



## EUROPE

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# Report reignites Kosovo organ trafficking claim



**By Mark Lowen**

BBC News, Kosovo and Albania

**Silvana Marinkovic clasps the faded photograph of her husband, Goran; the contours of his face now barely visible.**

"He was 26 here," she says. "19 June 1999. The last time I saw him before he was taken."

For over a decade Ms Marinkovic has come twice weekly to a cramped office near the Kosovan capital Pristina.

There, she and other relatives of Kosovan Serbs who disappeared after the war discuss the hunt for their loved ones.

Almost 2,000 ethnic Serbs and Albanians are still missing from the conflict in Kosovo.

"He was kidnapped," she tells me. "It's so hard to think of it. I don't know where he was taken, but I still pray I'll find him alive."

The fate of some lay a few hours' drive away, according to the human rights watchdog, the Council of Europe.

Its rapporteur, the Swiss senator Dick Marty [published a report last month](#), alleging that members of the ethnic Albanian separatist group, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), took prisoners to detention camps in Albania in the months following the war against the Serbs.

### 'Yellow house'

In a makeshift clinic in the town of Fushe-Kruje, near the Albanian capital, some are said to have been killed and their organs removed to be sold on the international market.

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly has adopted a resolution calling for a "serious and independent investigation" into the findings.

Allegations of organ trafficking from the Kosovan war have been present for some years.

They previously centred on a building nicknamed the "yellow house" near the Albanian town of Burrel, where kidneys of captured Serbs were said to have been removed.

But after successive investigations ended without prosecutions, [many believed the case would be dropped](#).

Now the Marty report has reawakened those claims, focusing for the first time on Fushe-Kruje.

The building mentioned in the report is described, though its exact location not disclosed.

I travelled to a crumbling house near the town that matches the description.

Local media say it could be the building mentioned since Kosovan Albanian refugees lived here during the war.

Hidden up a stony track, the deserted shell is choked by thick brambles. The window frames are empty, doors removed and even the light fittings ripped out. Old shoes and empty bottles are strewn across the rotting floors.

There is nothing to suggest that it housed an operational organ clinic, but then it is totally

derelict.

Outside, I meet a neighbour, Shkelqim Gjokeja.

He tells me he used to play football with the Kosovan Albanian refugees here during the war.

### **'Slanderous'**

"The report is totally false," he says. "I was here the whole time and if something like that had happened, I would have seen it."

The Marty report claims that witnesses were silenced and paid off by members of the Drenica Group, a faction within the KLA, whose members allegedly carried out the organ trafficking, as well as heroin smuggling and assassinations.

Its leader is named as Hashim Thaci: then the KLA's political chief, now Kosovo's Prime Minister, described by intelligence sources as being "the most dangerous of the KLA's 'criminal bosses'".

Mr Thaci was backed by western powers from the late 1990s, through Nato's bombing campaign to support the KLA and drive the Serbs out of Kosovo.

That support is heavily criticised in the report as fostering a one-sided view of the conflict, with Serbs seen as the aggressors and Kosovan Albanians as the victims.

"This is slanderous Serbian propaganda," the prime minister tells me.

"There may have been individuals who misused the name of the KLA to commit illegal acts.

"But I have never broken international law. If there's any evidence, an investigation should be launched to clear this slander once and for all."

I ask whether he feels he should stand aside in the event of an investigation.

"The interest of my country is the priority and I have just won a second mandate as prime minister," he replies.

"I will never surrender to what is invented by Belgrade."

### 'Black cloud'

The European Union rule of law mission in Kosovo, Eulex, would probably take the lead in any probe.

Its head, Xavier Bout de Marnhac, disputes criticism from Dick Marty that Eulex and others simply did not want to find any evidence of KLA crimes in the past.

"Mr Marty needs to provide concrete evidence, and based on that we will investigate and prosecute if necessary. We have the tool, the capabilities and the will to do so," he says.

The ethnic Albanian majority here have prepared a petition against the report.

For them, it discredits what they see as their just war against the Serbs. But while they stand with their government on this issue, the claims have seriously dented Kosovo's image, leading many to fear this will remain a black cloud hanging over Kosovo as it seeks wider recognition as an independent state.

"Kosovo's reputation has been damaged in public opinion worldwide," says political analyst Krenar Gashi. "And I don't think the result of any investigation can repair that damage."

Just outside Pristina lies a gated cemetery to fallen members of the KLA, with each grave decorated by an Albanian flag.

Across Kosovo, the men are seen as heroes of the liberation struggle, martyrs for the Albanian cause.

But an uncomfortable light has now been shone of the other side of that fight and on what may have happened back in 1999 in the KLA's name.

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