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**EU JUSTICE MISSION LEAVES KOSOVO, ACCUSED OF FAILING ITS MANDATE READ MORE AT**

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The European Union wound up its decade-long law enforcement and justice presence in Kosovo on Thursday but critics said the mission failed to root out endemic crime and corruption in the tiny Balkan country.

The EU launched its biggest and most expensive mission outside its external borders in 2008 when Kosovo declared independence from Serbia, almost a decade after a guerrilla uprising against repressive rule from Belgrade.

The EULEX mission was tasked with fighting corruption and organised crime as well as prosecuting war crimes cases, dating from the 1998-99 conflict, that were seen as too sensitive to be handled by local judges.

But after 10 years, EULEX proved a failure, according to Arton Demhasaj of Cohu (Wake up), a Pristina-based anti-corruption watchdog.

"We saw EULEX filing giant indictments and arresting people in Hollywood movie style, aiming only to show the public 'this is what we do', and after 2-3 years these indictments were dropped or people acquitted," Demhasaj said.

EULEX's figures show it delivered 479 convictions for criminal cases, including corruption, organised crime, money-laundering, war crimes and human trafficking.

But the EU judges failed to convict some high-ranking Kosovo officials on charges of corruption and organised crime even after their arrests, which were hailed as big successes.

"The biggest problem was to get evidence and witness testimonies and not having a proper criminal code...", said Greek diplomat Alexandra Papadopoulou, the EULEX mission chief.

EULEX was not about arresting people, we came here to help build rule of law. Arrests were secondary, she said.

After EULEX shuts down, the EU will keep around 500 employees, both local and international, to monitor Kosovo institutions as well as around 90 police officers from Poland.

An EU-financed tribunal based in The Hague, operating with international judges and under Kosovo

law, will soon begin to tackle war crimes linked mainly to former members of the ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in 1998-99.

In Serbia, which adamantly refuses to recognise independent Kosovo, EULEX was seen as biased against Kosovo's Serb minority or, also, as an outright failure.

I simply do not know any case that they brought to closure, and we know about thousands of cases that they did not want to prosecute, or they transferred them to the Kosovo courts, or lost them, Dusan Janjic of the Belgrade-based Forum for Ethnic Relations told Serbia's daily Kurir.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/eu-justice-mission-leaves-kosovo--accused-of-failing-its-mandate-10433344>

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