry out actions with regards to those concerned by its executive mandate. These elements and considerations have, therefore, been taken into account by the Panel to determine what, in those circumstances, could legitimately be expected from the Mission in relation to the present case.
42. A few preliminary issues should be addressed here first. In its submissions, the Mission notes, correctly, that the guarantee contained in Article 2 of the European Convention is one of *means* and not *result*. That is indeed correct as a State or relevant authorities could not be faulted for failing to protect an individual's rights if they have done their utmost and what the law expected to protect those rights. However, as an obligation of means, the law expects that the means invested to guarantee the effective protection of fundamental rights are commensurate to the importance of the right concerned and the gravity of the potential violation which the authorities seek to prevent and remedy. In particular, in the case *Mustafa Tunç and Fecire Tunç v. Turkey* (Application no. 24014/05, Judgment, 14 April 2015 (Grand Chamber), paras 172, which the Panel adopted in case 2016-12 (para 63)), the European Court of Human Rights said this:

172. In order to be 'effective' as this expression is to be understood in the context of Article 2 of the Convention, an investigation must firstly be adequate (see *Ramsahai and Others v. the Netherlands* [GC], no. [52391/99](#), § 324, ECHR 2007-II). That is, it must be capable of leading to the establishment of the facts and, where appropriate, the identification and punishment of those responsible.

173. The obligation to conduct an effective investigation is an obligation not of result but of means: the authorities must take the reasonable measures available to them to secure evidence concerning the incident at issue (see *Jaloud v. the Netherlands* [GC], no. [47708/08](#), § 186, ECHR 2014; and *Nachova and Others v. Bulgaria* [GC], nos. [43577/98](#) and [43579/98](#), § 160, ECHR 2005-VII).

174. In any event, the authorities must take whatever reasonable steps they can to secure the evidence concerning the incident, including, *inter alia*, eyewitness

testimony, forensic evidence and, where appropriate, an autopsy which provides a complete and accurate record of injury and an objective analysis of clinical findings, including the cause of death. Any deficiency in the investigation which undermines its ability to establish the cause of death or the person responsible will risk falling foul of this standard (see *Giuliani and Gaggio v. Italy* [GC], no. 23458/02, § 301, ECHR 2011)

The Panel will take due account of these considerations in assessing the Mission's response in this case.

43. The Panel will also review whether there were concrete and real obstacles that might have undermined the possibility for EULEX to conduct a prompt and effective investigation of a case. Such an evaluation is not intended to justify operational shortcomings unrelated to concrete and demonstrable challenges, nor to affect the standard to which the Mission should be held in the light of its human rights obligations. See *L.O. against EULEX*, 2014-32, 11 November 2015, para. 44; *D.W., E.V., F.U., G.T., Zlata Veselinović, H.S., I.R. against EULEX*, 2014-11 to 2014-17, 30 September 2015, para. 73-74; and *K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S & T (K to T) against EULEX*, 2013-05 to 2013-14, 21 April 2015, para. 54; *Sadiku-Syla against EULEX*, 2014-34, 19 October 2016, para. 31; *D.W., E.V., F.U., G.T., Zlata Veselinović, H.S., and I.R. against EULEX*, 2014-11 to 2014-17, 19 October 2016, par 57.

#### *Absence of investigation*

44. In the present case, there was no investigation by the Mission, interview of witnesses or relatives, request for documentation, contacts with UNMIK, or any apparent efforts to obtain documents that UNMIK had collected in relation to it. As discussed below, there was also no contact, or attempted contact with the relatives of the disappeared.
45. The reason advanced by the Mission for this situation is that it gave priority to cases that were 'more promising in terms of investigative outcome'. The Panel finds such argument problematic for a number of reasons.
46. Firstly, the right to an investigation in cases of enforced disappearance is not optional and is unqualified. The Mission has failed to explain why the complainant would have had less of a right to truth and justice than any other victim in the same position.
47. Secondly, practical considerations (such as the number of cases and the limited resources of the authorities concerned) might mean that some cases could be prioritised over others. This does not, however, under any circumstances, erode the essence of that right, i.e., remove or lessen the obligation to carry out an effective investigation. Even where difficult circumstance prevail, the authority must take all reasonable steps in the circumstances. Therefore, where an investigation is temporarily not possible, other means and mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that the rights in question are sufficiently preserved and their essence guaranteed. In particular, steps must be taken to ensure that the possibility of an investigation, even if delayed, is preserved and not lost by reason of delays in formally commencing it.
48. In this case, the Panel notes that the absence of investigation was compounded by the absence of communication with the relatives of the disappeared. Furthermore, the Mission took no steps to provide for alternative remedies to alleviate the effect of this absence of investigation upon their rights. Its 'prioritisation' therefore resulted in a complete absence of investigation, remedy and truth as far as this case is concerned. The Panel notes in this context that the post-conflict situation in which the Mission had to operate did not in



any way prevent the Mission to do these things. Nor does a lack of resources appear to provide a valid explanation for its failure to even look into this case.

49. In this respect, the Panel would wish to add the following. Firstly, it was the Mission's responsibility to ensure that it organised itself and distributed its resources in a manner consistent with its human rights obligations. As a 'rule of law' Mission, it is clear that responsibilities having to do with the rule of law should have been institutional and operational priorities. Secondly, where necessary to prioritise certain activities over others, it should have ensured, at the very least, that (a) a clear strategy and policy to that effect was devised and publicised (and which, to the Panel's knowledge, never existed) and (b) that prioritisation did not result in the abandonment of its human rights obligations, in particular in respect of those rights that are absolute in character. Considering that the Mission was replacing local authorities in many of its executive responsibilities, it was for the Mission to ensure that this was done in full compliance with those human rights responsibilities that were associated to that role. A lack of resources provide no justification for a failure to do so. If anything, this should have required the Mission to request resources it was lacking or, where this was refused, to clearly and candidly publicise the fact that it would only be able to deal with a narrow set of executive responsibilities. Transparency, while not a substitute for conducting an effective investigation or meeting other human rights obligations, is indeed an important element of accountability and victims of human rights violations were entitled to know what the Mission was *really* able to do to redress the violations of their rights. While challenging, the post-conflict situation in which the Mission had to operate does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the large-scale failure to deal with cases of this sort. The European Court of Human Rights has made it clear – albeit in relation to states – that human rights obligations are to be met also in the context of an ongoing armed conflict, including the procedural requirements under Article 2 of the Convention to carry out an effective investigation (see, e.g., *Al-Skeini v United Kingdom*, Application no 55721/07, Judgment, 7 July 2011; *Jaloud v Netherlands*, Application no 47708/08, Judgment, 20 November 2014).
50. The failure of the Mission to deal with cases such as the present one might have been affected by its limited resources and by the challenges posed by the post-conflict situation in which it had to operate. But a failure to plan properly and develop detailed and transparent strategies to deal with those cases is at least if not more significant in explaining the fact that the present case was not investigated and that no effort was made to reach out to the victims.
51. Thirdly, whilst prioritisation of cases might be reasonable where cases demanding the authorities' actions are too numerous for its capacities, the decision to prioritise must at least fulfil two basic requirements. *First*, it should not discriminate on impermissible grounds prohibited by human rights law. See, generally, Article 14 ECHR; Articles 2 and 7 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Articles 4(1) and 26 ICCPR; and Article 1(3) of the UN Charter. *Secondly*, as was made clear by the ECtHR (cited, *supra*, in paragraph 30), the obligation to conduct an effective investigation requires the authorities to take the reasonable measures available to them to secure evidence concerning the incident at issue (*Mustafa Tunç and Fecire Tunç v. Turkey*, Application no. 24014/05, Judgment, 14 April 2015 (Grand Chamber), paras 173-174). In this case, the Mission did not engage in any process of evidence collection. In fact, it did not even ask UNMIK or other authorities for the dormant files which they had or might have in their possession. This leads the Panel to a fourth concern associated with the course of action taken by the Mission.
52. *Thirdly*, as noted above, it was recommended by the SPRK to the Mission that this case should be investigated. There were, therefore, not just a human rights duty to do so but also a sufficient basis for the case to be investigated. To explain its failure to follow up on

that recommendation, the Mission suggests that it had to prioritize cases that appeared 'more promising in terms of investigation outcomes'. In the absence of any preliminary investigation of this case (see paragraphs 48 and 49), the Panel is not convinced that such an evaluation could have been carried out fairly, in an informed manner and in a manner that guaranteed the effective protection of the rights of those concerned. The Panel is unconvinced that the Mission could have been in a position to make such an assessment without asking for the UNMIK file and without conducting any interviews or contact those closest to the disappeared. The Panel is, therefore, not satisfied that the Mission's priority assessment was based on a sufficient and reliable basis to secure and guarantee the rights of those concerned.

53. *Fourthly*, before making the above judgment call that would have such significant consequences for the rights of the complainant, the Mission would have reasonably been expected to seek the assistance and cooperation of other authorities if and when the latter might have in their possession information and/or resources of relevance to the former's efforts to conduct an effective investigation. See, generally, *U.F. against EULEX*, 2016-12, Decision and Findings, 12 February 2020, para 64, referring to: *Case of Güzelyurtlu and Others v. Cyprus And Turkey*, Application no. 36925/07, Judgment, 29 January 2019, paras 229 and 232-233. The Mission failed to reach out to those with (potential) information about this case and it has provided no explanation for that failure.
54. In light of the above, even if the Mission had been authorised to give priority to certain cases of this nature (at least temporarily), it did not act in this case in a manner that would be compatible with the effective preservation of the rights of the complainant. Its complete failure to investigate this case and to take even the most basic of steps to have in its possession all available information before deciding not to investigate it constitutes a serious violation of its human rights obligations under Article 2 (procedural limb) and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. It reveals a lack of diligence and propriety in the exercise of a critical element of its mandate.

*Failure to inform close relatives of the disappeared*

55. International human rights law demands that in a case such as the present one, relatives of the disappeared should be kept sufficiently informed of the course of the investigation of the case and the course of proceedings. See, generally, *U.F. against EULEX*, 2016-12, Decision and Findings, 12 February 2020, para 97; *S.H. against EULEX*, Decision and Findings, case no. 2016-28, 11 September 2019, para. 66; *Desanka and Zoran Stanisić against EULEX*, 2012-22, 11 November 2015, para. 66; *L.O. against EULEX*, 2014-32, 11 November 2015, paras. 60-61, 72-73; HRRP, Case-Law Note on the Duty to Investigate Allegations of Violations of Rights, pp 28-30; see also *Ahmet Özkan and Others v. Turkey*, Application no. 21689/93, ECtHR Judgment of 6 April 2004, paras. 311-314, *Isayeva v. Russia*, Application no. 57950/00, ECtHR Judgment of 24 February 2005, paras. 211-214; *Al-Skeini and Others v. United Kingdom*, Application no. 55721/07, ECtHR Judgment of 7 July 2011, para. 167.
56. This requirement is intended to ensure that relatives can meaningfully contribute and participate and it seeks to diminish the strain and pain of not knowing what happened to their loved one. See also *S.H. against EULEX*, Decision and Findings, case no. 2016-28, 11 September 2019, para. 66; *U.F. against EULEX*, 2016-12, Decision and Findings, 12 February 2020, para 96.
57. The obligation to keep victims abreast of investigative efforts is particularly important in a case involving acts of enforced disappearance as surviving relatives might have no other source of information regarding the fate of their relative(s) and they will continue to live in the hope that the fate of their relative(s) will one day be elucidated. As a result, close

relatives of the disappeared victims suffer emotionally from the absence of information regarding the fate of their loved one. See *U.F. against EULEX*, 2016-12, Decision and Findings, 12 February 2020, para 98; *Zufe Miladinović against EULEX*, 2017-02, 19 June 2019, para. 87; *S.H. against EULEX*, Decision and Findings, case no. 2016-28, 11 September 2019, para. 78. Such a requirement is a necessary element of the protection of the rights of the victims in the investigation of such a case. See, e.g., *U.F. against EULEX*, 2016-12, Decision and Findings, 12 February 2020, para 98; *S.H. against EULEX*, Decision and Findings, case no. 2016-28, 11 September 2019, para. 77; *Desanka and Zoran Stanisić against EULEX*, 2012-22, 11 November 2015, para. 66, referring to *L.O. against EULEX*, 2014-32, 11 November 2015, paras. 60-61, 72-74; *Zufe Miladinović against EULEX*, 2017-02, 19 June 2019, para. 86; see also *Ahmet Özkan and Others v. Turkey*, Application no. 21689/93, ECtHR Judgment of 6 April 2004, paras. 311-314, *Isayeva v. Russia*, Application no. 57950/00, ECtHR Judgment of 24 February 2005, paras. 211-214; *Al-Skeini and Others v. United Kingdom*, Application no. 55721/07, ECtHR Judgment of 7 July 2011, para. 167.

58. Competent authorities will not easily be permitted to disregard or ignore this obligation. See *S.H. against EULEX*, Decision and Findings, case no. 2016-28, 11 September 2019, para. 67; *U.F. against EULEX*, 2016-12, Decision and Findings, 12 February 2020, para 98.
59. The Panel also notes that the right to truth in relation to human rights violations is not only an individual right. It is also a collective right, serving to preserve memory at the level of society and acting as a safeguard against the recurrence of violations. See *General Comment on the Right to the Truth in Relation to Enforced Disappearance, Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (2010)*, Document A/HRC/16/48, Preamble. In the post-conflict context of Kosovo, investigations of enforced disappearances contributed – and continue to contribute – to promoting truth, to the collective memory of such human rights violations, and to ensuring their non-recurrence.
60. To the question of whether relatives of Mr Avramović were involved in the investigation of this case and whether they had been interviewed by the Mission, the Mission said that the complainant gave statements to KFOR in June 1999 and to UNMIK Police Mitrovica Station in December 1999. And in June 2004, the complainant and the father of the disappeared were interviewed by the UNMIK Missing Persons Unit. The Mission itself had no contact with the complainant or relatives of Mr Avramović.
61. Asked by the Panel why the Mission did not seek to contact relatives of the disappeared, the Mission responded that since it could not follow up on the 2009 request of investigation, it did not seek to contact them. The Panel considers this explanation to be unsatisfactory. Even if the Mission's decision not to investigate had been acceptable, that did not qualify its obligation to keep relatives informed as they reflect two separate obligations arising from the same right(s). Instead, the absence of information on the part of the Mission might have continued to feed the family's hope that the matter would eventually be brought to justice, as they were entitled to expect.
62. Regarding the possibility for the Mission to inform the relatives of those disappeared whose file was transmitted to local, Kosovo, authorities, the Mission said that it did not consider that it was required to do so. Furthermore, the Mission submitted, 'this would also have been an impossible administrative task to complete by the deadline of December 2018. Again, the Panel is unconvinced. Such a step would have gone some way meeting the obligation of the Mission to inform the complainant and could have contributed, albeit to a limited degree, to their right to truth. As for the 'impossibility' of the administrative task, the Panel is not persuaded there could have been any insurmountable

difficulty that would have prevented the Mission from doing so. That explanation is therefore unconvincing.

63. The duty outlined above is not optional and is important. The efforts deployed by the Mission to meet it – or, rather, the lack thereof – do not reflect the importance of the interests that were at stake. The Mission's failure would have further contributed to leaving the complainant in a state of uncertainty that would have contributed to causing her emotional distress.
64. Based on the above, the Panel finds that the Mission has failed to fulfil its obligation to inform the complainant as it was required to do and, in so doing, violated her fundamental rights as guaranteed under Articles 2 (procedural limb) and 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights.
65. In light of the Panel's findings in relation to Articles 2 and 3 of the Convention, it is not strictly necessary for the Panel to make specific findings regarding the rights guaranteed under Article 8 of the Convention. However, the Panel wishes to highlight the fact that one of the most serious consequences of the violation of the complainant's rights pertain to her family life. For two decades now, she has been living without her husband, and without his emotional and financial support, compounded by the painful uncertainty of his fate. Her right to respect for her family life has therefore clearly been affected by the situation.

#### *Right to a remedy*

66. This case reflects a much broader reality and a larger institutional problem, which the Panel has observed in this and other cases that have come before it. The record of these proceedings suggest that most cases of enforced disappearance dating back to the Kosovo conflict and its aftermath have been left un-investigated and un-resolved. They first came under the responsibility of the United Nations. Then of EULEX Kosovo. And now local, Kosovo, authorities. Despite the involvement of multiple authorities over the course of two decades, most of those cases have remained un-investigated or in a state of limbo. As a result, victims have had little justice and truth, and little visibility over what was being done by those with a responsibility to act to protect and guarantee their rights.
67. At every stage, victims would have been entitled to believe, expect and hope that the new authorities would do better than the previous one. They must have been greatly disappointed that their hopes did not materialise. Most cases of enforced disappearance remain, incredibly and unforgivably, un-investigated. Literally hundreds of them passed through the hands of EULEX Kosovo without their being investigated.
68. When asked about the current state of some of the cases – including the present one – that spent 10 years under EULEX responsibility, the Mission invites the complainant through the Panel to go and enquire with the Kosovo authorities. Human rights are not, however, a bucket that authorities should pass from one to another. EULEX Kosovo had, for a decade, the responsibility to investigate these cases – including this one – and it failed to do so. It must now repair the consequences of its own actions and decisions.
69. In that light, the Panel considers that the Mission has violated and is currently violating another right of the complainant, namely, her right to an effective remedy as guaranteed, *inter alia*, by Article 13 of the European Convention of Human Rights, Article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 2(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. See also *Kudla v. Poland*, Application no. 30120/96, Judgment, 26 October 2000, in particular, para. 152.

70. The Panel invites the Head of Mission to give careful consideration to the consequences of these findings and what measures should be put in place to provide an effective remedy for the violation of the complainant's rights. The fact that the complainant's rights have been violated for two decades, one of which under the responsibility of EULEX Mission, should justify that the steps taken should be such as to reflect the gravity and duration of these violations as well as the need for effectiveness in remedying those. See, generally, *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. the United Kingdom*, Application no. 7552/09, Judgment, 4 March 2014, in particular, para. 41; *Husayn (Abu Zubaydah) v. Poland*, Application no. 7511/13, Judgment, 24 July 2014, para 540; *Kaya v. Turkey*, Application no. 158/1996/777/978, Judgment, 19 February 1998, para. 106; *Mahmut Kaya v. Turkey*, Application no. 22535/93, Judgment, 28 March 2000, in particular, para. 124.

*Miscellaneous*

71. In April 2018, the case file pertaining to Mr Avramović was handed over to the competent Kosovo institutions. The hand-over note addressed to the (then) Chief Prosecutor of the SPRK contained an invitation to liaise with the EULEX WCIU regarding the actions undertaken in connection to the request to conduct an investigation of July 2009.

72. There is no indication of an investigation having been started by the local authorities into this case.

**FOR THESE REASONS, THE PANEL UNANIMOUSLY**

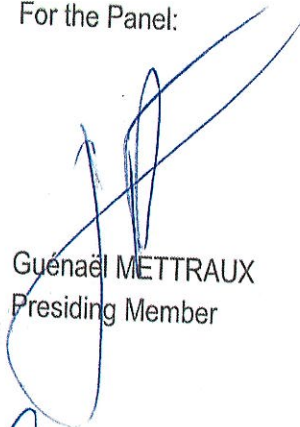
**FINDS** that the Mission has violated the fundamental rights of the complainant as guaranteed under Articles 2 (procedural limb), 3, and 13 of the European Convention of Human Rights;

**FINDS FURTHER** that the violations are serious and ongoing and that they, therefore, call for the adoption of remedial measures commensurate to those;

**INVITES THE HEAD OF MISSION**, in particular, to give consideration to the following:

- i. Acknowledge the violation of the complaint's rights by the Mission;
- ii. Provide a copy of the present decision to
  - a) relevant organs of the Mission,
  - b) relevant political authorities in Brussels and to
  - c) the local authorities competent to investigate this case;
- iii. Order that this case be monitored by the competent organs of the Mission;
- iv. Query with the competent local authorities what steps, if any, have been taken to investigate this case and what future steps are being planned;
- v. Reach out to the complainant with a view to finding a way to remedy the violation of her rights.

For the Panel:



Guénaél METTRAUX  
Presiding Member



Anna BEDNAREK  
Member



Anna AUTIO  
Member