



The Human Rights Advisory Panel

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DECISION

Date of adoption: 17 February 2011

Case No. 269/09

Vlanka RISTIĆ

against

UNMIK

The Human Rights Advisory Panel, sitting on 17 February 2012,
with the following members present:

Mr Marek NOWICKI
Mr Paul LEMMENS
Ms Christine CHINKIN

Assisted by
Mr Andrey ANTONOV, Executive Officer

Having considered the aforementioned complaint, introduced pursuant to Section 1.2 of UNMIK Regulation No. 2006/12 of 23 March 2006 on the Establishment of the Human Rights Advisory Panel,

Having deliberated, decides as follows:

I. PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE PANEL

1. The complaint was introduced on 14 April 2009 and registered on 30 April 2009.
2. On 23 December 2009, the Panel requested the complainant to submit additional information. No response to this request was received.
3. On 24 November 2010 the Panel repeated its request. The complainant's response was received on 2 December 2010.
4. On 21 November 2011 the complaint was communicated to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), for UNMIK's comments on admissibility. The SRSG presented his response on 23 December 2011.

II. THE FACTS

5. The complainant is the wife of Mr Srba Ristić.
6. The complainant states that in the morning of 13 July 1999, Mr Ristić left their house in the village of Strezovc/Strezovce, Kamenicë/Kamenica municipality, to go to Prishtinë/Priština, to check upon their apartment and that since that time his whereabouts have remained unknown.
7. The complainant indicates that she immediately reported the disappearance to KFOR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Serbian Orthodox Church. On 4 April 2000, the ICRC opened a tracing request for Mr Ristić, and that request is still open. The complainant also claims to have reported the disappearance to an International Public Prosecutor in Prishtinë/Priština.
8. On 9 December 2008, UNMIK's responsibility with regard to police and justice in Kosovo ended with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) assuming full operational control in the area of the rule of law, following the Statement made by the President of the United Nations Security Council on 26 November 2008 (S/PRST/2008/44), welcoming the continued engagement of the European Union in Kosovo. Between 9 December 2008 and 30 March 2009, all criminal case files held by the UNMIK Department of Justice and UNMIK Police were handed over to their EULEX counterparts.

III. THE COMPLAINT

9. The complainant complains about UNMIK's alleged failure to properly investigate the disappearance and probable killing of her husband. The complainant also complains about the fear, pain and anguish suffered by herself because of this situation.
10. The Panel considers that the complainant may be deemed to invoke, respectively, a violation of the right to life of Mr Ristić, guaranteed by Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and a violation of her own right to be free from inhuman or degrading treatment, guaranteed by Article 3 of the ECHR.

IV. THE LAW

11. Before considering the case on its merits, the Panel must first decide whether to accept the case, considering the admissibility criteria set out in Sections 1, 2 and 3 of UNMIK Regulation No. 2006/12.

Alleged violation of Article 2 of the ECHR

12. The complainant alleges in substance the lack of an adequate criminal investigation into the disappearance of her husband.
13. In his comments, the SRSG raises no objection to the admissibility of this part of the complaint.

14. The Panel considers that the complaint under Article 2 of the ECHR raises serious issues of fact and law, the determination of which should depend on an examination of the merits. The Panel concludes therefore that this part of the complaint is not manifestly ill-founded within the meaning of Section 3.3 of UNMIK Regulation No. 2006/12.
15. No other ground for declaring this part of the complaint inadmissible has been established.

Alleged violation of Article 3 of the ECHR

16. The complainant alleges mental pain and suffering caused to her by the situation surrounding the abduction of her husband.
17. In his comments, the SRSG argues that, while the complainant states that she has suffered mental pain and anguish as a result of the disappearance of her husband, there is no express allegation that this fear and anguish were a result of UNMIK's response to the disappearance of Mr Ristić. For that reason, this part of the complaint is inadmissible as manifestly ill-founded.
18. The Panel refers to the case law of the European Court of Human Rights with respect to the question whether a member of the family of a disappeared person can be considered the victim of a treatment contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR, which prohibits inhuman treatment. The European Court of Human Rights accepts that this may be the case, depending on the existence of "special factors which give the suffering of the [family member] a dimension and character distinct from the emotional distress which may be regarded as inevitably caused to relatives of a victim of a serious human rights violation". The Court further holds that "relevant elements will include the proximity of the family tie, the particular circumstances of the relationship, the extent to which the family member witnessed the events in question, the involvement of the family member in the attempts to obtain information about the disappeared person and the way in which the authorities responded to those enquiries". It also emphasises "that the essence of such a violation does not so much lie in the fact of the disappearance of the family member but rather concerns the authorities' reactions and attitudes to the situation when it is brought to their attention" (see, e.g., European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (Grand Chamber), *Çakici v. Turkey*, no. 23657/94, judgment of 8 July 1999, § 98, *ECHR*, 1999-IV; ECtHR (Grand Chamber), *Cyprus v. Turkey*, no. 25781/94, judgment of 10 May 2001, § 156, *ECHR*, 2001-IV; ECtHR, *Orhan v. Turkey*, no. 25656/94, judgment of 18 June 2002, § 358; ECtHR, *Bazorkina v. Russia*, no. 69481/01, judgment of 27 July 2006, § 139; see also Human Rights Advisory Panel (HRAP), *Zdravković*, no. 46/08, decision of 17 April 2009, § 41, and HRAP, *Petković*, no. 133/08, decision of 16 December 2011, § 35).
19. The Panel considers that a complainant may invoke a violation of Article 3 of the ECHR even if there is no explicit reference to specific acts of the authorities involved in the investigation, since also the passivity of the authorities and the absence of information given to the complainant may be indicative of inhuman treatment of the complainant by the authorities.
20. The Panel considers that this part of the complaint raises serious issues of fact and law, the determination of which should depend on an examination of the merits. The Panel concludes therefore that this part of the complaint is not manifestly ill-founded within the meaning of Section 3.3 of UNMIK Regulation No. 2006/12.
21. No other ground for declaring this part of the complaint inadmissible has been established.

FOR THESE REASONS,

The Panel, unanimously,

DECLARES THE COMPLAINT ADMISSIBLE.

Andrey ANTONOV
Executive Officer

Marek NOWICKI
Presiding Member