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### KOS103838.E

Kosovo: Procedures and documents required to obtain a passport from within Kosovo and abroad; procedures required to replace a lost or stolen passport; information on the appearance of the passport; introduction of biometric passports; other passports in use by Kosovo citizens

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Kosovo began issuing passports in July 2008 (*EU Observer* 31 July 2008; B92 15 July 2008). As of June 2011, reports the European Commission, more than 827,000 Kosovar passports had been issued, including 1,600 that were issued to Kosovar Serbs (EU 12 Oct. 2011, Sec.4.3.1). According to the *EU Observer*, a Brussels-based publication reporting on European Union (EU) issues, the passports contain "laser and invisible-ink security technology to conform with the International Civil Aviation Organization and EU [European Union] standards for machine-readable passports" (31 July 2008). The passports cost 25 Euros and are produced in Germany (B92 15 July 2008; *EU Observer* 31 July 2008).

On 31 October 2011, Kosovo began issuing biometric passports (Kosovo 31 Oct. 2011b; AFP 31 Oct. 2011). Kosovo's Prime Minister and Internal Affairs Minister both stated that the introduction of the biometric passports is an important condition for visa liberalization with the EU (Kosovo 31 Oct. 2011b). In the Kosovar media source *Express*, state authorities describe the biometric passports as being of "high quality," containing "the most sophisticated security elements," with quality comparable to the biometric passports of EU countries (5 Aug. 2011). Sources indicate that the passports are being produced by an Austrian company (Kosovo 31 Oct. 2011b; *Express* 5 Aug. 2011), called OeSD [Österreichische Staatsdruckerei] (*ibid.*).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Head of the Office of Coordination and Cooperation of Kosovo's Civil Registration Agency provided information about the security features of Kosovo's biometric passport (Kosovo 17 Nov. 2011). The data page, among other security features, includes an antenna and unalterable electronic chip, which contains the holder's personal data, photo and fingerprints (*ibid.*). The paper of the inner pages of the passport includes three types of security fibres and a customized watermark in the centre of the pages (*ibid.*).

### Procedures to obtain passports within Kosovo

The Head of the Office of Coordination and Cooperation of Kosovo's Civil Registration Agency provided information about the procedures to obtain a biometric passport in Kosovo (Kosovo 17 Nov. 2011). Applicants 16 years of age and older must apply in person to the Municipal Civil Registration Centre and present a valid identity document (ID) of the Republic of Kosovo along with proof

of payment (ibid.). Applicants under the age of 16 years must also apply in person, accompanied by their parents or guardian, to the Municipal Civil Registration Centre with the following documents:-

- birth certificate
- citizenship certificate
- residence certificate
- proof of payment
- proof of parents' identity (ID, passport or driver's license) (ibid.)

Other documents may also be required if both parents are not present, such as the death certificate if a parent is deceased, or the court decision regarding child custody if the parents are divorced (ibid.). According to the official, it takes 15 days to receive the passport (ibid.).

### **Procedures to obtain passports outside Kosovo**

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an official at the Consular Mission of the Republic of Kosovo in New York stated that their office is only issuing non-biometric passports and will begin issuing the biometric passports sometime in 2012 (Kosovo 31 Oct. 2011a).

On its website, Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides information about the documents required to obtain a passport (Kosovo n.d.a). According to the website, the applicant must be present in the embassy or consulate in order to be issued the passport (ibid.). Persons 16 years of age and over must provide the following documents:

- copy of identification card of the Republic of Kosovo
- previous expired passport if the party had one
- evidence of payment of passport (ibid.)

The consular official explained that a passport applicant must provide a birth certificate, a citizenship certificate, and proof of living in Kosovo (*Vendbanimit*) (Kosovo 31 Oct. 2011a). These documents, along with a marriage certificate, are listed as the requirements for an identification card on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (ibid. n.d.a). In addition, the assistant noted that if the person had been issued Yugoslav identity documents in the past, he or she must also provide those documents or a police report if the documents have been lost or stolen (ibid. 31 Oct. 2011a).

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the following documents are required for citizens 16 years of age and younger to receive passports:

- birth certificate
- citizenship certificate
- proof of identity of parents (identification card, RKS [Republic of Kosovo] passport, drivers license)
- death certificate if parents are deceased
- court order for custody of children if parents are divorced
- legal authorization verified by notary in the absence of one parent
- certificate of residency in RKS
- evidence of payment for passport (Kosovo n.d.a)

### **Procedures to replace passports**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides the following information about the requirements to replace lost or damaged passports for persons over 16 years of age:-

- copy of identification card of Republic of Kosovo with validity date
- damaged passport (if applying because of damaged passport)

evidence of payment for passport

- police report of the state where the passport was lost (in cases where the applicant has lost the passport, within three months of the date of loss)
- the final decision of the competent court in case of seizure of passport (ibid.)

The requirements to replace lost or damaged passports for persons under the age of 16 years are listed as follows:·

- damaged passport (if applying because of damaged passport)
- police report of the state where the passport was lost (in cases where the applicant has lost the passport, within three months of the date of loss)
- proof of identity of parents (identification card, RKS passport, drivers license)
- court order for custody of the children if parents are divorced
- legal authorization verified by notary in the event of absence of one parent
- evidence of payment for passport
- the final decision of the competent court in case of seizure of passport (ibid.)

Consular missions are also authorized to issue travel documents to Kosovar citizens for one-way return in cases in which a passport has been lost or expired and in "humanitarian cases" (ibid.). The application can be made by mail or in person at the mission; the document is issued within 48 hours and is valid for 30 days (ibid.).

## **Appearance of passports**

An illustration of the information page of Kosovo's biometric passport is found on the Ministry of Internal Affairs' website and is attached to this Response (Kosovo 28 Oct. 2011). The passport information is written in three languages, Albanian, Serbian and English, and contains the following fields of information: Type; Code; Passport No.; Surname; Given name; Nationality; Personal No.; Date of birth; Place of birth; Sex; Height; Eye colour; Date of issue; Date of expiry; Issued by; and Signature (ibid.).

A brochure about Kosovo's biometric passport, provided by the official at the Civil Registration Office, shows that Kosovo has three types of biometric passports (regular, diplomatic and official), as well as two types of travel documents (regular and one for foreigners) (Kosovo 17 Nov. 2011). Each type of passport is a different colour; the regular biometric passport is burgundy (ibid.). The cover of each passport displays the wording "Republic of Kosovo" and "Passport" in Albanian, Serbian and English, and Kosovo's emblem (ibid.). Passports for citizens 18 years of age and over are valid for 10 years; children up to the age of 3 years are issued passports valid for 3 years, while those between the ages of 3 and 18 years are issued passports valid for 5 years (ibid. 17 Nov. 2011).

According to the *EU Observer*, ordinary non-biometric passports have dark blue covers (31 July 2008). A sample of a non-biometric passport, which was provided by an official at the Canadian embassy in Vienna, shows the following fields: Type; Code; Passport number; Surname; Given name; Place of birth; Date of birth; Citizenship; Sex; Height; Eye Colour; Issuing Authority; Personal number; Date of issue; and Date of expiry (Canada 13 Dec. 2011). Page three of the passport contains the passport holder's signature and fingerprint, as well as the signature of the passport-issuing authority (ibid.). The consular official in New York noted that ordinary non-biometric passports issued to those 16 years of age and older are valid for ten years, while those issued to children under the age of 16 years are valid for five years (Kosovo 31 Oct. 2011a ). According to the *EU Observer*, the documents contain 32 pages (31 July 2008).

## **Recognition of Kosovo's Passport**

According to Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of 11 October 2011, 85 countries have recognized Kosovo (Kosovo 11 Oct. 2011). While the majority of EU

countries have recognized Kosovo's independence, five EU countries have not (*Express* 21 Aug. 2011; *Balkananalysis.com* 29 May 2011); specifically, these countries are Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and Romania (*ibid.*; see also Kosovo 11 Oct. 2011). *Balkananalysis.com*, an independent news agency covering the region, explains that Kosovar citizens experience "hurdles" because their travel documents are not always recognized (29 May 2011). For example, in 2008, a spokesperson for the Slovak interior minister reportedly stated that, since Slovakia does not accept an independent Kosovo, it would not recognize Kosovar documents; instead, it would accept Serbian and UN-administered passports (*EU Observer* 31 July 2008). In 2008, at the time when Kosovo began issuing its passport, the Belgrade-based media source B92 stated that the document would be accepted by countries that accepted Kosovo's independence, as well as by some countries that hadn't officially recognized Kosovo (B92 15 July 2008). However, in 2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty noted that 34 countries recognized Kosovo's passport (16 Apr. 2009). According to their article, some Kosovar citizens living in Western Europe use Serbian travel documents in order to travel through Serbia en route to Kosovo, since Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's documents (RFE/RL 16 Apr. 2009).

Sources indicate that only a handful of countries allow Kosovar citizens to travel without a visa; these include Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Turkey (Kosovo n.d.b; *Express* 21 Aug. 2011; ESI 19 Nov. 2009), Haiti (*ibid.*; *Express* 21 Aug. 2011; ESI 19 Nov. 2009), and Maldives Islands (Kosovo n.d.b). That there are few consulates located in Pristina means that citizens need to travel to Macedonia, Albania, Turkey or Serbia in order to apply for a visa (ESI 19 Nov. 2009, 2 ; Kosovo n.d.b). The European Stability Initiative (ESI), a European non-profit research and policy institute that provides analysis about south eastern Europe (ESI n.d.), explains that this is a costly process and that nearly half of all applications for visas to European Union countries are rejected (ESI 19 Nov. 2009, 3).

## Use of other passports

According to the European Commission, there is a small number of Kosovar citizens who have passports that had been issued by the UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), as well as some who have old Yugoslav passports; both types of passports expire in December 2011 (EU 12 Oct. 2011, Sec. 4.3.1). In addition, ESI reports that, between 2008 and June 2009, Serbia issued Serbian biometric passports to 7,141 Kosovar citizens; these passport holders could travel visa free to the Schengen countries starting in December 2009 (ESI 19 Nov. 2009, 3). Starting in August 2009, Serbian passports issued to people in Kosovo were issued under a separate issuing authority that distinguished them from the others and excluded them from visa-free travel within the EU (ESI 19 Nov. 2009).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; Balkan Investigative Reporting Network; European Country of Origin Information Network; European Union Rule of Law Mission; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; Kosovo Democratic Institute; Kosovo Foundation for Open Society; Kosovo Ombudsperson Office; Transitions Online; United Nations — Refworld, UN Development Programme.

### **Attachment**

Kosovo. 28 October 2011. Ministry of Internal Affairs. "On Monday Will Be Held the Inaugural Ceremony on Issuance of the First Biometric Passports." <<http://www.mps-ks.org/?page=2,46,801>> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2011]

  
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