

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

The **Project on Ethnic Relations (PER)** was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

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2006-2007



PRISTINA

CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES IN KOSOVO

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ETHNIC
RELATIONS**



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PREFACE

The Project on Ethnic Relations' (PER) "Confidence Building Measures in Kosovo" project was conceived in late 2005 as a means of addressing the increasing tension weakening constructive interaction between political representatives of Kosovo Albanian, Serb, and other ethnic communities. The initiative, which began in June 2006 and concluded in July 2007, was predominately sponsored by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, with additional funds and support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Council of Europe.

Our main objective was to launch a set of confidence-building measures between Albanians, Serbs, Roma, and other ethnic communities in Kosovo to support the ongoing efforts by the international community to resolve the future status of Kosovo. Our priority was to facilitate an Albanian-Serb dialogue on concrete issues. To this end, we organized first indirect, and then direct contacts between Kosovo Albanian leaders and their Kosovo Serb counterparts.

Throughout the duration of the project, PER was able to facilitate contacts between leaders of Kosovo institutions and Kosovo Serbs. As you will see from the following synopsis, many of these contacts wrought tangible outcomes including a consideration by the Kosovo negotiating team of establishing a separate judicial district for north Kosovo's predominantly ethnic Serb population, amendments to policies governing appointment of municipal police chiefs, plans for the construction of a road crossing between two Serb settlements, and so on.

The unveiling in March 2007 of the UN Special Envoy's Package for the Future Status of Kosovo, commonly referred to as "The Ahtisaari Peace Package," made direct interaction between Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian leaders extremely complex. In fact, one of the more conservative Serb groups in Kosovo that has,



From left to right: Hashim Thaci, Veton Surroi, Randjel Nojkic, Skender Hyseni, Alex Grigor'ev, Livia Plaks, Joachim Rucker, Arben Qirezi, Oliver Ivanovic, Rada Trajkovic, Leon Malazogu, and Yvana Enzler.



From left to right: Fatmir Sejdiu, Livia Plaks, and Joachim Rucker.



Participants at the roundtable.



From left to right: Werner Wnendt, Alex Grigor'ev, and Hashim Thaci.

in the past, exhibited great trust in PER's neutrality, refused to take part in many of these discussion – they were only willing to continue consultations with PER privately, but not to engage in the wider dialogue unless it was held in a multi-lateral setting outside of Kosovo.

Despite these setbacks, PER persevered in its efforts to encourage productive interaction between the government, political parties, and Serb political leaders in Kosovo. It is PER's hope that through our efforts, these influential actors have found new ways to improve the current situation of Kosovo's communities and establish a better basis for any future political interaction in Kosovo after the status.

To encourage frank and open discussion, all of PER's roundtables are closed to the press. However, many of these meetings were followed by brief press conferences, and members of the press were allowed to take pictures and TV footage during the opening remarks. For the most part, the events were widely reported in Kosovo, Belgrade, and in the international media.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for their generosity, and particularly to Roland Salvisberg of Political Division IV for his dedication and support. As always, PER's work in the Balkans depends on our network of friends and associates who often have to rearrange their already hectic schedules to participate in our discussions. Special thanks go out to the busy political leaders from Kosovo and the representatives of the international community who nevertheless found time to attend our events. For our regional roundtable held in Athens, Greece (with funds from the US Agency for International Development, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation) we would like to give special thanks to the US Department of State. We would also especially like to express our deep gratitude to the Greek Foreign Ministry, especially Minister of Foreign Affairs Dora Bakoyannis, Ambassador Michael Christides, and their colleagues and staff, for their financial support and assistance in organizing the event.

Over the past several years, PER has had excellent cooperation with the Swiss Office in Pristina and we want to give a warm farewell to Yvanna Enzler, the head of the Office, who recently departed from Pristina.

Special thanks also go to the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) for allowing us to hold a roundtable there, to UNHCR for agreeing to be our host for another meeting, and to Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo Lutfi Haziri for hosting a very important round of discussions at the headquarters of the Kosovo government.

This project was a collaborative effort and would not have been possible without all our colleagues who worked tirelessly to make each event a success. For their hard work and dedication, we would like to especially mention Professor Steven Burg of Brandeis University, Pleurat Halili, an associate in Pristina, Nenad Djurdjevic, PER Representative in Belgrade, Adrienne Landry, PER Program Officer, and most of all Leon Malazogu, PER Representative in Pristina.

The following text has not been reviewed by participants, and PER takes full and complete responsibility for its contents.

Livia B. Plaks, *President*

Alex N. Grigor'ev, *Executive Director*

Princeton, NJ
August 2007

NEEDS OF THE SERB COMMUNITY IN KOSOVO: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Expectations for Kosovo's Status Resolution: June 21, 2006

In June 2006, PER held roundtable discussions with senior leaders of the two major political groupings of the Kosovo Serbs: the Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija of the Kosovo Assembly (SLKM), and the Serb National Council (SNV). In consultation with PER's offices in Belgrade and Pristina, the following questions for the meetings' agenda were drafted: What are the top issues of concern for the daily existence of the Kosovo Serb community? What are the causes of these problems? What are the Serb community's expectations for the immediate future (prior to the status resolution)? Are there problems that could and should be resolved while the status talks are going on? How should these problems be resolved? Who should be responsible for resolving such issues?

Due to severe political disagreements among Kosovo Serb leaders, PER was forced to hold two separate meetings in Mitrovica: one for the SNV group, and the other for the SLKM group. Both rounds of discussions were chaired by PER Executive Director, Alex Grigor'ev (then the PER Director for the Western Balkans).

Serb National Council

The Serb National Council (SNV) roundtable commenced with an evaluation of the negotiation process in Vienna conducted by the UN Special Envoy. SNV leaders labeled the process a farce, and said that the negotiations on Kosovo's decentralization were in fact negotiations on Kosovo's "unitarization." The following points were made by the SNV leaders in regard to decentralization:

- The powers as established by the Kosovo government for the proposed Serb municipalities are not sufficient.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In this report, the spelling of the name "Kosovo" is used (rather than "Kosova," the spelling preferred by Albanians, or "Kosovo and Metohija" or "Kosmet" preferred by Serbs) because that is the spelling most commonly used in the English-speaking world. For the same reason, Serbian names of the places are used, for example, Pristina and not Prishtina. However, the spelling "Kosova" is used in the names of Kosovo Albanian political parties and organizations. The term "Kosovo" is used as an adjective for Kosovo's inhabitants, whether Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Turks, or others.

"Serb" is used as an ethnic term, whereas "Serbian" is employed when referring to Serbia.

- A larger number of Serb municipalities ought to be established in Kosovo and with different borders.
- The Kosovo Serb municipalities should be linked institutionally.
- Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo require decentralization for different reasons. Albanians need "classic" decentralization with the aim of more effective governance. For the Serbs, decentralization is the major way to ensure their physical survival in Kosovo. Therefore, decentralization in Kosovo should be asymmetric.
- Municipal police chiefs and judges ought to be appointed by the municipalities and then approved by the Kosovo central government rather than the other way around, as proposed by the Kosovo government.
- Serb municipalities should be able to form a single judiciary district.
- Belgrade should be allowed to finance the Serb municipalities directly and not through a deposit at a Kosovo bank.
- Mitrovica and Zvecan ought to be established as a joint municipality.
- The lack of sizeable returns by the Serb population to Kosovo remains a large concern that will negatively influence the outcome of the status negotiations.

The SNV leadership claims that Kosovo Serbs are gaining nothing from the Vienna talks, are disillusioned with the Vienna process, and are not optimistic about its outcomes. They believe that many of the international moderators are partial to the Albanians and serve the larger goal of "weakening Serbia and eliminating it as a factor from Balkan politics." SNV leadership believes that while Serbia is being asked to accept the reality on the ground in Kosovo, no one wants to accept the reality on the ground in Mitrovica and in northern Kosovo.

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At PER's encouragement, the SNV leaders mentioned a number of concerning issues involving the Serb population that could (and/or should) be resolved before the status of Kosovo is settled. One participant asked that special attention be paid to Serb enclaves south of the Ibar river, and requested a separate article on enclaves to be included in the final decision on Kosovo status. Other issues included:

- security and freedom of movement;

- unemployment;
- economic development;
- infrastructure improvements, especially roads, telephone lines, and energy supply (some requested the establishment of a separate Serb energy provider);
- inequality in the privatization process;
- linguistic discrimination and the need for an independent Serbian language media.

The SNV leadership was adamant against engaging with the Kosovo Albanians on any substantive or so-called technical topics as their main priority is that Kosovo remains within Serbia. If this does not happen, they see no possibility for Kosovo Serbs to have a normal life. The SNV leaders would prefer to deal with representatives of the international community instead of the Kosovo institutions. It is their belief that the international community, not the Serb political parties, should pressure the Albanians into greater understanding of the Serb perspective.

Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija

The Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM) agreed with many of the points raised by the SNV leaders on the issues needing to be resolved before the status, and also on decentralization. They also said they prefer if Kosovo remains a part of Serbia, but believe that responsible politicians should consider and be ready for all possible outcomes for the final status.

They were concerned that the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) were capturing the Kosovo Serb leadership, resulting in little room for democrats. The main goal of SLKM's policy is to preserve the Serbs in Kosovo and to improve their lot. "If there are no Serbs in Kosovo, there will never be Kosovo in Serbia. If the lives of the Serbs in Kosovo do not improve, there will be no Serb returns to Kosovo." During the discussion, many SLKM leaders indicated they were ready to engage with the Kosovo Albanian leadership and Kosovo institutions on resolving issues of significance before the final status is set. They did, however, stress that without having Belgrade on board, implementation of many agreements would be problematic.

Implementation and Cooperation: July 6, 2006

Following the roundtables in June, it was proposed that PER organize two additional Mitrovica roundtables in July 2006. One session was

composed of the SNV leadership as well as the municipal mayors who support them. The other session included SLKM leadership, representatives from other Serb political parties in Kosovo, and Kosovo Serb municipal officials who favor subject-driven dialogue with Albanians.

The SNV session was devoted to the issue of security, which is considered by many Kosovo Serb politicians to be Kosovo's interethnic politics' most pivotal concern, as well as integral to the SNV's relationship with the international community. The SLKM session focused on a multitude of the Kosovo Serb community's concerns, but especially the issue of their ongoing relationship with the Kosovo Albanian leaders.

Serb National Council and Their Affiliates

This roundtable, which was attended by the more conservative part of the Kosovo Serb leadership, focused on the issues of their relationship with the international community and security for the Kosovo Serb population.

The SNV participants began the discussion by thanking PER for its role in assisting them with making contacts with senior representatives of the international community. They believe that following these initial meetings, senior international diplomats are more aware of the importance of communication with this part of the Kosovo Serb leadership.

These same leaders, however, were critical of the nature of these contacts, and were concerned that their communication with representatives of the international community has yet to bring any real improvements to the lives of Kosovo Serbs: "Talks bring nothing as the cleansing of the Serb families from Kosovo does not stop to this day," one of them argued.

The SNV leaders reiterated their stance that many international diplomats come to Kosovo with preconceived negative attitudes toward Kosovo Serbs. They did state, however, that the most accurate analysis ever written about the situation in Kosovo by the international community is the Eide report.*

The Kosovo Serbs' engagement with the international community is especially important as they refuse to sit down with Kosovo Albanian leaders, and prefer to discuss their concerns with internationals only. It was the SNV opinion that there is still insufficient contact with international

*The "Eide Report" was written in 2004 by Norwegian Ambassador Kai Eide, Special Envoy of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

representatives and that there is room for improving their cooperation with the international community. According to SNV leaders, one way to improve relations between the Kosovo Serbs and the international community is for the international community to stop treating the Serbs as a minority group in Kosovo and to resume the implementation of the UN-established standards for Kosovo.

In a noteworthy reversal of their June position, the SNV leaders stated they would not leave Kosovo in the event that Kosovo becomes independent. They also said they would not encourage the Kosovo Serb community to resort to guerilla resistance as a means of appealing an unfavorable status decision.

The majority of the roundtable was spent discussing the security of Serbs in Kosovo. The main points characterizing the position of the SNV leadership were:

- There is no freedom of movement for the Serb population in Kosovo;
- The number of Kosovo Serb returnees is extremely low: only ca. 2,000 persons have returned to Kosovo since 1999;
- If the Kosovo Albanians say that they are *frustrated* with the status quo in Kosovo, the Serbs are *scared* by it;
- The best way to protect the Serbs in Kosovo is through an arrangement with Belgrade;
- Establishment of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) was a mistake as its existence provides a daily threat to the Serbs;
- Perpetrators of crimes against the Serbs are not punished;
- There is little to no trust between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.

It is important to note that when asked about the latest Head of UNMIK's report on the situation in Kosovo, and especially its part describing the security of Kosovo Serbs as adequate, the SNV leadership adamantly refused to accept the report as accurate saying that crimes against the Serbs are continuing in Kosovo. However, when asked to provide the actual numbers and examples of such "widespread crimes," they said that numbers were not important. What is important, according to them, is the perception on the part of the Serbs in Kosovo that they are in constant danger and are being threatened everyday, and that the violence is most likely being organized in Pristina. They could not report on specific details or elaborate upon request.

Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija and Their Affiliates

The SLKM leadership agreed that the security situation for Serbs in Kosovo needs to be improved and that security remains one of the more critical issues affecting the area. However, they said that instead of concentrating on the number of potential returnees, the international community and the Kosovo government should concentrate their efforts on improving the lives of those Serbs who are already (or still) in Kosovo.

"No Serbs will stay in or return to Kosovo unless there is freedom of movement and job opportunities," they argued. They even suggested halting the construction of new houses for potential returnees and diverting the funds to improve the infrastructure of homes in Serb localities. According to the SLKM leadership, one of the first steps in this process could be creating two hundred jobs for the Serbs at Pristina airport, the postal service, the Kosovo Assembly administration, and road maintenance.

The SLKM group agreed that all Serb enclaves should be transformed into municipalities. "If that is done, it will resolve 75% of the problems of the Serbs," said one participant. There was also agreement that in ethnically mixed municipalities with Serb populations living compactly outside of municipality centers, municipal liaison offices ought to be established in villages in which Serbs live as it is still not always safe for Serbs to travel. It was the opinion of certain participants that such offices should employ Serbs only.

In general, all agreed that municipal influence on the formation of local police and courts is crucial. The SLKM leaders proposed that police chiefs and judges be appointed by municipal authorities with the consent of Pristina, as opposed to the other way around. They also felt that mayors of ethnically mixed municipalities should care more about providing jobs not only for Albanians but for the inhabitants of all ethnicities. One good example of similar practice can be found in Novo Brdo where an ethnically Serb mayor prioritized providing jobs for all inhabitants of the municipality, not just fellow members of his ethnic community.

The SLKM leaders stressed that the issue of Kosovo's final status ought to be decided by Belgrade, and what's more, they would only accept a decision approved by Belgrade. They did say, however, that they do not want Belgrade to decide for them their own problems in Kosovo. According to them, Kosovo Serbs would like the opportunity to negotiate with the Albanians about decentralization, internal constitutional arrangements, and concrete mechanisms for protecting the Serb population in Kosovo, etc.

Unlike the SNV leaders, the moderate Kosovo Serbs engage with many Kosovo Albanian representatives and senior officials in Kosovo institutions. At the meeting, they reiterated their commitment to taking part in the government's work, but argued that this could still not happen due to the low level of confidence between moderate Kosovo Serb leaders and their Albanian counterparts – they do not fully trust Albanian leaders and especially, as they describe it, “the sincerity of their intentions.” Several cases of debate were cited to PER in which Serb proposals were not even considered, let alone accepted, by the Albanians until they were told to do so by international representatives. “The Albanians do not want to talk about our proposals. It happens only when the internationals push them. What kind of trust does that build?”

In terms of suggestions for initial steps towards improving confidence between the two communities and their leaders, the SLKM leadership recommended infrastructural improvements be made in Serb areas (they spoke about installing traffic lights and constructing access roads to Serb villages and Serb cemeteries), increases in the number of hours of Serbian language broadcasts on Kosovo radio and television, providing more opportunities for the Serbs to access electronic and print media in their language, and punishment of those responsible for crimes against Serbs and making information about their trials widely available. These leaders asserted that once they start delivering tangible results to their constituents, the entire Kosovo Serb community would see the benefits of participating in Kosovo institutions and of cooperating with Kosovo Albanians.

Consultations in Pristina: Summer 2006

Following each series of discussions in Mitrovica, PER consulted in Pristina with senior Kosovo Albanian leaders. While some of the Serb demands were considered unreasonable, many points raised in the Mitrovica discussions were regarded as acceptable and solutions were proposed.

For example, the government representatives in Pristina agreed with the Serbs on the need to form a single district judiciary in the north. However, the Albanian leaders felt that a similar judiciary for the enclaves is out of the question as the principle for forming such a judiciary would be regional and not ethnic.

At the request of the SLKM leaders and the SNV Gracanica leadership, PER was told that an underpass will be considered by the Kosovo government under the Pristina-Skopje highway at the point where it intersects

with the Gracanica-Laplje Selo road – a place where numerous accidents, including fatalities involving Serbs, have taken place.

The Kosovo government leaders also expressed willingness to accept financing of the Kosovo Serb municipalities directly from Belgrade without an initial deposit at a Kosovo bank. Pristina would, however, demand complete transparency in all financial transactions.

The Kosovo Albanian leaders testified that perpetrators of crimes against Serbs have been punished. That said, some of the leaders expressed understanding about the need to disperse this information to a wider Serb population in Kosovo.

Lastly, all the Albanian leaders indicated a willingness to work on improving Serb access to media in Kosovo.

PER related in detail the lack of trust SLKM representatives, or for that matter, all Kosovo Serbs, have in the Kosovo Albanian leadership. The Albanians pointed out that the Serbs have only themselves to blame for not obtaining significant results from their participation in these institutions.

The Kosovo Albanians indicated they were seriously dissatisfied with the fact that Kosovo Serb officials refuse to accept monies from the Kosovo budget under the argument that this financial acceptance will legitimize Kosovo's institutions. Government officials claimed that money is available for a number of projects that would benefit the Serb communities, but Serbs continue to refuse these funds as a matter of political principle.

The Albanian leaders also complained that the SLKM leaders have promised on many occasions that they will enter Kosovo institutions and will actively participate in the government's work – however, this promise has yet to be fulfilled. If the current situation continues, the Albanian leaders argued, there will be little trust built between the Albanian parties and SLKM. In the end, the Albanians will be happy to cooperate with whoever joins the institutions and wins elections.

The Kosovo Albanian leaders suggested bringing the report on PER's Mitrovica discussions to the attention of the Kosovo negotiation team and to the Ahtisaari team in Vienna. They also expressed interest in bi-monthly Kosovo Serb-Albanian roundtables to be organized by PER before the status is set. According to them, even if these roundtables were not to bring agreements, they would serve as an important background for working with the Serbs on issues of substance following the status.

ROMA, ASHKALI, AND EGYPTIANS OF KOSOVO

Reconciling the Past and Forging Future Prospects for Reintegration: September 29, 2006

On September 29, 2006, PER organized a discussion in Pristina under the title “Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians of Kosovo: Reconciling the Past and Forging Future Prospects for Reintegration.” The roundtable was co-chaired by the President of PER, Livia Plaks, and by PER’s then Director for Roma Programs, Andrzej Mirga. The meeting was opened by Kosovo President, Fatmir Sejdiu, the Head of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Joachim Rucker, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo, Lutfi Haziri.

The goal of the event was to facilitate a dialogue among Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) leaders, Kosovo politicians, and international officials on the situation of RAE communities in Kosovo. This dialogue was intended to improve relations between these groups and create better policies for RAE in Kosovo.

Differences in Perception

In his opening remarks, while acknowledging that problems remain, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General emphasized recent improvements in the living conditions of RAE communities as implemented by UNMIK, the Provisional Institution of Local Self-Governments (PISG), and others.

Albanian representatives adopted a similar stance, focusing on positive developments, and citing the difficult economic conditions in Kosovo as the main reason why more has not been done for RAE communities. Several Albanian politicians mentioned the impending resolution of Kosovo’s status, and argued that RAE problems could be better tackled once this issue was resolved.

A Romani leader, who is also a member of the Kosovo Assembly, took the position that Kosovo Roma do not suffer from discrimination, lack of rights, or the inability to move freely. “Tell me where democracy is better for minorities,” he challenged the participants. “There is a lot of work to be done, but we do have rights.” He charged that Kosovo Roma chosen by Belgrade to participate in a number of international conferences are responsible for painting excessively bleak descriptions of conditions for Roma in Kosovo, suggesting that the Serbian government is attempting to use the Roma issue to impede Kosovo’s independence.

By contrast, international participants and some civil society Romani representatives emphasized the continuing difficulties for RAE in Kosovo. They described problems such as the inability of Roma to return to their homes safely, inadequate opportunities for education, issues of personal and property documentation, poverty, and cases of overall discrimination.

A Romani leader representing an international organization accused Albanian leaders of failing to keep their promises and commitments for assisting RAE in Kosovo. He also cited the issues of reconciliation and of justice for those who have committed crimes against RAE, such as burning houses. “We need a new deal for reconciliation of Mitrovica Roma,” he said. “Otherwise you will build houses and they will remain empty.”

Identify Issues

An Egyptian participant, who is also a member of the Kosovo Assembly, strongly rejected the “Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian” category, arguing that Egyptians in Kosovo have a different history from the Roma. According to this participant, the Egyptians are generally better educated and better integrated into Kosovo society. “These communities should not be grouped together,” he argued. “Using the ‘RAE’ category allows for statistical misinformation.” He also supported the position, expressed by many Albanian participants, that Kosovo’s budget constraints make it very difficult to address all the needs of Kosovo’s residents.

Other participants disagreed, arguing that RAE have common interests, sharing a history of racism. “We need to unite to solve our common problems,” said one.

Protection Mechanisms

Several participants brought up the question of how mechanisms for protecting RAE can be established in Kosovo’s laws and institutions. An international participant noted that it appears as if Kosovo’s status will be determined soon, and that the agreement on status will include some language on minority rights. Considering this, he said, “I encourage RAE representatives to push for mechanisms of representation – not only laws, but mechanisms as well.” An Albanian political leader echoed this view, insisting that in the decision on Kosovo’s status “there must be strong guarantees for minorities, and that these guarantees ought to be mandatory and obligatory.”

Conclusions

The RAE roundtable occurred at a uniquely opportune moment and succeeded in highlighting the importance of RAE issues during the ongoing negotiations of Kosovo's status. The attendance of a number of Kosovo's most senior officials, including the President, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, the Deputy Prime Minister, the leader of the largest opposition party, and parliamentary leaders of major political parties was unusual for an event covering this topic, and PER hopes the discussions helped them better understand RAE issues and the urgent need to address them.

The discussion showcased the differences among various RAE actors as well as among Albanian political parties, who have diverse claims and needs. This clarification of positions and demands helps improve the climate in which RAE policies are ultimately formulated, as all sides have a better understanding of the political environment in which they are working.

In a significant departure from previous discussions about RAE, no Albanian leaders in the meeting suggested that the RAE are guilty of collaborating with Serbs during the 1999 war. This represents a more constructive attitude toward the RAE community in Kosovo.

All sides in the discussion recognized the issue of forced returns as a forthcoming problem.

The strong position of the Egyptian community representatives against the "RAE" designation was given a public hearing. In future events PER will respect the stated preference of the Egyptians in this regard, and recommend that other international actors (i.e., the OSCE) do the same.

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

Albanian and Serb Interaction – Prospects for Improvement: October 2, 2006

During the course of summer 2006, PER met with Kosovo Serb leaders to discuss the situation of the Serb community, and the state of relations between Kosovo Albanian and Serb politicians. During these discussions it became apparent that confidence between Serb and Albanian politicians is entirely absent (as in the case of the leadership of the SNV) or is in rapid decline (as in the case of the SLKM).

Acting on recommendations given by Kosovo Albanian and Serb interlocutors, PER organized a roundtable on this issue. The entire spectrum of political leaders was invited to take part in this discussion which was held at

the Pristina Office of UNHCR. SNV leaders refused their invitations to the PER roundtable. Despite this development, the meeting was actively attended by the President of Kosovo, his principal political adviser, the heads of the major opposition parties, and the top officials of most international agencies in Pristina.

The composition of participants was more than sufficient for the discussion, as it was clear that all those present were interested in improving relations between the leaders of the two communities. In fact, the Serb participants from SLKM stated that in their view, "participation in Kosovo institutions is the only alternative we have."

The main objective of the roundtable was to consider how political relations can be improved as the final status of Kosovo draws nearer. The agenda for the discussion included the following items:

What is the current state of dialogue between the political leaders of the Kosovo Albanian and Serb communities? How frequent are these contacts? Is there dialogue within Kosovo's governing institutions? Does the Albanian-Serb dialogue inside Kosovo benefit from the Vienna talks? Are these contacts producing tangible results that benefit both communities and Kosovo as a whole?

What are the major obstacles for improving communication and raising the level of trust? Do political divisions within each community matter for the Albanian-Serb dialogue?

Are joint projects on specific issues possible? Is there an effective process set up to monitor the implementation of possible agreements?

What, if any, is the role of the international community in helping Kosovo Albanian and Serb political leaders to improve the quality and effectiveness of their interaction?

Productive Dialogue and Positive Interaction

Both sides welcomed possibilities for positive interaction. They both agreed that productive dialogue between them is still possible but acknowledge that cooperation is difficult – joint implementation of projects remains challenging.

There are a number of major obstacles obstructing productive dialogue, argued several SLKM participants. They claimed that Kosovo institutions refuse to substantively discuss the problems of the Serbs, especially in the official settings of the Kosovo Assembly and in the Consultative Council for Communities – a body created by the Kosovo negotiating team earlier in 2006. As one of them put it: "The institutions do not want us. The

Serb community is active but we are being ignored. What can one do in the institutions when they are ignoring you and don't respect you?" The Consultative Council [for ethnic communities], according to SLKM, does not take into consideration their positions. In their opinion, the council will remain nothing but window dressing for the international community unless the proposals made by the Serbs are discussed and adopted. They also complained that both the Kosovo president and the head of the council have ignored invitations from SLKM to discuss the Serb position in regard to the negotiating team's documents for Vienna.

According to the Serb participants, Albanian politicians offer nothing but talk when it comes to improving the actual lives of Serbs in Kosovo. From their perspective, SLKM leaders have nothing or, at best, very little to show to their community for their participation in Kosovo's institutions, and the Kosovo government is unwilling to implement even the small requests of SLKM members. "The mere fact that most of the roads in Serb enclaves are not fixed shows that Serbs are treated as second class citizens," said one participant.

SLKM blames Albanian politicians for the lack of productive dialogue in Kosovo as the Albanians are in charge of all institutions for self-government. "If the Albanians want dialogue, it will happen," said one Serb participant. From this point of view, it is up to the Albanians to encourage and support different political groupings of Serbs. An interesting fact mentioned during the meeting is that since 1999, the political group that refuses to take part in Kosovo's elections and to engage in dialogue with the Albanians has not lost a single member. Technically, this group has not grown in numbers over the years, but their popularity has certainly not diminished, and they have a strong foothold in Belgrade. During the same period, the political group that has favored participation in Kosovo institutions and dialogue with the Albanians is losing not only support among the Serbs but is also shrinking numerically. The Albanians have not done anything to support the second group and to help them improve their rating within the Serb community.

Serb Participation in Kosovo Institutions

Kosovo Albanian participants invited the Kosovo Serbs to stop looking toward Belgrade to defend their position. As an example of this approach, they cited the case of the talks on decentralization in Vienna, when Belgrade was asking for the creation of Serb municipalities in places where no Serbs were present even in the past, but omitting some with a Serb presence today. It is very unfortunate that the voice of the

Kosovo Serbs is not heard on such occasions, they argued. The Kosovo Serbs have to decide whether they want their views to be included in the proposals of Kosovo's negotiating team or of Belgrade's negotiating team. For the prior to happen, the Serbs should be present in Kosovo's institutions. Once again, SLKM representatives were invited to enter the Kosovo Assembly and the government.

Albanian participants asked the Serbs to stop the work of parallel institutions, as one cannot ask for support from Kosovo's bodies of power and maintain their own parallel bodies at the same time. The Serb leaders were asked to redefine their own interests and to see if it is worth continuing to allow Belgrade to handicap them. As one of the opposition leaders put it: "If you allow Belgrade to defend all of your rights, then why should I discuss anything with you? I should talk to Belgrade only."

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The Albanian participants pointed out to their Serb counterparts that it would be crucial for them to participate in Kosovo's institutions during the status implementation phase. This period is coming soon, the rules of politics in Kosovo will change drastically, and SLKM has to make its decision on participation before that happens. It is true that the majority of the Kosovo population has reached a consensus on independence, the Albanians reminded, but there are a lot of other issues that remain to be discussed including the rule of law, property, new legislation including the constitution, etc. This is where Serb participation would be crucial, they surmised.

SLKM expressed willingness to engage in the work of certain Kosovo institutions, but they were resolute about preserving their current political rights within Kosovo's constitutional framework. According to them, for historic, political, and demographic reasons, Serbs should not be grouped with other non-Albanian communities and should be treated separately. There should be a special protection mechanism in the Kosovo Assembly when decisions that affect Serbs are being discussed and voted on, they argued.

The opposition participants wanted to be identified as such by the Serbs and the international community when asked about their role in improving the situation of Serbs or of anyone else in Kosovo. They estimated that the responsibility for actual decisions and their

implementation lies within the government of Kosovo and among the ruling parties. After all, Kosovo has a lot of other problems including its dire economic situation and high unemployment rate – according to the opposition, only ruling parties possess instruments strong enough for fixing these problems.

In a noteworthy revelation, a Serb participant admitted that the Serbs in Kosovo have received very little from their complete reliance on Belgrade. From the participant's own experience with working in Kosovo's institutions, the answer to the Serb community's problems did not lie there either. "Why do Albanians need to reconcile with me when they don't have need for it and can make all the decisions by themselves?" asked this politician. "I would like to be part of Kosovo's institutions if I can receive mechanisms guaranteeing my ability to defend the rights of my constituents," the participant concluded.

Serb National Council in Mitrovica

Since the SNV leadership refused to take part in the October 2, 2006 roundtable, PER staff traveled to Mitrovica the day before to meet with the President of the Council. The main topic of the meeting was SNV's concern about security of Serbs in Kosovo and the negotiation process in Vienna. SNV was surprised that the international community is pressing on with the final status of Kosovo without considering how a decision would be implemented absent the agreement of Kosovo Serbs or Belgrade.

EDUCATION FOR NON-ALBANIAN COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO

Building Better Opportunities for All: December 5, 2006

On December 5, 2006, PER organized a Council of Europe funded roundtable in Kamenica which gathered representatives of Kosovo's various ethnic communities, officials from provisional self-government institutions, as well as relevant members of the UN administration in Kosovo. The roundtable was chaired by PER Representative in Kosovo, Leon Malazogu, who guided the discussion on minorities' access to education, a unified curricula, and policy strategies for the future. Moreover, participants agreed on a set of proposals aimed at improving education for all in Kosovo.

PER President Livia Plaks emphasized in her opening remarks the importance of this roundtable in bringing about dialogue between majority and minority communities on developing a common and viable

system of education in Kosovo. "Education is a powerful tool for taming hate and bringing about tolerance," she said, underlining the value of education in developing democratic societies. She noted that PER has been successful in other countries in central and southeastern Europe in initiating dialogue between the government and minority communities on building a unified education system that meets the needs of all communities.

During his remarks, the Principal Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Steven Schook, said that education is an important issue that should not be left in the shadow of Kosovo's status talks. He urged participants to come up with concrete recommendations on "how to balance demands with fiscal realities and constraints." In addition, he assured participants that he would personally follow-up on and promote the recommendations and conclusions agreed on at this roundtable.

In his opening statement, the Minister of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo (MEST), Agim Veliu also emphasized the importance of stimulating discussions among various ethnic communities in Kosovo. Kosovo's law on education provides equal access to education for all citizens, he said. He further stated that, since education is paramount to the development and future of the country, the government of Kosovo has proclaimed education to be a key priority among its policies.

The Kamenica Example

The Kamenica municipality is a positive example of interethnic tolerance where minorities are integrated within municipal structures, enjoying freedom of movement and equal access to education and other public services. Despite this progress, municipal officials from Kamenica presented their views with regards the progress made and problems related to education in their municipality.

According to their assessment, the funding needs identified by the municipality are not taken into consideration by the Kosovo government. Despite the fact that schools are shutting down in Kamenica due to budgetary constraints, communities from remote areas are all but abandoning their homes and migrating to the municipality's center because their prospects for education are even worse. Additionally, funding is disproportionately high for ethnic minority communities relative to the number of students attending school. About 24% of the municipal budget for education is earmarked for the Serbs, who constitute only 14% of the total student population.

A Common Curriculum

There was general agreement among the participants that there is a need for a common curriculum for all communities. Such a curriculum, however, should be sensitive to the specific cultural identities of different ethnic groups. High level officials from MEST emphasized the readiness of the ministry to work with communities in building an inclusive education system. Such a system would accommodate the ethnic and cultural identities of all ethnic communities, including their history, language, and religion. Nevertheless, textbooks, although tailored to communities' cultures, need to be free from ethnic prejudice and should aim at establishing interethnic tolerance in Kosovo.

A senior official from an international organization emphasized that Kosovo needs a common curriculum for all communities so that children of different ethnic backgrounds will have a common base of knowledge. It is in the interest of the majority in Kosovo to facilitate the education of minorities, he argued. He also offered the help of his organization in providing expertise to MEST in working together with communities in developing a unified educational system.

The Serb Community

A MEST representative presented the problems the ministry is facing while attempting to cooperate with education structures serving Serb communities. Direct communication with Kosovo Serb education officials is not possible, he said. All communication on educational matters is conducted through UNMIK. As a result, MEST is not in a position to plan effectively for addressing the problems and needs of the Kosovo Serb community.

This position was echoed by a senior opposition member in the Kosovo Assembly, who emphasized that "every community should take part in the decision-making process that will contribute to improving the provision of services." Without the participation of Serbs it is impossible to improve their situation.

Even though eight of the Serb leaders invited to the meeting confirmed their participation prior to the event, none were present at the roundtable to articulate their points of view to the other participants. However, representatives of other non-Serb minority communities presented numerous concerns on the subject.

Other Minority Perspectives

A leader of the Turkish community expressed his dissatisfaction with the attention given to tackling the problems of the Kosovo Serb and Romani communities at the expense of other ethnic groups like the Turks or Bosnjaks. His main concern was the lack of textbooks in the Turkish language. At present, there are only 15-16 textbooks available for primary and secondary education. Many other required textbooks are not available in Kosovo, he said. He sought an answer to the question: "Is there a separate budget for providing textbooks for smaller communities like the Turkish and Bosnjak communities?" Since it is not profitable for private companies to publish textbooks for only 3,000 students, the government should explore possibilities of subsidizing the smaller communities, he suggested.

In response to the idea of books being imported from Turkey, this Turkish leader stressed the need for textbooks to be compatible with a unified Kosovo curriculum. Moreover, he underlined the importance for developing and implementing a strategy for offering Albanian language courses to Turkish children as their second language. Such a strategy would need to encompass the training of teachers who would be competent in providing Albanian language courses to Turkish students.

A Romani community leader from Fushe Kosova/Kosovo Polje presented his concerns on the access to education for Romani, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities in the Pristina region. Textbooks are too expensive for the poor RAE family budget, he said. Furthermore, the RAE communities typically reside in remote areas requiring children to travel long distances to kindergartens and schools located in downtown areas. Walking long distances to schools during the winter requires warm clothing for the children that often cannot be afforded by their parents. These conditions are related to poverty and long standing practices of discriminatory exclusion, and they lead to high dropout rates for the RAE children, he argued.

This same Romani representative proposed focusing on preschool education as the first step in assuring that access and support are provided for minority children. Such a policy would not only better prepare children from disadvantaged communities for attending primary schools, but would also facilitate interethnic dialogue at an early, developmental stage thus promoting tolerance and mutual respect in future generations, he contended. This idea was supported by a member of an international organization that focuses on childhood education, who asserted that

interaction in kindergarten among children of different ethnic backgrounds is important for overcoming their cultural barriers later in life.

In response to the comments and proposals of the Roma community leader, a senior MEST representative mentioned that preschool educational services are dissatisfactory not only for minorities but also for the majority community. When looking into these demands, one needs to bear in mind that Kosovo's student population is extremely high compared to the overall population. During school year 2006/2007, for example, MEST recorded that about 450,000 students are enrolled in pre-university level education. Such a high figure is a heavy burden for the budget and it calls for careful and effective planning.

Recommendations

The participants agreed that education is a human right and that it should not involve separating minorities from majorities. In this regard, they said, the government is responsible for providing an educational system that equally benefits all its citizens.

The following are policy recommendations agreed on by participants during the roundtable:

- MEST should develop a strategy for increasing access to preschool education for all children. Children's participation in kindergartens will contribute to breaking cultural barriers between different ethnic communities. If possible, pre-school education should be obligatory for all and free of charge for vulnerable families.
- MEST should take the lead in developing a strategy for children from vulnerable groups in order to support their attendance at school. In this regard, it is especially important to provide supplementary courses for RAE children who need help completing their homework (since many of their parents are not educated to provide adequate support).
- MEST, in close cooperation with representatives from ethnic communities and specialized organizations like the Council of Europe, should draft a unified curriculum for Kosovo. Textbooks for courses not related to culture should have the same content. They should be translated into the languages of different ethnic communities. At the same time, textbooks pertaining to identity and culture (such as those on language and history) should be drafted by expert groups who would ensure that the textbooks are free of prejudice and hate language. Expert groups should be composed of representatives of all

ethnic communities. An important element is the inclusion of the concerned community in drafting the content of those textbooks, in order to ensure respect for specific ethnic and religious identities.

- MEST should look into the possibility of supporting smaller ethnic communities with the provision of textbooks in their native language. The government should identify a budget line for subsidizing the publication of textbooks for smaller ethnic communities (Turks, Bosnjaks, and RAE).
- MEST should develop a strategy for providing obligatory courses for learning languages of other ethnic communities as a second language. Learning a second language will enhance communication between different ethnic groups and will break language barriers for future generations.
- MEST should develop a strategy for ensuring attendance of all children in obligatory education levels (especially for girls and RAE). In this regard, parents need to be advised on the importance of education.

It is agreed that at this stage legislation provides sufficient guidance on education. MEST should work on providing qualitative improvement in education services and not on shifting its focus to amending the existing legislation.

IMPLEMENTING THE PROPOSAL FOR STATUS SETTLEMENT

Interethnic Aspects – Problems and Solutions: March 13, 2007

In March 2007, the United Nations Special Envoy, former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari, issued the Final Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement. This document authorizes the European Union to take over the UN's "Rule of Law Mission" in Kosovo in order to facilitate the implementation of the peace package, now commonly referred to as the Ahtisaari Plan. This peace package faces many challenges, the most serious of which is the refusal of the Serb community and Belgrade to participate in its implementation.

As reported earlier, PER managed to bring leaders of Kosovo institutions and Kosovo Serbs to the same table in the fall of 2006. The approaching end of the status process, however, decreased the Serbs' willingness to sit

down with the Albanians, and especially to have a constructive dialogue. The Albanians, on the other hand, while seeing that independence is the most likely outcome of the Ahtisaari process, were reluctant to make more conciliatory gestures to the Serbs. Their concessions were made only in connection to the direct talks led by Mr. Ahtisaari during the negotiations for his peace package.

Throughout the fall and winter of 2006-2007, PER continued carrying messages from roundtables and separate meetings with Albanians and Serbs trying to convince the Kosovo Albanian participants with practical ideas on how to ameliorate the situation and win some Serbs over to their side. The announcement of the Ahtisaari plan, however, dramatically changed the political dynamics in Kosovo. As a result of the Ahtisaari process, the Albanians have committed themselves to a great number of steps that are seen by the international community as accommodative to Serbs and Serb interests in Kosovo. Despite what many in the international community regard as fair and reasonable, the Serbs continue to boycott any participation in implementing these steps.

With this in mind, PER decided to hold a roundtable on how to engage as many Serbs as possible in the implementation process of the peace package, and how to implement it without the Serbs if necessary. The roundtable was held at the headquarters of the Kosovo government on March 13, 2007. The aim of the meeting was to have a frank and constructive dialogue among Kosovo Albanian leaders and with the international community regarding the actions they can take to build trust with the Serb community for the implementation of interethnic aspects of the peace package.

The agenda was composed as follows:

- What are the most difficult points for the implementation of the peace package?
- Will the Kosovo Serb community cooperate in the implementation of the peace package? What can Kosovo Albanian leaders do to ensure the Kosovo Serb citizens' participation in building a new Kosovo? What incentives are there for Serbs to cooperate? What part of the Ahtisaari document is the most difficult for the Serbs to accept? What compromises are Kosovo Albanian leaders willing to make in order to build a new Kosovo with an active and constructive Kosovo Serb population? What can Kosovo institutions and the international community do to reduce Serb frustrations?
- If Serbs do not cooperate now, is there a plan to ensure their cooperation in the future? When will the Serbs realize that in order to continue to live in Kosovo they need to cooperate with Kosovo's

institutions? Are there differences in approach with regards the northerly region of Kosovo and Serb enclaves south of the Ibar River?

- How are Kosovo's institutions going to deal with extremists among the Serbs and among the Albanians? How should Kosovo's institutions communicate with the Serb population? What will be the mode of dialogue? Is there a way of communicating to Kosovo Albanians the benefits of working with the Serbs on implementing the peace package? Is there a way to deal with the public pressure on Kosovo's institutions to stop endlessly asking the Serbs to join the government institutions and to cooperate?
- If Serbs continue in their refusal to join the implementation process after all the efforts put out by Kosovo's institutions, will the International Civilian Office (ICO) certify the process as multiethnic? Will sincere efforts count towards the fulfillment of the objectives in the evaluation of the two year implementation? If the Serbs continue in their refusal to join Kosovo's governing bodies, what will be the reaction of the ICO?

The meeting was opened and chaired by PER President Livia Plaks. Introductory remarks were given by the President of Kosovo, Fatmir Sejdiu, and by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Joachim Rucker.

PER's President commented that expectations, as well as fears, are running high in Kosovo this year. Having delivered on a number of reconciliatory agreements, Kosovo Albanians expected a major decision on status – which was exactly what the Serbs are hoping will be delayed. This impasse breeds mistrust, and remains the main obstacle needing to be overcome during the implementation of the status package.

She continued with the message that the possibility of violence or of radicals winning on one side or another must be faced. For the near future, all sides need to adopt a course of action that should minimize the likelihood of conflict, and that accelerates political processes in a way that maximizes the gain of all sides and avoids worst case scenarios.

Ms. Plaks concluded her opening remarks by saying that Kosovo authorities should prove their partnership to local Serbs, to other minority populations, and to the international community that they are truly concerned with the well-being of ethnic communities at this juncture in the status process.

Political Commitment

A senior Kosovo leader stated that the talks in Vienna were much more about the rights of communities than about the status of Kosovo. There,

Kosovo representatives showed readiness to accept the principles of minority over-representation in Kosovo institutions and a host of other mechanisms for the protection of ethnic communities. He asserted that Kosovo Albanian politicians remained devoted to fully implementing all that was in the peace package. He encouraged all Serb political leaders who wanted dialogue to understand the essence of what has been offered to them in the Ahtisaari plan.

Several international representatives thought that the Kosovo Albanians needed to prove that they are genuinely committed to the peace package. In response, a member of the Kosovo government concluded that whether one stands emotionally behind the package was a personal issue. What they could commit to was its implementation. As he stated, “we have come to believe that it [the Ahtisaari Peace Package] is doable no matter how difficult it may be in some elements.” He further added that “our vision about the kind of country we want changed. Back in 1997 our idea of the country we wanted was different, which is a sign that the society has obviously evolved.”

The Serb Community

The chief representative of a major international organization in Kosovo also thought that the Serbs were not convinced about the peace package. One reason for their dissatisfaction, of course, is Belgrade, but also other aspects such as “their own ability” to relate to the plan. Their opposition was usually voiced against independence, and few complaints were made regarding the Serb’s place in Ahtisaari’s recommendations.

In return, a leader of one of the parties in the governing coalition claimed that for Serbs living in Kosovo, independence would not be such a shock. As he said, “If you had asked the Serbs seven years ago whether they could live under an international protectorate they would have said ‘no.’ But they got used to it – people are practical and live where it is better for them.” On a similar note, a government representative was optimistic that the engine of reconciliation will start to run fast when Serbia recognizes the independence of Kosovo – this would be the serious turning point.

A senior representative of the international community stressed the importance of clarity when speaking about Serb participation in Kosovo institutions, when helping the Kosovo Serbs to articulate for themselves their needs, and when convincing moderate leaders to break away from the dominating forces that do not want to accept the terms of the peace package. A leader of the opposition assessed that the engagement of the

Kosovo leaders with minorities was well received but noted that there may be little else available to do. At this stage it would be important to tell the people that governance can be exercised throughout Kosovo, including the north.

A senior Kosovo leader thought it was necessary to dismantle all the parallel mechanisms or structures that have violated the integrity of Kosovo. He argued that this idea should be coupled with initiating communication infrastructures, and creating possibilities that services and functions can be made available throughout the territory of Kosovo. He also stated that a sense of functionality in the country could be produced through a series of special development projects: creation of jobs, property returns, and other aspects affecting culture or sports. “It is our duty as well as the international community’s responsibility to encourage an end to the boycott, permanent intimidation, psychological tension, and the undermining instigated by Belgrade to keep tension high,” he concluded.

A representative of the government stated that there are two lessons that everyone has learned: (1) independence is not at all relevant unless it is recognized by others, (2) states and regimes can give credibility to the request for independence no matter how unrealistic this may look at the beginning (meaning that the actions of Serbia has made Kosovo’s request for independence more credible). His statement implied that whatever the declarations of the Serbs in the north of Kosovo, their case would only be legitimized if Kosovo Albanians were not attentive to their needs and issues. He argued that because all of Kosovo’s citizens’ interests are accounted for in the package, there is little chance that the Serbs in the north will be neglected or abused.

Burden of Responsibility

Various participants had ideas about who should bear the burden of responsibility for the implementation of the peace package. The head of a party caucus noted that the main responsibility ought to lie with the ICO – a statement refuted by an international participant.

A government representative stressed that the participation of Serbs was essential for the main features of the package to kick in, although this was not essential at the beginning. One of the regular participants of the Vienna Ahtisaari-guided dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina claimed that the extent of success would depend on the readiness of the Serb community to take up all the rights that the package gives them. A former prime minister agreed that the level of implementation would

largely depend on the readiness of the Serbs to be part of the process, which so far they have shown that they are not.

Several Kosovo Albanian participants also recognized the need to continue to work with the public (especially communities) in order to have them understand the privileges laid out in the Ahtisaari plan. The head of a major party caucus stated, “as a newly emerging state, we have to gain the respect of minorities and the respect of the international community.” In his estimation, the peace package has to be implemented with or without the Serbs.

Approaching Implementation

A former prime minister categorized the challenges in implementing the package as two types: (a) technical, such as population registration, municipal boundaries, etc. and (b) political and psychological.

One participant spoke on the importance of unity within Kosovo institutions during the plan’s implementation. According to him, strong unity within the Kosovo Assembly would enable Kosovo government officials to meet the deadlines envisaged by Mr. Ahtisaari.

One of the main leaders of the opposition claimed that all Kosovo Albanian politicians had contacts with the Serbs and that in such channels they all expressed positive will, some of them even did so publicly. However, due to pressure, most were reluctant to do so in public. To prove his case, he pointed out the failed attempt to form with the help of OSCE the Serb National Assembly in Gracanica.

The next stage of the plan’s implementation, contended a participant, will see a repositioning of the Serb community which will be split between (a) those who accept the reality and want to be part of the governing institutions, and (b) those who are so rigidly against the plan without any regard to reality. “Even if we offered them the Presidency of Kosovo, they would refuse it,” said one participant. “Hence we can conclude that it is a waste to spend any time with this latter category.”

An international organization representative cautioned the participants to lower their expectations. There were calls for the Albanians to do more, but it was unclear what could be accomplished. He expressed doubts whether there was anything “more” that could be done to deliver Serb participation. If the battle for their hearts and minds was a competition with Belgrade, this battle was lost even before starting. Nevertheless, he argued, practical steps can and should be taken to keep open the window for inclusion.

The chair continuously prodded the participants to be practical, think what Kosovo Albanians or the international community could do for ethnic communities, how to help the local Serbs to assert their political position or for specific steps on how to bring Serbs on board. A representative of a diplomatic office criticized the Kosovo Albanians for not following up on their own statements and not doing what they themselves said should be done.

The head of a party caucus stressed the importance of the economy and money as a mechanism for people to come together. He also expressed his concern about the high cost of implementing the peace package. A senior member of the government from the same party addressed the concerns by stating that the cost of new municipalities was actually lower than expected. He then disputed some recent high figures noting that such cost was related to building the state and had little to do with concessions to communities. Further, he stressed that no cost was too high for building a governable, manageable country.

The message of one international participant was that Belgrade’s negative influence should not be an obstacle when implementing many of the points. Small things matter when building trust, the participant surmised. From certain perspectives, it was a given that Kosovo Serbs’ lack of participation was a direct result of Belgrade’s obstructive behavior. “We know that Serbs in the north are going to give problems, but you can reach out to those who have made themselves available (not by accepting the package but by being ready to talk and accept services). They are not going to accept the package and we know it, but talk to them about some practical steps,” was the participant’s advice. The participant also insisted that the impact of such projects would be great especially if communities could see the investments made, and were able to associate such improvements with the Unity Team. Moreover, it was argued, such investment would be worth far more now than it would be six months in the future.

The head of a western diplomatic office remarked on how abstractly other participants seemed to be treating the concept of implementation – as if it were something to be dealt with down the road, past the UN Security Council’s resolution, and past several other milestones. She reminded participants that the implementation period had already begun and that the world already had their eyes on them.

Moderate Serb Support

A former prime minister suggested that Kosovo leaders as well as the international community need to engage and support the Serb groups

who want to live in Kosovo. “Today I read about another [Serb] party that registered with the OSCE, with the agenda for integration.” He called for a break with the past practice of accommodating and encouraging Serb radicals who remain self-appointed leaders although none of them have proven their legitimacy – this is the current situation with both camps of the Kosovo Serbs. Several participants suggested the need to promote instances such as the recent integration of the Serb basketball club from Mitrovica into the Kosovo League.

A representative of PER stressed the importance of protecting the very few moderates among the Serbs by drawing a comparison from examples of interethnic cooperation occurring elsewhere in the region. He stressed the proactive and positive role that Montenegrins played in accommodating the Albanians in that country.

Recommendations

- *Quick Impact Projects:* A PER representative suggested building trust through practical matters such as jobs at Pristina airport, or the much-demanded traffic lights at Laplje Selo. A party leader suggested a park or a similar project jointly with the international community and the municipality as being a sufficient enterprise. An adviser from a diplomatic office informed participants that his office had been financing, ‘quick impact projects’ in the north and in the Serb enclaves in the south because that is where they are needed.
- *Rule of Law:* A former prime minister said that without the functioning of the rule of law, nothing could succeed. All citizens must be convinced that at the end, the rule of law will prevail, he contended. If this happens, then all will be relieved of the sense of fear that there are powerful elites holding citizens in particular areas hostage. It was his opinion that this was a task primarily for the international community.
- *Information Outreach:* Serb citizens are in desperate need for information outreach programs in order to explain the complex elements of the Ahtisaari package, and combat misinformation and disinformation.
- *Mitrovica:* A former prime minister stressed the need to have joint economic plans as the main segments to bringing communities closer. Departing from a number of cases where Albanians and Serbs work jointly, such as the brick factory in Kamenica, he concluded that people were tired of poverty, and after the finalization of the status, they would return to reality. Such projects could be the segment that brings most results.

SECURITY AND THE STATUS PROCESS

Prospects for Sustaining Peace in Kosovo: May 14, 2007

Spring 2007 was marked by an active international negotiation over Kosovo’s status. During this period, few face to face contacts were made between Belgrade and Pristina, even between the leaders of the Kosovo Albanian and the Kosovo Serb communities.

PER off-set this political impasse by convening, at the headquarters of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo, a group of senior political leaders from both communities. Prior to the roundtable, PER determined it was best to keep the issue of the status outcome off the agenda.

PER chose the topic of security because it revolves around a common interest affecting both communities – from our many talks with these leaders, maintaining security in Kosovo is a goal and value shared by all. Besides, it has become quite apparent that the resolution of Kosovo’s status hardly depends on these parties, and a discussion on this topic would serve only to accelerate already deteriorating relations.

The roundtable was opened by the Principal Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Steven Schook, and Livia Plaks, President of PER, who also chaired the roundtable. The participants included three presidents of four major parties from the Kosovo Albanian side, five Kosovo Serb leaders, and local international representatives.

The agenda for the roundtable included the following topics:

- *Preserving security as the status process enters its final phase:* What needs to be done to maintain the current relatively calm, although unpredictable, security situation in Kosovo? What is the role and responsibility of political leaders of all ethnic groups and the international community in the preservation of security? Do present international and local security forces have the adequate capacity to provide security for all communities? What are the major potential sources of tension in Kosovo today?
- *Fears, perceptions, and information:* What are the expectations of the communities in Kosovo from the settlement of Kosovo’s status? How realistic are perceptions that the final status will produce winners and losers? How should local and international leaders address fears of the local population? Are these perceptions caused by the lack of information and/or misinformation? Is it possible to replace misperceptions with correct information? What can be done to bring the Kosovo institutions closer to the people in Kosovo? Is it possible to

intensify the dialogue between the international community and the Kosovo population?

A Common Interest in Peaceful Progress

In her opening remarks, the President of PER reminded participants that an event such as this roundtable, away from the prying eyes of the media, was exactly a forum for blunt discussions, and encouraged the participants to make use of it. She stressed that, “Although ethnic incidents have been gradually decreasing since the March 2004 unrest, interethnic tensions remain high. PER believes that it is crucial for the people of Kosovo not only to maintain but also to strengthen the channels of communication between each other. Furthermore, all sides should see their main interest in this.”

Various scenarios have been circulating in both international and local media outlets in the past few weeks regarding the post-status Kosovo, she stated. Some go so far as to predict new conflict, ethnic cleansing, and the region’s return to the violence of the 1990s. “These reports feed peoples’ insecurity about their future which may manifest in new forms of violence. Some may see advantages in endangering security, but most do not,” she argued.

Preservation of security during the status process is a key determinant for Kosovo’s post-status political and economic stability, she continued. She added that all of Kosovo’s leaders should insist on keeping peace in all circumstances and scenarios.

Both international participants in the opening stressed the role of local leadership and its implications on security as well as the need to meet the expectations of the international community. The second specifically stressed that local leadership has a responsibility to create a climate conducive for security.

Preserving Security . . .

A leader of an opposition party surmised that any finale raises emotions, even in football. He assessed ethnic relations as essentially the same as before – no conflict – but without any improvement in interaction between the communities. He then called Serbia an exporter of problems, whereas Kosovo was a tax-free importer of the same. He thought that the local Serbs would be the best customs officials against such imports which prevent interethnic relations from getting better. According to him, there was a direct correlation between actions of the unreformed security structures in Serbia and the state of interethnic relations in Kosovo.

This same leader suggested that the most difficult issue after the resolution of the status would be the issue of northern Kosovo which may be the arena in which Russia would choose to challenge the West. According to him, Russia has opened a wide spectrum of crisis spots with the EU at a time when Kosovo acquires not only European, but global importance. He predicted that Russia will perceive northern Kosovo as a useful field on which to play out its new role in foreign affairs. According to him, if such a new role would be confrontational, Eastern Europe will face, at best, a scenario of a frozen conflict. How Serbs and Albanians communicate will depend on Russia’s stance, not towards Kosovo, but towards the EU, for the only strategic value of Kosovo was the ability to exercise pressure on the EU.

A former prime minister stated that partition was only a theoretical possibility and should be discarded as unrealistic. He suggested that the integration of the north into Kosovo might be too ambitious a goal. Instead, a pragmatic goal for this stage could be the mere ‘return to legality’ of northern Kosovo. Whereas the Ahtisaari Plan only gives a chance to Mitrovica and other areas to normalize and return to the rule of law, integration will take far longer. The question he posed was whether the Mitrovica Serbs will return to legality or continue to live in their El Dorado of crime, smuggling, etc., to the benefit of those who are currently monopolizing such activities as well as to the benefit of many political leaders.

A Serb participant that has engaged little with Albanians in previous years thought there was some progress made, but not enough. He criticized leaders who promise to do things in the future, but only talk and do little about the present. The understanding he has is that there is a future for the Serbs only if they participate in the project of an independent Kosovo. According to him the Ahtisaari proposal was not acceptable to the Serbs, not only because of status, but also because the mechanisms for ensuring safety were not there. Also, while it may offer protocol for the selection of police commanders, it does not offer better possibilities for the Serb community to elect its own representatives. In essence, he believes the Ahtisaari plan offers too little.

. . . and Dispelling Fears

A senior representative of an international organization thought the Albanian community should do extensive work to send clear, positive messages that whatever the outcome of the status process there will be positive results for the Serbs. “It is the time to try some sincere efforts, and show some more leadership,” he advised. “We have to step back from a reactive posture to a proactive one, maybe bring in more international

policemen to the Serb areas. In general, we need a more active preventative posture.” Nevertheless, he continued, the real fix is a sincere effort from the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb leadership, at all levels, including at the personal level, to find mechanisms to talk and act responsibly.

An adviser to the President of Kosovo argued that the main source of fear is from the unsustainable situation. A senior Serb leader said that a status which was unacceptable to either side would create political tension after the resolution, which in turn would create widespread instability. A representative of a Serb political party that only recently got involved in politics predicted that Serbs in the north, who are much more organized (although only a third of all Serbs in Kosovo live there), will resist the status and this resistance could result in open conflict. But he tried to convey to the Albanians that it was in their interest to avoid violence. For as long as no reconciliation happens, no investment will come to Kosovo. He disputed the legitimacy of the current Serb leadership, claiming that Serbs would benefit most from elections in order to obtain true political representatives.

Security and the International Community

A leading Serb representative stated that security was the most important issue for his ethnic community. He criticized the international community for allowing everything and anything in the name of status. “They say if there is no status, there will be violence, which has become a way for the international community to pressure the Serbs,” he said. “When they say that Russia will bear responsibility for violence, this is an open call for those who would threaten security. There were 41,000 KFOR soldiers in 1999, and the Serbs were still chased away. The fact that there were no trials over the disorder in March 2004 sends a message of impunity to all.”

Another leading Serb politician stated that only recently has he received signals from KFOR/NATO that they will not tolerate violence. He called on the Kosovo Albanian leadership to address the people with less ambiguous statements about the importance of a peaceful society, in such a way that every peasant can understand, and to stop setting deadlines for the resolution of status. “Even the EU has no control over status anymore. It is between the USA and Russia now,” he concluded.

A local civil society representative stressed that violence should be neither hostage to political solutions nor a political tool. He felt that KFOR should be only one of the mechanisms for keeping the peace, and that

the main insuring factors are political stability and the way politicians project the security of Kosovo to its populace. He recommended the re-establishment of a security forum, which failed years ago when created by UNMIK, but this time by involving KFOR, the police, party representatives, and government.

A party leader claimed that status was indeed essential for security. The hitherto dualistic governance by UNMIK and Kosovo institutions has enabled a general ‘shirking of responsibility.’ Hence, even a conditional independence would define the role of each citizen. “Independence brings functional responsibility and one can already observe more engagement and devotion by the leadership. The desire for independence was not an invention, but the natural course of events that all societies have followed. Where Kosovo can lead by example is in protecting its ethnic communities, because Kosovo Albanians themselves have been victims of repression,” he argued.

Clarity and Communication

An international participant reiterated the importance of communication during this time: “Political leaders have a responsibility to increase their communication with their constituencies in order to provide them with accurate information regarding developments related to status. Although people these days have access to a wide spectrum of news outlets, they tend to trust their politicians most. Therefore, a genuine communication and debate among and within ethnic communities reduces the risk of ethnic tensions resulting from inaccurate information and misconceptions.”

According to a Serb representative, journalists in Kosovo are usually militants of various party factions and it is difficult to find independent ones. Hence Serbs have resorted to communicating only with Belgrade media, as their local media have no such capacity. He suggested having a media outlet in Gracanica, Caglavica, or a similar Serb-majority place.

The head of an opposition parliamentary caucus suggested that a second channel in the public broadcasting system be set up with an independent editorial policy. She said that the news for the Serbs should not be translated from the Albanian version, but developed out of a separate editorial policy.

Varying Points of View

A diplomatic representative of a Western country addressed the local Serbs: “Above all, you need open and honest dialogue. You have to accept

reality. If you do not do this, you can not build trust. If status is resolved without trust, you are going to create a mass exodus of Serbs.” Another international representative also addressed the Serbs. “We can wait longer for you to join the Kosovo Assembly, but it is not in your interest.”

A Serb participant surmised that Serbs need to take part in institutions, not because the internationals have requested it, but because the Serbs are equal Kosovo citizens with the Albanians. However, as done previously by other Serb leaders, he claimed that some conditions need to be met beforehand. The head of a parliamentary caucus suggested that the Serbs try the institutions, no matter how imperfect they may be. She said that her party was not entirely happy but has been making an impact from inside and changes have ensued. “One cannot make changes by ‘victimizing’ yourself and by asking others to demand changes in one’s name,” she stated. A senior Serb leader in Kosovo also declared that the decision to not take part in the elections was, in her opinion, catastrophic. “Serbs are part of the problem, but also part of the solution.”

An international participant observed that even though the potential for violence still exists in Kosovo, there are several ways of mollifying the situation – that there is potential to improve the security situation. From his perspective, much depends on the population’s perceptions. In most cases, what the population is really looking for is a sense of fairness. “This sense of fairness could and should be provided regardless of status,” he continued. “This sense of fairness could be created through more active political action by the majority, the main vehicle of which is communication. This is a time for the leaders to show their responsibility and to change their reactive response to a proactive response, i.e. being constantly

Cooperate with those who are willing to cooperate, and do it to the fullest.

present on the ground, talking to the people, informing them directly. The problem is that one cannot have communication when there is no trust. It is difficult to rebuild this trust but not impossible.” The best way is through practical cooperation, he advised. The Albanian leaders do not have much choice on which

Kosovo Serbs they get to cooperate with. “Cooperate with those who are willing to cooperate,” he said, “and do it to the fullest.” Another way to build a sense of fairness is to give Serbs and others a clear picture of what kind of Kosovo they would like to build. They are awaiting such a clear vision, he concluded.

THE BALKANS AS A SOURCE OF SECURITY AND STABILITY IN EUROPE

Ninth High-Level Balkan Regional Roundtable on Interethnic Relations: June 15-16, 2007

In June 2007, PER brought together leaders of various Kosovo Albanian and Serb political factions under the auspices of PER’s ongoing series of high-level Balkan regional roundtables on interethnic relations. The event was held in Athens, Greece, and funded by the US Agency for International Development, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The meeting was an opportunity for high-ranking officials from Balkan countries to gather with top representatives of the Euro-Atlantic community to discuss “The Balkans as a Source of Security and Stability in Europe.” The meeting was chaired by PER President Livia Plaks.

Just as the issue of Kosovo and its final status has stolen the limelight of international and European diplomacy, so too did it dominate the meeting’s discussion. It would be unjust to claim that any great meeting of the minds occurred between the Serb and Kosovo Albanian participants during the PER event, but the mere presence of both sides at the same table to take part in discussions about how their actions affect the wider region is a significant sign of hope for the area’s future. It is, in effect, a clear signal that representatives from both sides of this argument, no matter how extreme their disagreement might be, have an invested interest in maintaining peace and security in the region.

The issue of Kosovo was only part of the meeting’s agenda. In fact the four main themes around which the discussion revolved are: “lessons learned” from the settlement of other conflicts in the region and their implications for settlement of the Kosovo status question; the Ahtisaari plan; the role of the international community, particularly the EU, the United States, and NATO in ensuring stability and security in the Balkans; and, the question of accession to the EU, the internal challenges to meeting accession criteria in the states of the Western Balkans, and how to meet them.

For the purposes of this report, the following are only excerpts of the wider discussion. A full report of the Athens meeting can be found on PER’s website: www.per-usa.org.

“Lessons learned” and the Issue of Kosovo’s Status

“Since 9/11, we no longer have the luxury of adopting complicated solutions” an Albanian participant from Kosovo advised during the meeting. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have increased the price of oil, and increased the role of Russia – two key destabilizing factors, he surmised. It was also his opinion that, at the same time, the United States has shifted its priorities away from the Balkans and toward the Middle East. “The US had been the driving force behind all the settlements in the Balkans. Russian interests in the Caucasus may now shape settlements in the Balkans as much as any other interests” he professed. “Kosovo has become ‘hostage’ to Russian realities and to the threat of a Russian veto; this complicates any solution.” He was of the opinion that the Ahtisaari package – a recently released set of proposals issued by UN Special Envoy, former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari, which outline Kosovo’s future de facto independence – is already too complicated to implement successfully. He voiced his concern that the Kosovo conflict might eventually become a “frozen” conflict like that in Cyprus.

An international official responded to these comments by acknowledging that problems elsewhere, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, have reduced the level of international attention devoted to Bosnia and the rest of the Balkans. The participant pointed out that in Kosovo, most of the agreements negotiated up to now have never come into force, so that the only lesson to be learned is that leaving conflicts unattended, leaving them frozen, does not, in fact, solve them – they keep coming back.

A participant from Serbia reiterated that a potential for violence remains in the region. From his perspective, the region’s various agreements were successful in brokering peace but have been unsuccessful in maintaining it. While there are no open conflicts in the region, the potential for unresolved issues to escalate into violence remains strong. The unresolved question then, according to this participant, is how to create societies more or less homogenous within states as well as state institutions that function efficiently in all its territories.

An international functionary with extensive experience in the region suggested that a “step by step” approach has to be adapted to realities on the ground. UNMIK is no longer an effective mission, the participant stated. From this perspective, it no longer works and can no longer keep things on an even keel under the constraints of UN Resolution 1244. Therefore, some of the “steps” in a solution must be hurried up, because conditions on the ground in Kosovo have changed fundamentally in the past eight years. The current political leadership, that is, the wider

political elite, is under immense pressure because they have tied themselves to the process defined by the Contact Group, which stated the solution would be found in 2006. That political leadership has now been put at risk by the failure to meet that timeline.

A Serbian government official argued that the best approach to the remaining political conflict would be to opt for a political compromise. The framework for such a compromise is to be found in the norms of the international order and in international law. From his perspective, this is the only path to stability, and other approaches threaten to turn the region into a zone of instability. Serbia is not prepared to accept any imposed solution, especially with regards to a part of its territory.” In his estimation, this includes the latest version of the Ahtisaari plan. “It is totally unacceptable. We are convinced the UN Security Council is the place a solution will be found for the status of Kosovo and Metohija within the Republic of Serbia. If debate in the Security Council does not produce a result, we should open a new round of negotiations,” he concluded.

The Ahtisaari Plan

A participant from Kosovo argued that the Ahtisaari plan is a compromise that opens up new perspectives for the people of the region. Without such a settlement, it will be far more difficult, and perhaps even impossible to achieve integration into the EU or to attract international investment in the development of the region, he suggested.

A Serb from Kosovo argued that the Ahtisaari plan is not, in fact, a compromise between the Kosovo Albanians and the Serbs. It is a compromise between the Kosovo Albanians and the international community. By defining the Kosovo Serbs as a minority, and focusing on the issue of protection of minorities, he argued, the Ahtisaari plan sets the stage for future challenges to the rights of the Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo. Serbs should be treated differently, he argued.

If Serbia is not on board, there is no possibility of implementation, there is no sustainability, and there is new tension – it means no solution.

“They are not in a bad situation in Kosovo because they are a minority; they are in a bad situation because they are Serbs. The situation can be resolved only if it is understood as an ethnically motivated issue.” While the other minorities are important, he claimed, a multiethnic Kosovo

cannot be created without having the Serbs on board. “If Serbia is not on board, there is no possibility of implementation, there is no sustainability, and there is new tension – it means no solution,” he declared.

An American diplomat in the region declared that it is US policy to ensure that Kosovo maintains a viable Serb community within its borders and that the Kosovo Serbs are not the victims of miscalculations on the part of their Belgrade leadership, their Kosovo leadership, or for that matter, the international community. Under the Ahtisaari plan, according to this participant, some 90% of Kosovo Serbs will live in Serb-majority municipalities, and 55-60% will live in the US KFOR sector. There will be double-majority rule in eight crucial areas of national legislation in Kosovo, and guaranteed levels of representation in central and local institutions and cultural and financial links to Serbia. Therefore, he concluded, if the Kosovo Serbs wish to try and build better lives for themselves in Kosovo, they will have an opportunity to do so.

A participant from Hungary active in European institutions identified the status of Kosovo, and the consequences of any decision on status, as the biggest challenge for regional stability. “A decision that rewards one side and punishes the other is not a solution. But the Serbian elite must recognize that Kosovo has been lost. Even as early as the 1970s it was clear the Albanians did not want to live with the Serbs. Serbia would be better off not having to deal with the problems of Kosovo,” he concluded. He also noted that any solution must be adopted through a UN Security Council resolution so as to create a legal basis for the EU’s replacement of UNMIK.

An Albanian participant from Kosovo argued that there can be no democratic Serbia without an independent Kosovo, and there can be no democratic Kosovo without independence. In his view, “we can not have stable democracy if there is an outstanding issue or conflict as big as Kosovo status.” While some participants had spoken of the potential consequences of a solution in Kosovo, he emphasized there are also consequences for not acting. “The negotiations in Vienna were designed to minimize the consequences of what we are facing. We need to do something that is ‘just’ even when there will be consequences. We are not going to turn the world upside down. But, when we have had so many tragedies, so much anger, of course there will be consequences. But there will be some justice done too.” He suggested Albanians have been patient only because the United States urged them to remain patient. Without US influence, things would have been very different. When people are told they do not have the right to decide their own fate, he

argued, that gives them a reason to question the situation. “Yes, we do know what will happen in Kosovo. It will be independent. But, knowing that independence will happen is not enough; it must happen soon.”

An international functionary from the region warned with respect to Kosovo that a process has taken place since March 2004 that involved the United States, the EU, Russia, the Contact Group, and it has come up with a solution for what is an untenable situation. The mandate of UNMIK is over, 1244 is an obstacle, and the current status cannot be maintained. Instead of waiting until after the problem escalates beyond the point of return, a solution was found in the form of the Ahtisaari plan, which has been adopted by both the EU and the United States, and until January, by the whole Contact Group. The only reason it has not been implemented is that one state that is a permanent member of the Security Council has threatened a veto. Had that not happened, he argued, the Ahtisaari plan would have been implemented by December or March. The US is now in the situation of trying to find a way to pass a resolution, or in the case of a veto, to find an alternative means of implementing a solution.

An American diplomat asserted that it is the Kosovo Albanian leadership in Kosovo, and the international actors with personnel on the ground who have made the greatest investment in the region, and who have the most to lose from violence. “The Ahtisaari plan is not brilliant,” he suggested, “but it is the least bad plan available for promoting ethnic reconciliation and stability, and for promoting a European perspective for all the people of the region.” The *status quo* is unsustainable, and it is unthinkable to go back to the *status quo ante*, that is, pre-1999, he warned. But, “if there are specific proposals from Moscow or Belgrade or anywhere else that address specific issues and concerns, they should be considered as part of an effort to reach a less incongruous resolution. We would like Russia to take seriously the fact that there are other Security Council members who have personnel on the ground, at risk in Kosovo, and their views must be taken into consideration.” The American view, he claimed, is that Kosovo’s independence would not be a precedent for any other case. But there will be people who will assert it is a precedent for their own ambitions.

A participant from Montenegro asked how it would be possible to keep Kosovo inside of Serbia. “I cannot see a way to do this,” he declared. Is Serbia ready to integrate Kosovo into the political system of Serbia? Can Serbia survive the integration of Kosovo? Is Serbia ready to accept Albanians into the government in Belgrade? Is Serbia ready to finance the ambitions of Kosovo? Does Serbia have the power to protect its national

interests and at the same time keep Kosovo inside its borders? It is a fact of history, he stated, that in war one either loses or gains territory. “The Serbian political leadership must create a consensus inside of Serbia to protect the national interest of Serbia by closing the Kosovo issue. It is better for the Serbian elite to take the initiative than to simply wait.”

CONFIDENCE BUILDING DURING THE STATUS PROCESS

Dialogue Despite Delay: July 16, 2007

Like the scorching hot weather, the volatility of political rhetoric in Kosovo summer 2007 heated up due in large part to the delay in Kosovo’s final status resolution. Given these limiting circumstances, PER decided to hold, instead of a roundtable, a ‘roundtable dinner.’ On July 16, 2007, PER hosted such an event with a rather informal format in the hopes that a smaller group of influential leaders of the Kosovo governing coalition and SLKM might have a more focused and constructive discussion. Although all PER roundtables are informal, the added levity brought much needed candor that has been somewhat missing from other dialogues. The timing and mercurial situation over status did not allow for more long-term discussions, nevertheless constructive debate took place with a better understanding of the prospects of Serb participation in the elections and in the institutions.

The discussions at the dinner were guided by PER President Livia Plaks and the Head of the Swiss Liaison Office in Pristina Roland Salvisberg.

Livia Plaks opened the dinner by saying that the gathering was organized to discuss several important topics relevant to the situation in today’s Kosovo. The timing of the meeting, amidst confusing signals from the international community regarding the future of Kosovo and the delay in resolving the status issue, coincided with the rise in worries and trepidation of the population both among the Albanians and the Serbs. She specifically asked the participants to discuss the following points:

- Possible impact of the delay in settling the status issue.
- How to maintain calm and security, and prevent the outbreak of violence during these uncertain times.
- The issue of a possible unilateral declaration of independence and its consequences.
- Upcoming elections: will the Serb population participate? Will they gain or lose from such participation? And if they participate in the elections, will they also take part in the institutions?

The discussion mainly focused on the issue of elections in 2007 and the likelihood of Serb participation. There was an understanding that any Kosovo government would need a Serb partner to address Serb grievances effectively. Naturally, the status process is an impediment to such a partnership since a Serb politician cooperating with his Kosovo Albanian counterparts would be seen assenting to independence.

Serb participants stated that they prefer for Kosovo to hold elections in November before the finalization of the status. One of the participants said that if elections are held in Kosovo without the status defined, it would make it easier for them to participate.

At this point in the discussion, the chairperson asked a top government official to weigh in. He informed those present that a new roadmap for status was to be agreed upon by the Unity Team within ten days. This Kosovo Albanian leader expressed genuine confidence in the final outcome, “We’ve received serious guarantees [from our supporters within the international community] that the wish of the majority will not be damaged, but they need more time.”

It was important that this official recognized the need to collaborate with the Serbs despite status setbacks. “We need to continue to work together on the issue of returns, and also on decentralization,” he said. He expressed dissatisfaction with Belgrade’s role and stated that the leadership there looks at things differently and has different stakes. He called on the local Serbs to take more ownership and be more part of the processes in Kosovo, at least in the background. He noted that while Serbs did take part in sessions of some parliamentary and government working groups, they did not do so in all of them, e.g. they did not contribute to draft decentralization legislation, budgetary planning and municipal boundaries (according to the Ahtisaari Plan). He recommended the Ahtisaari Plan be used as a blueprint for a future Kosovo, even though the document has been rejected by Serbia.

... the overwhelming majority of the people, not only in Kosovo but in the region as a whole, are in favor of a peaceful resolution, even when their expectations are not fully met.

The chairperson also stressed that preservation of security during the status process was a key determinant for Kosovo’s post-status political and economic stability. “Although there are still some fringe elements that advocate the use of violence as necessary to reach their goals, the overwhelming majority of the people, not only in Kosovo but in the

region as a whole, are in favor of a peaceful resolution, even when their expectations are not fully met,” she said.

Another Serb member of the Kosovo Assembly echoed this view by stating how encouraged he was by what the Kosovo government official had said, that the Kosovo leaders will try to keep the calm. He also recalled from the last PER meeting what he saw as two very positive notes coming from top Kosovo Albanian leaders, when one of them said that Pristina needs to speak to Belgrade, and when a former Kosovo prime minister stressed the need for the Kosovo government to move from words to action. This Serb leader expressed that he felt much better about the political process in Kosovo than before, and that time was having its effect. “I hope that all my co-nationals will feel the same, regardless of status,” he added.

Serb Participation in the Upcoming Elections

One Serb Assembly member was not sure if the elections were good for the Serbs at this time. “If all Serbs do participate in the elections, a radical list will get a lot of votes,” he estimated. His concern was that these radicals would not be partner to Kosovo Albanian institutions.

Another Serb politician disagreed, stating that “nothing is better for democracy than elections. I supported the delay last time, waiting for clarity of status. I hope the Albanians will see the new resolution whatever it is as a new beginning.” He strongly surmised that Belgrade would not repeat the old mistake of telling the Serbs to boycott.

He also agreed that, for Albanians, the most important thing was to have partners among the Serbs. He stressed that, for Serbs, taking part in Kosovo’s processes is imperative. Of most vital importance is their cooperation in decentralization, especially with regard to northern Mitrovica and Gracanica. To make it easier for the Serbs, he suggested that the Kosovo government embark in an unofficial way to create and build new municipalities. One way to begin this process, he commented, is for the top government official present to initiate the construction of buildings for the new municipalities. Such an effort would be a fairly inexpensive way to produce a positive psychological impact on the Serb population.

It is also essential that Belgrade does not call for a boycott of elections, a Kosovo Serb leader said. He opined that the chances of electoral participation would increase if Kosovo Serb politicians could quickly come together and decide on how best to pressure Belgrade into recognizing the need for participation. He also thought that Serb non-participation would not challenge the legitimacy of the elections. “This is not the same

as the Albanians did in the nineties since the international community will recognize the results of the elections.” The challenge remains, however, on ways to call the Serbs to vote, if not in central elections, then at least in local elections.

Participation in the Government

Whereas another leader of a Kosovo Serb political party was unequivocally positive about participation in the elections, the same cannot be said about participation in Kosovo institutions. He stated that participation in the government will depend on turn-out and the votes their party wins. “We need to be brave and show our pro-European orientation in action,” he said.

As participation in Kosovo’s institutions depends on the results of the elections, the chairperson asked a Serb representative to make an assessment of their potential electoral strength. The Serb leader replied if a boycott is organized, a Serb coalition could expect 5,000-6,000 votes. If there is no boycott, or only a partial boycott (by some parties in Belgrade) there could be around 20,000 votes which is sufficient for capturing 5 seats on top of the guaranteed 10. As most Serb votes will go to the Serb parties supported by Belgrade, he pointed out the need for a pre-electoral grand coalition comprised of 7-8 entities. This coalition could help avoid a big dispersal of the vote, garner large voter turn-out, and could push the seats gained well beyond 5 (in the elections in 2001, Serbs won 12 seats – combined with the ten set-aside seats, they gained 22 seats altogether).

The Status Question

Unlike the other two Serb participants, a leader of a small Kosovo Serb party was impatient about tackling the status issue. But he nevertheless conceded that they have little influence on status, hence it was a non-starter. As a result, he called upon all the participants to work on the status of citizens. At the same time, he, in no uncertain terms, stated that the status should be solved as soon as possible, and that his party was ready to participate in elections.

A Serb member of the Kosovo Assembly preferred delay. “If you ask us, we would like to join Kosovo institutions, but that is not realistic. Then again, even this uncertainty is better than an unwanted certainty.”

Collaborative Efforts

A Kosovo Albanian representative at the dinner lamented the possibility of a Serb boycott as, in order to implement decentralization and other programs to the benefit of the Serb community, the government can not

do so without a partner on the Serb side. He outlined a potentially very difficult situation regarding status, and the looming independence on the horizon. “I realize it’s not easy to challenge Belgrade. But such is the role of leaders to lead communities in difficult times.”

It was concluded that such informal exchanges between the Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders should continue – in a tense atmosphere, any open and public support by the “other side” may translate into weakening a ‘partner’ on the other side of the fence.

A Serb leader agreed that it was difficult to explain to the public the matters upon which both Albanian and Serb leaders agree. “We, as politicians, are too often forced to communicate to the people on what we disagree,” he said. Instead, he called for support behind the scenes such as making appointments favored by the moderate Serb leaders or providing jobs to the Serbs.

A senior government official retorted that individuals should not be employed in key positions based on their party loyalty and further called upon the Serb politicians to find the courage to lead their people in these difficult times. He said that “we should be treating the local Serbs as bridges. We have a problem with Belgrade and we are looking to the Kosovo Serbs to reconcile us.” He pondered over the possibility of having no UN resolution on the Kosovo status or adoption of the Ahtisaari Plan, stressing that this would not be a positive outcome for the Serbs.

Upon conclusion of the roundtable, the chairperson reiterated what was already discussed in private meetings with most of the participants – that PER was planning to organize a process of consultations among and within the leaderships of the two ethnic camps, away from the capital, to hammer out matters of mutual interest and to forge positive relationships. This idea was supported by the participants who thought it was useful in the current political climate in Kosovo and committed to participate in all such PER events.



From left to right: Dragisa Krstovic, Emina Demirovic, and Slobodan Petrovic.



Bajram Rexhepi

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS: ACTIVITIES IN KOSOVO, 2006-2007*

(English alphabetical order)

Participants from Pristina and other municipalities in Kosovo

- Muhamet Arifi**, Secretary, NGO Pajtesa (2)
Fevzi Berisha, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, and Technology of Kosovo
Goran Bogdanovic, Member, Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija, Kosovo Assembly; Member, Main Board, Democratic Party; Member, Negotiating Team for Kosovo, Government of Serbia (2)
Vladimir Bojovic, President, Municipality of Leposavic
Vlora Citaku, Spokesperson, Democratic Party of Kosova (2)
Daut Culjandzi, Manager, NGO HUB
Nexhat Daci, President, Democratic League of Dardania, Kosovo Assembly
Gjergj Dedaj, Chair, Parliamentary Group, Group for Integration, Kosovo Assembly
Alush Gashi, Head, Parliamentary Group of the Democratic League of Kosova, Kosovo Assembly
Defrim Gashi, Adviser on Pre-University Education, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology of Kosovo
Ardian Gjini, Minister for Environmental Protection and Special Planning of Kosovo; Member, Main Board, Alliance for the Future of Kosova (3)
Muhamet Hamiti, Spokesperson of the President of Kosovo
Ramush Haradinaj, President, Alliance for the Future of Kosova (2)
Mimoza Hasani, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo
Lutfi Haziri, Deputy Prime Minister of Kosovo; Vice President, Democratic League of Kosova (4)
Skender Hyseni, Principal Political Adviser to the President of Kosovo; Member, Presidency, Democratic League of Kosova (3)
Bashkim Ibishi, Civil Society Activist
Sladjan Ilic, Member, Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija, Kosovo Assembly
Fehmi Ismaili, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo
Ahmet Isufi, Acting President, Alliance for the Future of Kosova; Member, Kosovo Assembly (2)
Oliver Ivanovic, Head, Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija; Vice President, Social Democratic Party (4)
Milan Ivanovic, President, Serb National Council (2)
Marko Jaksic, Vice President, Serb National Council; Member, Main Board, Democratic Party of Serbia; Member, Negotiating Team for Kosovo, Government of Serbia (2)
Vesna Jovanovic, Member, Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija, Kosovo Assembly
Vesna Kadic, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, and Technology of Kosovo
Nexhmije Kallaba, Vice President, Assembly, Municipality of Kamenica

*The number in parentheses indicates the number of PER roundtables the participant attended. Where no number appears, the person took part in one roundtable only. Some participants have changed their titles between 2006-2007. Only the titles at the time of their latest attendance are listed.

Fehmi Kastrati, Director, Technical Secondary School in Kamenica
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From left to right: Skender Hyseni, Gjylnaze Sylja, Alush Gashi, Zurab Katchkatchishvili, and Teuta Sahatqija.



From left to right: Ahmet Isufi, Ardian Gjini, Yvana Enzler, and Tina Kaidanow.



From left to right: Tom Yazgerdi, Arben Qirezi, Oliver Ivanovic, Werner Wnendt, and Rada Trajkovic.



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