

French minister's remark in Kosovo criticized

BELGRADE, Serbia — A media watchdog on Wednesday condemned French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner's recent remark that a Serb reporter was "insane" for asking him a question about alleged organ trafficking in Kosovo.

The South East Europe Media Organization, based in Austria, said in a statement that Kouchner's behavior was unprofessional and surprising from a French government representative.

Kouchner, who was Kosovo's U.N. administrator in 1999-2001, was asked by a Voice of America reporter in Kosovo this month if he knew about allegations that minority Kosovo Serbs were kidnapped by ethnic Albanians and had their organs removed for trafficking during the 1998-99 Kosovo conflict.

"But you are sick, aren't you? Do I look like someone who would traffic organs? You are insane to believe all kinds of nonsense like that," Kouchner responded. "Sir, you should consult (a doctor) ... people who talk about things like that are bastards and murderers."

Europe's top right body, the Council of Europe, is currently conducting an investigation into the alleged organ trafficking — a probe led by Swiss Senator Dick Marty.

Serbian officials say up to 400 Kosovo Serbs vanished without a trace during the war, and some fear a few dozen may have fallen victim to an organ trafficking operation performed in the so-called "yellow house" inside neighboring Albania.

Kosovo and Albania have strongly denied the allegations of organ trafficking, which first surfaced in a book by former U.N. war crimes prosecutor Carla Del Ponte. She portrayed the "yellow house" as a building in Albania where organs might have been surgically removed from the victims.

But Kouchner said, "There was no yellow house. There was no organ trade."

The media watchdog said it was unacceptable that a top official should be so aggressive at a news conference.

"As a politician and a member of the French government, he should communicate professionally and responsibly with journalists," said the South East Europe Media Organization. "We would have expected Mr. Kouchner to react in a more courteous and dignified way."

Asked about the organization's criticism, French Foreign Ministry officials in Paris declined to comment immediately.

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