

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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R e p o r t

PRISTINA, SKOPJE, BUDAPEST
SEPTEMBER 2007 – MAY 2009

**THE FUTURE OF
MULTIETHNICITY IN KOSOVO**

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PREFACE

An earthquake in the Balkans sent shockwaves through the entire world. The earthquake was the violence emanating from the 1999 conflict between Serbia and its southern province of Kosovo. Some say the violence was due to the multiyear discrimination and eventual efforts at ethnic cleansing of the Albanians by the Serbian government of Milosevic. Others have said that the violence started with the appearance and activities of the then shadow Kosovo Liberation Army. In any case, the international community eventually got involved and Serbia and Montenegro (as well as Serbia's southern province of Kosovo) received more than a month of intensive bombing by NATO forces against military targets (with countless civilian casualties as well).

A decade has passed since those events and the reality on the ground looks different. Kosovo has now been recognized by over 50 countries as a new state and is trying to enter the path of belonging to the Euro-Atlantic structures. However, there is still a serious international presence on the ground which is mostly meant to protect and encourage the Serbian community to be part of Kosovo's life even if not recognizing its current status. Relations between Belgrade and Pristina are at best frozen if not downright hostile. The greatest challenge for all inside Kosovo as well as the international community is how to deal with the relations between Kosovo institutions and the Serbian community.

To respond to some of these challenges, the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) has been working intensively on the ground as a neutral broker between the two main ethnic communities (as well as the Roma). PER has been active in Southeastern Europe since 1991 and has a long history of organizing dialogues among the main players on some of the most sensitive issues. Although the situation is still very complex on the ground, there are some opportunities that have recently appeared which might make progress in the relations between the two communities more productive. PER will continue its work in Kosovo for the coming period and hopes to be among those forces that bring prosperity and better interethnic relations not only in Kosovo but in the entire Western Balkan region. Kosovo and the situation there is very much interwoven with all other countries in the region and no country can exist without the other. For the good of all, we hope that they will be working together towards a closer and more productive neighborhood.

PER's work in Kosovo for the past two years has been supported by a generous grant from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. I would like to thank our partners in Switzerland and their representatives in Kosovo for trusting us and allowing PER the flexibility to respond as needed to circumstances on the ground.

Most of all, I would like to thank all the participants in the PER dialogues, whether they were presidents or prime ministers, heads of political parties or members of parliament and civil society, for the trust they showed in us and just simply for showing up for the roundtables organized by us. My thanks also go to PER staff in Princeton, Alex N. Grigor'ev and Shpetim Gashi, and in Pristina, Leon Malazogu, for planning and implementing this initiative.

Livia B. Plaks, *President*

Princeton, New Jersey
July 2009

INTRODUCTION

Anticipating that the outcome of the UN-sponsored negotiations on Kosovo's status would not satisfy all parties, PER implemented a two-year long initiative, September 2007 – May 2009, aimed at helping to manage interethnic relations and keep the channels of communication between Albanians and Serbs open. The program promoted interethnic trust and cooperation through consensus-oriented dialogues focused on issues that bring the communities together.

The majority of the activities took place in Kosovo. A meeting of mayors and political leaders from multiethnic municipalities in the Western Balkans and a roundtable of Kosovo Serb leaders and Serbian government and political party officials were held in Skopje, Macedonia, and Budapest, Hungary, respectively. Participation in PER's activities included senior Kosovo government officials, including the president and the prime minister, Kosovo Albanian and Serb political leaders, mayors of multiethnic municipalities in the Western Balkans, Serbian government officials, and various senior international representatives.

The activities in Kosovo contributed to easing the tensions between Albanians and Serbs on the eve of the status decision and helped restore interethnic communication in the post-independence period. Disagreements between Albanian and Serbian representatives during the status negotiations had inadvertently exacerbated tensions between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, contributing to speculations that independence will lead to a Serb exodus or massive interethnic violence. Although no serious violence occurred, the interethnic cooperation was terminated and Serbs organized their own political structures. While some level of communication has resumed, the representatives of the two communities have yet to engage in serious discussions. In this regard, a solidified Kosovo Serb political leadership that has the legitimacy to articulate the demands of the Serb community and negotiate with Kosovo authorities is crucial.

PER launched a debate on the need to strengthen the Kosovo Serb leadership. A series of discussions were held among Kosovo Serb political leaders in Pristina and other multiethnic areas in Kosovo. Aware of Belgrade's role in this aspect, PER organized a roundtable of Kosovo Serb leaders and Serbian government officials and parliamentarians in Budapest. The discussions indicated that while the Serb community is

unanimous in opposing Kosovo's independence, it remains divided regarding its participation in the political process in Kosovo. However, there was consensus that a representative Kosovo Serb leadership is instrumental in modifying and adjusting policies to reflect the changing circumstances. They pledged to intensify their efforts to establish an inclusive and authoritative Kosovo Serb leadership.

The implementation of the Ahtisaari plan, particularly its decentralization part, constitutes a serious challenge for the Kosovo institutions. The problem is not legislative or financial, but political. A detailed comprehensive road map exists, the financial means to implement the process have been secured, but there remains one problem: the party with the biggest stake in the reform, the Kosovo Serbs, refuses to join the process. Without the Serbs participation in the process, it is hard to conceive of a successful implementation of not only decentralization but any minority related reform. In an effort to promote municipal cooperation on local reform in the region, PER organized in Skopje a roundtable of local leaders of multiethnic municipalities and minister of local government in the Western Balkans. A list of lessons learned from the Balkan countries was articulated. There was consensus that the process should serve not only as a mechanism to ensure for equal representation but also to improve public services for all communities, and that the decentralization of power should go hand in hand with the decentralization of resources.

The roundtables were moderated by PER President Livia Plaks.

Shpetim Gashi, PER Senior Program Officer, is the author of this report.

This report is a collection of individual reports of PER activities in chronological order held in the past two years. In order to encourage frank discussions, it is PER's practice not to attribute remarks to specific participants unless made in opening statements in the presence of media. We have tried to be accurate and balanced in summarizing the proceedings, and ask the understanding of participants whose remarks may have not been fully captured within the brief compass of this document, for which PER accepts sole responsibility.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Pristina, October 2007

Introduction

Kosovo Albanians and Serbs are locked in a complex struggle over the future status of Kosovo. Albanians are unanimous that Kosovo must become independent, while Serbs insist that Serbia's legal sovereignty over Kosovo be preserved. Aware of these irreconcilable positions, the international community has been reluctant to take a decision on Kosovo's status. Instead, additional rounds of negotiations have been sponsored in the hope of narrowing the existing differences. Status talks are due to conclude in December 2008, with no compromise in sight. Albanians have indicated that they will proclaim independence. Serbs support the continuation of talks with a focus on reaching a solution that keeps Kosovo within Serbia's borders. The international community remains divided and ambiguous. With Albanians seeking independence, Serbs opposing it, the international community divided, the prospects for a compromise are bleak. The continuation of the status quo is also untenable.

The unpromising prospect for a compromise between these two irreconcilable status positions as well as the divisions within the international community increased the uncertainty of Kosovo's population when looking towards their future. This in turn has exacerbated tensions and fears among Kosovo communities and has made the efforts of the international and local organizations to build interethnic trust more difficult. Disagreements between Albanians and Serbs on almost every matter and the legacy of ethnic conflict have strengthened the widely-held belief that domination of one community by another is the "only game in town," rendering efforts to build a multiethnic society futile.

Despite the sensitive nature of its work and of the situation on the ground, PER has managed to retain the trust of leaders of both communities to bring them together for discussions. The series of meetings reported here attest to this trust. The meetings, which took place in October 2007, were designed to assist the Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders in strengthening interethnic cooperation on issues of mutual interest and improve interethnic trust needed for the implementation of an eventual status package. Such cooperation in the post-status period is

crucial if Kosovo is to successfully implement new policies, especially ones related to minority communities. Participants included leaders of Kosovo government and Albanian political parties, Serb political leaders, and representatives of the international community in Kosovo.

Consolidation of the Kosovo Serb leadership

PER organized a roundtable of Kosovo Serb political leaders in Pristina for a discussion of issues concerning the Serb community. The meeting provided senior Serb leaders with an opportunity to jointly consider the main challenges facing their community and to encourage interethnic cooperation on non-status issues. Simultaneously, the discussion intended to strengthen the position of the Serb leaders vis-à-vis Kosovo authorities and Belgrade. Insufficient concrete action by Kosovo institutions to improve the situation of the Serb community and Belgrade's pressure on Serb leaders to remain "loyal" to the Serbian government were considered by many participants to be two major factors for undermining the political leverage of the Kosovo Serbs.

The Serb participation in Kosovo's political life and the impact of status talks on interethnic relations were the focal points of the debate. Though Kosovo Serbs are united in regards to Kosovo's final status, they remain divided on participation in the political process. At least three major positions were clearly articulated: Serbs should boycott the Kosovo political process; Serbs should be involved in Kosovo's political life but only with Belgrade's support; and they should participate in Kosovo's political life with or without Belgrade's consent.

Serb participants articulated a list of issues concerning the Serb community. Security, political representation, relations with Belgrade, and the



Left to right: Nenad Radosavljevic, Randjel Nojkic, Vesna Jovanovic, Dragisa Krstovic, and Momcilo Trajkovic.

status process topped the list. The participants argued that progress in these areas is lacking largely because of the Albanians' reluctance to engage in compromise-oriented dialogues. The international community was also blamed for "openly siding with the Albanians."

It was stated that compromise solutions are the only way to build a viable society in Kosovo. Postponement of the final status decision and replacement of UNMIK with an EU Mission, and the idea of "one state, two systems" were considered as potential compromises.

Discussions also addressed Serb political participation and the role of Belgrade in this process. Arguing in favor of the boycott, a participant contended that the Serb engagement in Kosovo's institutions in the past had been "misused and abused" by their Albanian counterparts and the international community. This position was seconded by the majority of participants. The Serbs who intend to take part in the Kosovo elections were criticized. Albanians and the international administration were accused of deliberately using some "young quiet and compliant" Serbs as a multiethnic décor just for the sake of "fulfilling the international standards of multiethnicity."

A former senior Serb official noted that "political participation is useless as long as problems that produce crisis are not resolved." Pressed to name what these problems were, he said, "international policies that support Albanians' quest for independence," which also undermine Serbs' trust in the international community. "At the beginning, the Serbs saw the international administration as a bridge between the two communities, but the bridge turned out to be rotten when we tried to cross it. Now that we know the bridge is rotten, we won't try to cross it again."

Some participants affirmed that Belgrade is not their partner of choice, but rather of convenience. The financial support that Belgrade provides to the Kosovo Serbs is particularly appealing. "As long as it provides financial support to us, Belgrade will remain our main partner," stated one participant. Some speakers, however, denied that Belgrade's financial support plays a determining role on their political decisions. They argued that the reason for the boycott of the Kosovo institutions is their inability to deliver what they had promised to their electorate, and it was deemed "immoral to ask Serbs for their vote again." There was agree-

Political participation is useless as long as problems that produce crisis are not resolved.

ment among the Serbs that the culprit for their inability to deliver was Albanians' unwillingness to compromise and the international community's "unreserved support" for the Albanians. Therefore, Belgrade remained the only partner, the majority of participants concluded.

A former official stated that he has nothing against those who participate in the Kosovo elections, but he believes that the Serb community is better off

***Kosovo Serb community
needs to act as a
unified political body.***

“without representatives than with illegitimate representatives.” Another participant stated that Serbs want to be part of the institutions but only when they have a say, and when “they are not outvoted on everything.” She blamed the Kosovo institutions, which she labeled “illegal organizations that became legal but continue to have an illegal culture,” for violating even those few rights protected by the Kosovo Constitutional Framework.

A leader of a new Serb party, which has decided to participate in the elections, contended that boycott has not brought the Serbs anything but misery. “We do not support the boycott. Our objective is to reach compromises.” Other participants retorted that they have already tried to do so. It was suggested that the “Kosovo Serb community needs to act as a unified political body.”

A senior leader claimed that the decision of some new Serb leaders to engage with the Kosovo institutions is simply based on their personal interests. He also implicated the international community and Albanian politicians in this “conspiracy” to split the Serb community.

Another participant in favor of taking part in the political process accused Belgrade and some of the Serb representatives present in the meeting for contributing to the confusion of the Serb community. He also questioned the legitimacy of the participants to represent the Serb community in Kosovo. “We are not Serb leaders; leaders take responsibility, they take part in elections, and get elected. We are just a group of Serbs who have wisdom but lack courage.” He also challenged the view that Serbs have tried to work with the Kosovo institutions. “Even when we were in the Kosovo parliament, we spent more time outside than inside it.”

Speculating on the post-election situation of the Serbs, he said that four years later the Serb community will be even weaker, especially now that UNMIK is transferring its competencies to the Albanians. “We should

have no illusion that things will get better by staying out of the game.” He stated that Serbs should have learned by now that their boycott does not put into question the legitimacy of elections in Kosovo. “In 2004, we boycotted the elections, but the international community praised Kosovo institutions for organizing free and fair elections. Nobody cared about the Serb boycott.”

Although the discussions were characterized by disagreements among the Kosovo Serb leaders over policy tactics, they shared their views on major issues, and will most likely act as a unified body in close cooperation with Belgrade in the post-status period. The influence of the new Kosovo Serb political parties that have decided to participate in the November 2007 elections is not likely to be strong enough to allow them to assume the role of the Serb community representatives in Kosovo's institutions. Therefore, interethnic dialogue outside Kosovo's institutions will remain the only channel of communication.

The differences among the Serbs themselves attest to the growing need of an intra-Serb dialogue to create a serious Kosovo Serb political force to work with Albanians. The cooperation between the two major communities will be crucial for the successful implementation of an eventual status outcome, especially of sections that aim to improve the lives of the Serb community.

Consensus among Albanian parties

In an effort to build consensus among Albanian political parties in engaging the Serb community, PER organized a meeting for senior Kosovo Albanian political party leaders and government representatives. Possible steps that Albanians should take to improve interethnic relations in Kosovo were suggested.

The impact of the status process and the upcoming elections on interethnic relations were the focus of discussions. Participants acknowledged that integration of the Serb community remains one of the most challenging battles for Kosovo's institutions, and that it is difficult to implement legislation related to the Serb community without them on board. There was agreement that even though the Serbs are boycotting Kosovo's institutions, political leaders of both communities should explore and build non-institutional mechanisms of communication with the goal of bringing the Serbs back into the political process.



Left to right: Veton Surroi and Hashim Thaci.

The Albanian officials believed that more Serbs will take part in the November 2007 poll, especially in areas where interethnic tensions have been relatively low, such as Gjilan/Gnjilane, Kamenice/Kamenica, Shterpce/Strpce, and Novoberde/Novo Brdo. It was acknowledged that the new

Serb political elite will not be able to do much, as it confronts two big challenges: lack of support from Belgrade, and lack of support from the Kosovo Serb population. None of them, however, mentioned a third challenge most frequently raised by the Serbs: lack of political will and action by the Kosovo institutions.

The meeting suggested that Albanians agree that Kosovo has yet to build adequate democratic institutions with capacities to protect all communities and respond to unpredicted situations, such as the March 2004 unrest. The Serb community's stated fear is based on the fact that Kosovo institutions are weak and do not possess the necessary power and mechanisms to protect them in case the status decision produces a degree of lawlessness in Kosovo. The discussions revealed that Albanian political leaders have little differences in matters related to the Serb community. They agree that they are doing enough for the Serbs, and if Serbs want to get more, they need to join the political process.

Political participation and status

Following the meetings with Serb and Albanian leaders, PER convened a roundtable of senior Kosovo Albanian and Serb political leaders as well as representatives of the international community in Pristina. Inclusion of Serb leaders in the political process, status talks, and the November 2007 Kosovo elections and their impact on interethnic relations were the main topics addressed at the roundtable.

Acknowledging the importance of Serb participation in the political process, a senior Albanian official stated that "we can move forward only together and only together we will be able to build a democratic society." He pledged to do more to integrate the Serb community into Kosovo's political life but admitted that these efforts may fail as long as Belgrade's interference continues. He encouraged the Serbs to take a more active role



Lukas Beglinger, Fatmir Sejdiu, Livia Plaks, Hashim Thaci, and other participants.

in Kosovo's political life, as they, no matter the status outcome, "will be the ones living in Kosovo side by side with Albanians."

Justifying the decision to hold elections in the midst of the status negotiations, an international representative stated that "democracy should run its course" regardless of the challenges that may arise in the process.

We cannot and should not imagine a Kosovo without Serbs.

He said that the Serb boycott constitutes a challenge to the process and invited Serbs to vote, as they will remain in Kosovo regardless of the status decision. "We cannot and should not imagine a Kosovo without Serbs." He also blamed Belgrade for urging the boycott, which, he said, has only "sidelined the Serb community from the political process."

There was consensus among Albanian leaders that Kosovo Serbs have lost their negotiating power and no longer constitute an impediment to Kosovo's independence. However, some feared that Serbs will be used by Belgrade as a tool to create a "frozen conflict" and a confrontation front against Albanians. Though they supported a quick declaration of independence, they acknowledged that securing its international recognition is "another story." Regardless of status outcome and the Serb response to it, a participant stated that Kosovo Albanians should support Kosovo Serbs and listen to their concerns, as Belgrade is "not voicing their concerns but rather its own."

A government official argued that by boycotting elections Serbs are losing another opportunity to integrate. He presented two approaches available to Serbs: "the easy approach," with gains in the short run but losses in the long run, and "the difficult approach," losses in the short run, but gains in the long run, and asserted that Serbs have chosen the easy approach.

Democracy was considered to be the cure to interethnic divisions. “Democracy allows us to keep our differences but respect each other. Democracy will heal relations between communities, but this takes time and we should be patient.” A Serb participant rejected the notion that Kosovo is building a genuine democracy, stating that it can only be built when Serb legitimate leaders take part in it. “Inclusion of illegitimate Serb leaders in the institutions will only exacerbate the interethnic divide.”

Serb participation in institutions and in the political process was considered key to strengthening trust and cooperation. A senior Albanian leader said that political participation provides an opportunity for the Serbs to be heard and voice their concerns. “Once in institutions, Serbs can no longer be ignored by Albanians.” He further remarked

Once in institutions, Serbs can no longer be ignored by Albanians.

that the crucial differences, such as status, are impossible to bridge, but that “Albanians and Serbs share the rest.”

A Serb participant had a different opinion about the issues of Serb participation in Kosovo’s political life. “Participation is beneficial only if we are capable of delivering to our communities.” He said that Albanians are just interested to talk and have coffee with us. “This is not enough. We need people employed in institutions and our roads repaired.” There was agreement that implementation of concrete projects would strengthen mutual trust and establish new standards and values of interethnic coexistence in Kosovo.

Poor economic situation was mentioned as the main culprit for the slow implementation of some concrete projects, such as employment of Serbs in public services. “The reason we can’t meet the Serb demands is simply because we lack the resources. We need economic aid.” In addition, she said that Serb participation is also required to implement such projects. An international representative agreed that the economy is essential to improving daily life and interethnic relations. But he asserted that improvement of the economy is not possible without the resolution of status, which Serbs prefer to postpone. “No status, no economy.”

Addressing the issue of political will, a senior leader of an opposition party said that will is not enough to solve the problems. Adequate legal mechanisms and determined political decision-making is needed. He

blamed the Kosovo institutions for lack of commitment to provide incentives and involve the Serbs in the process, and Serbs for their “inability to articulate their demands.” The participant did not spare the international community either: “The International community installed compliant people in the institutions.”

A representative of an opposition party regretted the fact that Kosovo communities still need an international organization to bring them together. He suggested that the Kosovo President launch a similar initiative to complement the current local and international efforts. He said that interethnic relations will start to improve after what he labeled “second international intervention,” when Kosovo becomes independent. He stated that one of the strongest guarantees in the Ahtisaari package is that it does not “deliver the Serbs to the Kosovo Albanians, but rather to the EU and other international organizations.”

Conclusion

The discussions were characterized by disagreements between Albanians and Serbs over major issues, such as Kosovo’s political status and participation in elections. They remained entrenched in their diametrically differing positions on the final status: nothing less than independence versus anything less than independence.

Despite these fundamental differences on Kosovo’s status, there was consensus that Albanians and Serbs could work together on concrete projects like security, employment, and education. Both Albanian and Serb participants agreed that more should be done to secure political participation of the Serbs and address their grievances in the institutions. Senior Albanian leaders pledged that Kosovo will do more to accommodate the demands of the Serb community after the resolution of status. On the other hand, Serbs affirmed that the Serb community will be more cooperative on non-status issues but admitted that Belgrade will continue to represent their interests in the status talks.

The discussions suggest that the status negotiations have inadvertently exacerbated relations between Albanians and Serbs and between Serbs and the international community. The statements of Albanian leaders that Kosovo will become independent one way or another, and the counteracting Serb statements that an eventual proclamation of independence will be met with strong objections by the Serbs have

increased the uncertainty of Kosovo's population when looking towards their future.

Perceived as supporting independence for Kosovo, the international community has been gradually losing the little trust it enjoyed from the Serbs. The Serb feeling of alienation toward the international community stems mainly from the public statements of some major western powers in support of Kosovo's supervised independence as well as from the support of the international administration to transfer its powers to Kosovo institutions.

While the Serb community unanimously opposes Kosovo's independence, it remains divided and confused about political participation in Kosovo's political life. The majority of the Serb leaders, encouraged by Belgrade, have decided to boycott the elections. However, a number of new Serb political parties and civic initiatives have decided to defy Belgrade and take part in the November 2007 poll. They are supported by a significant number of moderate Serb leaders. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged throughout the meetings that the overwhelming majority of the Serbs will respond positively to the call for boycott. As a result, the new leaders will lack the necessary legitimacy and power to negotiate with Albanian leaders on behalf of the Kosovo Serb community.

Belgrade's economic assistance to the Kosovo Serbs is strengthening its trust and credibility among the Serb population. It is also bolstering the position of Kosovo radical leaders at the expense of moderate ones. The Serbian President Boris Tadic's decision to support Prime Minister Kostunica's call on Kosovo Serbs to boycott elections has further undermined the position of Serb moderate leaders.

Although the dialogue did little to narrow the existing differences between the opposing sides, it provided senior Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders with an opportunity to jointly consider the challenges they face in building a multiethnic and democratic Kosovo. Participants agreed that dialogue remains the best mechanism for resolving problems and for building sustainable peace in Kosovo. Both Albanian and Serb leaders committed to working closely with their communities and urging them to refrain from the use of violence.

PREPARING FOR STATUS

Pristina, February 2008

Introduction

The activities covered in this chapter were designed to assist the Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders in identifying issues on which interethnic cooperation is possible regardless of the status outcome. Participants included senior officials of Kosovo's institutions, including the president and the prime minister, Kosovo Albanian political party leaders, Serb political leaders representing a wide spectrum of Serb political parties, including those that boycotted the elections, political analysts, and representatives of the international community in Kosovo.

The two-day discussions showed that the persisting irreconcilable differences and the additional rounds of status negotiations, September to December 2007, provided Kosovo Albanian and Serb political leaders with an opportunity to better prepare themselves and their communities for the apparent status outcome. Representatives of both communities agreed that efforts to produce a consensual outcome have been exhausted and any new attempts to reach a solution would be futile. Subsequently, they had intensified communication with their own communities encouraging them to remain in Kosovo and refrain from the use of violence. According to various recent polls, the number of Serbs willing to stay in Kosovo regardless of status outcome has been increasing. The overwhelming majority of Albanians also have understood that attacks on the Serbs will only damage their future prospects, and are not expected to respond to eventual provocations that may come from extremist elements.

Although a few Serb participants reiterated their previous arguments against independence based on their interpretation of the UN Resolution 1244 and international law, most of the Serbs conceded that they have no power to stop or delay the process any further, and that Kosovo will declare independence in a matter of weeks. As a result, discussions were inadvertently based on the premise that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and its recognition by major western powers are inevitable. Consequently, the debate focused on how to make the transitional period as smooth as possible for everyone in Kosovo. Cooperation between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs at both the central

and local levels was considered crucial to a peaceful management of the post-status period. Although it was evident from the discussions that no significant interethnic cooperation on major issues is likely to take place in the immediate aftermath of the status decision, participants came out with a number of practical issues on which interethnic cooperation is feasible.

The dialogue focused on the management of the post-status period and identification of issues on which Albanians and Serbs could begin working together. A top government official stated that his government will make sure that voices of all communities are heard at all institutional levels and called on the Serb community not to be afraid of the approaching finalization of Kosovo's status, as, according to him, "clarifying the future is in the interest of all communities." He announced the establishment of an office for communities within the prime minister's office whose mandate will be to address the daily problems affecting non-Albanian communities. He reaffirmed his government's commitment to implement the Ahtisaari plan in full and assured the Serbs that they will have a strong say in their future: Serbs will have a direct say on the selection of police chiefs in Serb majority and mixed municipalities; mayors in mixed municipalities will create more jobs for members of the Serb community; employment opportunities will be created for members of the Serb community in public enterprises such as the Post and Telecommunications of Kosovo, the Pristina Airport, various municipal administrations; and access to the media for non-Albanian communities will be improved.

Security, security, security

Security was considered to be crucial for the future of Kosovo, and especially for the Serb community. Serbs feared that KFOR, UNMIK Police, and Kosovo Police do not have the capability to fully control any massive violence against them. However, they stated that the potential for violence is small and could easily be controlled with increased cooperation among the security bodies, media, and Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders. Some feared that eventual counteracting actions of the Kosovo Serbs north of the Ibar River in response to Kosovo's declaration of independence might jeopardize the security of the Serbs in the south. To enforce this point, a representative of a Kosovo Albanian opposition party stated that the reaction of Kosovo Albanians to independence largely depends on the reaction of the Serbs in the north. "Extreme Serb reaction will be met with extreme Albanian reaction." His statement,



Left to right: Lukas Beglinger, Alex Grigor'ev, Fatmir Sejdiu, Joachim Ruecker, Lutfi Haziri, Oliver Ivanovic, Petar Miletic, Tom Yazdgerdi, and Ardian Gjini.

however, did not reflect the majority Albanian opinion. The prime minister and the president, as well as leaders of Albanian political parties, stated that nothing will happen to the Kosovo Serbs regardless of the reaction of the Serbs in the north. A Serb member of the Kosovo Assembly said that he did not expect any serious violence, but that when visiting his constituencies and confronted with the question of whether Kosovo's institutions can guarantee their lives, he said, "I cannot say yes."

In an effort to better prepare the Serb community for the apparent status outcome, a Serb participant said that many Serb leaders are signaling to their community that independence is inevitable, but they should stay in Kosovo. However, he asserted that messages to the Albanian community are even more important. The Albanian politicians should tell their community that "it is the majority's responsibility to protect the minority," and any violent action will be to the detriment of the future of Kosovo. Strongly supporting this

statement, an international representative stated that it is wrong to assume that the Kosovo Albanians' must react to the Serb reaction in the north. "It's KFOR's responsibility to deal with such reactions."

It is the majority's responsibility to protect the minority.

He suggested that the message to the Serbs by all politicians should be: "There will be no reaction, and that nobody is capable of endangering the security situation that we have built in the past few years." An encouraging prediction from the Serb participants was that most of the Serbs are going to stay in Kosovo regardless of the status outcome. "Serbs have lived through the 1999 crisis and decided to stay; these Serbs are prepared to withstand any pressure from independence and will remain in Kosovo."

The prolongation of Kosovo's status has increased the fear and anxiety among the Kosovo communities, especially the Serb community. It was agreed that dialogue is the best available mechanism for reducing fear and frustration at this time, and that it should become a daily occurrence. In this context, visits by the prime minister and president together with local municipal officials and Kosovo Serb leaders to various Serb localities were considered timely and successful. Serb participants asserted

The Serb objection to independence should not be seen as a threat to the Albanians.

that members of the Serb community needed to hear more often from Kosovo's institutions, who should reassure the Serbs about their safety in the post-status period. Some Serbs stated that although they will not accept a unilateral declaration of independence for Kosovo, "the Serb objection to independence should not be seen as a threat to the Albanians."

In addition to direct meetings with members of the Serb community, media was mentioned as another important mechanism for facilitating interethnic communication. A Serb participant stated that Albanians and Serbs should have access to each other's media as a means of bridging their differences. "We live in two different worlds; we don't hear each other's views." The participant suggested establishing a TV channel in Serbian language at the public Radio Television of Kosovo, or by increasing the current airtime for programs in Serbian language. Serbs have established dozens of local radio and television stations, but they have no Kosovo-wide media outlet, which, according to the participant, prevents the Serb population from knowing what is going on beyond their localities. Addressing a similar point, an Albanian analyst stated that the main problem is not how to convince politicians to send encouraging messages, but rather how to transmit such messages correctly to the other side: "There is no channel of communication to do so. Serbs listen to the Serb media and Albanians listen to the Albanian media. They have no common channel of communication."

Noting the importance of the media, the analyst feared that unprofessional handling of the situation by the media may cause panic and consequently refugees. "Panicking, not independence, cause troubles." There was consensus among Albanian and Serb participants alike that messages from the media are crucial at this sensitive time, and they

pledged to work closely with editors of the media outlets in Kosovo. But they feared that the messages that will come from the Serbian media, through which most of the Kosovo Serb population is informed, may aggravate the situation. However, a Serb participant stated that if the situation remains calm, messages from Belgrade are not likely to have a significant impact on the Kosovo Serbs. "Kosovo Serbs' trust of Serbian media and politicians is just as low as their trust of Albanian media and politicians."

Practical outcomes encourage participation

Serb participation in Kosovo's political life was another focal point of the debate. Though Kosovo Serbs are united in regards to Kosovo's final status, they remain divided on participation in the political process. The majority of the Serb political parties boycotted the November 2007 poll, citing their inability to deliver what they had promised to their constituencies and pressure from Belgrade as the main reasons. There was agreement that the culprit for their inability to deliver was Albanians' unwillingness to compromise, and Belgrade's pressure to boycott the Kosovo political process. However, a number of new Serb political parties and initiatives defied the Kosovo Serb majority opinion and Belgrade and took part in the elections, in which they filled the ten parliamentary seats reserved for Serbs by the Kosovo Constitutional Framework. Kosovo Serb representatives are also in charge of two ministries in the Kosovo government.

A Serb participant stated that the new Kosovo government seems to be willing to help the Serbs, and he believed that "the government is genuine this



Left to right: Momcilo Trajkovic and Skender Hyseni.

time." Another participant asserted that even small concrete improvements in Serbs' daily life will encourage Serb participation and strengthen the position of the Serb leaders willing to be involved in the political process. "Improvements will show that the Kosovo government will deliver more when it has a Serb partner."

A few participants stated that the Kosovo government's increased support for the Serb community will also help to undermine the credibility of the Serb parallel structures and discourage the creation of new ones.

Serb participants were encouraged to hear from some Albanian representatives that part of the problem for Serb non-participation is not only in Belgrade but also in Pristina and that Kosovo's institutions will do more to help Serb politicians deliver tangible results to their communities. An Albanian participant remarked that practical outcomes strengthen interethnic trust and cooperation. "Life is concrete and we should do concrete things." In this vein, the governmental official made two suggestions: form a group of advisors on minority health issues and appoint a senior Serb advisor to the Ministry of Health of Kosovo.

Enforcement of property rights laws was another issue debated at the roundtable. Participants agreed that guaranteeing security for the Serb community is important but not enough to convince them to stay in Kosovo. A Serb participant asked what the new Kosovo government

By failing to implement its own laws, the Kosovo society will show that it is unable to build a state.

can do to solve property issues as "property is one of the most important elements to convince Serbs that the Kosovo institutions are committed to protecting them and their property." Another Serb leader asserted that by showing its inability to secure the property rights, Kosovo's society shows its immaturity and its inability to build a state. "By failing to implement its own laws, the Kosovo society will show that it is unable to build a state." He added that Kosovo's institutions have failed to ensure property rights so far, and that organized crime groups are benefiting from this lawlessness.

An international participant said that the international community expects more from the new Kosovo government. He stated while the laws have been adopted, their enforcement has not been satisfactory, making it very difficult for the Kosovo Serbs to return. He encouraged a more active role for Kosovo police in taking action. "Law enforcement is key to resolving property issues."

Conclusions and recommendations

The outcome of this series of meetings was a number of consensual conclusions and recommendations.

- Kosovo Albanians should send clear and strong messages to the Serb community that nothing will happen to them in the post-status period. To be convincing, these messages should be accompanied by concrete action, such as enforcement of property rights laws, and swift punishment of perpetrators of ethnically motivated crimes;
- Political leaders of both communities should encourage their community members to refrain from responding to potential provocations and incidents in the aftermath of the status decision;
- Serb opposition to independence should not be seen as a threat to Kosovo Albanians;
- Intensify communication with Serbs at the local level. The prime minister and the president, accompanied by Serb leaders, should make frequent visits to Serb areas and make dialogue a daily occurrence. Local mayors should also get more involved in implementing governmental policies on the ground;
- Kosovo's institutions should help newly elected Serb representatives deliver tangible results to the Serb community with the goal of bolstering their support within their community;
- Increase media communication. Albanian and Serb communities need to hear from each other. Albanians and Serbs get their news from separate sources with clashing agendas. The problem could be rectified by increasing the airtime in Serbian language or by establishing a national TV channel in Serbian;
- Form an advisory group on public health issues facing the Serb community and appoint a Serb representative to the Ministry of Health. If successful, replicate the example in other ministries;
- Establish an interethnic forum for dialogue and reconciliation;
- Establish the announced governmental office for communities as soon as possible and involve Serbs that are inside and outside Kosovo's institutions;
- Create employment opportunities for Serbs in public enterprises, such as Post and Telecommunications of Kosovo, Pristina Airport, Municipal Administrations, and Assembly of Kosovo;

- Kosovo Serbs should have direct impact on the selection of police chiefs in their municipalities.

The list of conclusions and recommendations that came out of these meetings was sent to local and international policymakers in Kosovo.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF MULTIETHNICITY

Pristina, March 2008

Introduction

In an effort to keep the channels of communication open and regain the momentum for interethnic dialogue following the declaration of independence by the Assembly of Kosovo on February 17, 2008, PER staff held meetings with various senior Kosovo officials, including the president, the prime minister, the speaker of parliament, leaders of Kosovo Albanian political parties, Kosovo Serb leaders, and representatives of the international community, including the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Kosovo. The objective of the meetings was to explore what opportunities exist to resume the dialogue between the Kosovo Albanians and Serbs. The discussions assisted PER to chart its future steps for action under the new circumstances. Although organizing direct dialogue between the representatives of the two communities was not in the realm of possibility at this time, our interlocutors supported maintaining the indirect lines of communication open and recommended organizing “indirect dialogues.”

All the contacts between leaders of the two communities have been terminated after the declaration of independence. The Serbian politicians who took part in the November 2007 Kosovo elections, and subsequently joined the Kosovo Assembly and Government, withdrew from institutions in protest of the independence declaration. Other Serb leaders, particularly from the north of Kosovo, intensified their efforts to consolidate Serb parallel institutions and undermine the authority of UNMIK and Kosovo’s institutions, in an attempt, as many fear, to prepare the stage for the de jure partition of the north of Kosovo. In the immediate aftermath of the declaration of independence, Serbs from the north set fire to two Kosovo border posts, disrupted rail lines, attacked EU’s and UNMIK’s judicial and administrative offices, and prevented Albanian judges from entering their offices in northern Mitrovica. In early March, Serbs seized the courthouse in north Mitrovica. UNMIK’s action to retake the courthouse resulted with one UN Ukrainian police officer dead and dozens of UN police officers, NATO troops, and Serb protesters wounded.

Exploring opportunities for dialogue

Discussions in Pristina indicated that the relations between Albanians and Serbs have exacerbated since the declaration of independence, and in the short term the situation will most likely get worse. Serb leaders strongly oppose independence, and most of them want Belgrade to establish its authority in the north and in the Serb enclaves in Kosovo. Kosovo authorities expect UNMIK and KFOR to help them establish and execute their mandate all over Kosovo and dismantle the Serb parallel structures. Serbs, on the other hand, withdrew from Kosovo's institutions. Belgrade has put them on the payroll of the Serbian relevant ministries, with salaries twice those received by Kosovo institutions. However, many Serb leaders said that it is unclear how long Belgrade will pay their salaries.

A Serb leader said that Belgrade's moves to establish its control in the north have often backfired. For example, when UNMIK was able to reestablish its control over the railroad, it stopped the train service altogether, cutting off the only reliable line of transportation between the north and the Serb enclaves in the south.

The situation of the Serbs south of the Ibar River is even more complicated. Their enclaves are surrounded by the majority Albanian population, and boycotting the Kosovo institutions and UNMIK has proven much more difficult. After Serb police officers failed to report to work, they were suspended by the Kosovo Police Service, and Albanian police officers moved into the police stations.

The Kosovo Serbs will not start direct talks with Albanians anytime soon without Belgrade's permission. Many recommended that the international community intensifies its efforts to reestablish the lines of communications between Belgrade and Pristina and between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. Romania and Greece were singled out as two countries which are in a position to facilitate such communication, given their public opposition to Kosovo's independence. The Serb message for the Kosovo government was to move beyond symbolism, such as donating a tractor to a Serb family, and start tackling the real issues, such as education, employment, and security, which are crucial for the welfare of the Serb community in Kosovo.

In addition to meetings with individual Albanian and Serb representatives, PER organized a roundtable with several Serb leaders in Caglavica.



Left to right: Slobodan Petrovic, Shpetim Gashi, and Rada Trajkovic.

There was consensus among the participants that Serb leaders will stay out of the process and allow Belgrade to represent their interests for the time being. However, they feared that Bel-

grade's policy towards Kosovo will change in two to three years and its financial support for the Serb community will decrease or cease altogether. Some of them feared that the interest of the international community for the Kosovo Serbs will gradually decrease as well and Serbs will be left on their own. Therefore, they suggested that the Serb leaders should become more engaged in the political process.

There are at least three major groups within the Serb community in Kosovo: one group supports participation in Kosovo's institutions; the second group believes Kosovo Serbs should create their own institutions in Kosovo in coordination with Belgrade; and the third group contends that Kosovo Serbs are better off if they cooperate with both Pristina and Belgrade. What all three groups have in common, as one of the participants put it, "is the fact that none of them know how to resolve the problems facing the Serb community." They recommended that leaders of all three groups sit together and devise a strategy on how to act at this stage. While being reluctant to meet directly with Albanians, they said they will meet with Albanians in the presence of representatives of the contact group countries in Pristina.

Although Serbs stated that they will never recognize Kosovo as their own state and blamed the international community for trying to impose independence on them, they agreed that the international community is in Kosovo to precisely help the Serb community. They acknowledged that the Ahtisaari package offers optimal guarantees for the Serb community, particularly the section on decentralization, but it is not acceptable for the Serbs as it includes independence. "Accepting decentralization is tantamount to accepting independence." At the same time, the participants agreed that Serbs can no longer stop the independence process. As one of them put it, "Kosovo's independence is like weather, you can not change it, you have to adapt to it." Another participant said that in his

meetings with international representatives, they say they are willing to help the Serb community but don't know how. "They say we want to help you, but you tell us how." He further suggested that the Serb community itself doesn't know how it can be helped.

The upcoming May 11, 2008 Serbian parliamentary and local elections were another matter of concern to the Serbs, Albanians, as well as the international representatives. There was agreement that the Serbian elections will constitute the biggest challenge to UNMIK's mandate and to Kosovo government's authority since the declaration of Kosovo's independence. Furthermore, the election campaign that will be held in Kosovo is expected to raise interethnic tensions and will most likely provide a boost for the Serb radical leaders. All sides were aware that holding

Kosovo's independence is like weather, you can not change it, you have to adapt to it.

Serbian elections on the territory of Kosovo is in clear violation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and of the Kosovo Constitutional Framework, but they also understand that the elections will take place anyway. While

the Kosovo institutions are adamantly against allowing the Serbian elections in Kosovo, UNMIK has the authority to make the final decision. UNMIK is considering a range of options.

The holding of elections in itself is not as much of a problem as will be the leadership that will come out of such an election. The radical Serb politicians will most likely win the majority of the vote and will gain the legitimacy, at least as far as the Serb community is concerned, to speak on behalf of the Serb community in Kosovo. The Serb leaders who took part in the latest Kosovo elections and received an insignificant number of votes will find it difficult to claim that they are legitimate leaders of the Serb community. Another issue of concern would be the authority of the local mayors elected in same municipalities in the UNMIK-sponsored November 2007 local poll. The Kosovo institutions and UNMIK will be put in a complicated position: to recognize the legitimacy of these leaders or not. Recognizing them as elected leaders of the Serb community will be positive in the sense that Pristina will have finally an address for the Serb community; however, at the same time it will be tantamount to recognizing Belgrade's authority in Kosovo. The Kosovo government hopes that UNMIK will prevent Belgrade from organizing elections in

the territory of Kosovo. But all sides know that preventing elections is an impossible task. What they don't know yet is how to handle this process. It appears that each side is trying to figure out what is the other's agenda while not having one of their own.



Left to right: Lulzim Peci and Dragisa Krstovic.

PER also followed up with its interlocutors on the recommendations made by Albanians and Serbs at its February 1, 2008 roundtable. Political leaders of both Albanian and Serb communities had intensified their communication with their own community members and encouraged them to refrain from violence. No major interethnic incidents have taken place in Kosovo since February 17, 2008. While the Kosovo Serb protesters in the north have targeted border posts and security forces, they have not attacked the few Albanian villages in the north. Similarly, no Serb areas have been attacked by Albanians in the south. It was feared that interethnic incidents were inevitable in the immediate aftermath of independence declaration, especially in mixed areas, and that they would spark an outbreak of violence similar to that of March 2004. The decision of Albanians not to organize independence celebrations in mixed areas contributed to the absence of incidents. The Kosovo minister of health reiterated his offer to form an advisory group on public health issues facing the Serb community and appoint a Serb representative to the ministry of health. The Kosovo government has established the office for communities and allocated to it an initial budget of one million Euros.

Future steps

Based on the discussions PER had with Albanians, Serbs, international representatives and consultations with officials from various western governments, PER is considering the following possible steps for continuing our current program in Kosovo:

- Continue separate discussions with Albanians and Serbs with the goal of keeping the lines of communication open and define some small issues on which both sides are willing to resume dialogue and cooperation. These meetings will be low key and no media announcements will be made;

- Organize a meeting of Albanians, Serbs, and representatives of the Contact Group members in Pristina on easing the tensions. The Kosovo Serbs and the state of Serbia are determined to organize elections in May 2008, which will be preceded by an elections campaign that will most likely be dominated by the issue of Kosovo. There is a real potential that the rhetoric will raise interethnic tensions and incidents are possible;
- Most Serb leaders support the political process and have expressed their willingness to get involved indirectly through PER activities. Gjilan/Gnjilane, Kamenice/Kamenica, and Lipjan/Lipljane have been mentioned by both Albanians and Serbs as areas where implementation of some practical projects could be successful;
- Involve Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders in our regional roundtables.

RESTORING INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE

Pristina, May 2008

Introduction

Although no serious interethnic violence occurred following the declaration of Kosovo's independence, the potential for interethnic violence and aggressive reaction to incidents between members of the Albanian and Serb communities in Kosovo remains present. Occupied with more urgent and complicated issues – the adoption of the Ahtisaari plan, transfer of powers from UNMIK to the Kosovo authorities, deployment of the European Union Mission, and the reconfiguration of UNMIK – the Kosovo authorities and the international community have not been able to focus on the improvement of interethnic relations as much. In other words, the respective authorities have not been able to take advantage of the absence of violence during the post-independence period and translate it into an improvement of interethnic relations. Since the proclamation of independence on February 17, 2008, the Serb leaders elected in the Kosovo November 2007 parliamentary elections have returned to Kosovo's institutions, but the Serb majority continues to boycott any communication with Albanians. The Serb leaders who returned to the institutions quietly accept the new status, but do not enjoy popular support from their ethnic community. Four months after the independence declaration, Albanians and Serbs remain just as divided as on the first day of independence.

Kosovo authorities remain committed to implementing all of the minority related laws prescribed in the Ahtisaari plan, including the controversial legislation on decentralization, and to resume the dialogue with the Serbs, but the majority of Serb political leaders have so far refused to engage in meaningful discussions with Albanians. There are two major reasons for the Serb boycott of contacts with Albanians: first is Belgrade's decision to terminate contacts with the Kosovo authorities, and the second, which is usually being overlooked, the absence of authentic and strong Kosovo Serb political elite. Almost all of our Serb interlocutors considered the lack of a solid Kosovo Serb political leadership as a serious problem for the current situation and their future.

The implementation of the Ahtisaari plan, particularly its decentralization part, constitutes the biggest challenge for the Kosovo institutions



Left to right: Ramush Haradinaj, Alush Gashi, and Nexhat Daci.

and the international community. The implementation of the plan is an impossible task in the Serb-dominated north. The problem is not legislative or financial, but political. A detailed comprehensive

road map exists. The financial means to implement the process have been secured. There remains one problem: the party with the biggest stake in the process, the Kosovo Serbs, refuses to join the process. Without obtaining the cooperation of the Serb side, it is hard to conceive of a successful implementation of minority related legislation.

Although the Serbs refuse the plan officially, in private they admit that the Ahtisaari plan is a decent plan, but consider that cooperating with the Albanians in its implementation is tantamount to recognizing Kosovo's independence. Albanians, on the other hand, are not very unhappy about the Serb refusal as they view the Ahtisaari laws as primarily aimed at benefiting the Serb community. Kosovo's institutions have only grudgingly agreed to adopt it, and this is reflected in the slow implementation. Kosovo authorities have adopted the Ahtisaari plan laws but have not shown much determination on implementing them. Furthermore, they consider the implementation as altruism or sacrifice, not as self-interest for building a cohesive state. In short, the plan exists, the funds are secured, but what is lacking is the political will.

Resuming interethnic dialogue

After a series of conversations with various Kosovo Albanian and Serb leaders regarding the possibilities of resuming the interethnic dialogue, PER staff visited Kosovo from May 5-9, where it held individual meetings with several Albanian and Serb leaders; organized a discussion for Albanian and Serb representatives, the first of its kind since the independence declaration; and convened a roundtable of Kosovo government representatives, Albanian political party leaders, and international representatives in Kosovo to discuss the integration of the Serb community and challenges posed by the Belgrade-organized Serbian local elections in Kosovo.

The chief objective of these meetings was to explore what opportunities exist in resuming the dialogue and cooperation and building consensus

on practical issues between the Kosovo Albanians and Serbs. The willingness of three Serb representatives of different political backgrounds to sit together with Kosovo Albanian leaders indicated that interethnic dialogue is possible on some small issues at the local level. However, the full and genuine involvement of the Serb community in the process of the Ahtisaari plan implementation remains a long-term goal.

Serbian elections of May 2008

The Serbian government and its structures in Kosovo organized Serbian parliamentary and local elections in Kosovo on May 11, 2008. It was the first Serbian local elections since the deployment of the international mission in Kosovo. The international community maintains that the Serbian local elections are in contradiction with the UNSC Resolution 1244, and as a result neither UNMIK nor Kosovo's authorities recognize their legitimacy. However, these elections took place and few can deny that they will have implications for the interethnic relations in Kosovo. Prior to the elections, PER consulted with several Albanian and Serb representatives regarding the outcome of the poll, and how should the Kosovo relevant authorities deal with the "new" leaders and institutions. Besides Albanians, the Serb representatives taking part in Kosovo's institutions and some Serbs members of the democratic bloc in Serbia were against the local elections to be held in Kosovo.

A former Serb member of the Kosovo Assembly said that most of the Kosovo Serb "self-proclaimed leaders are not even from Kosovo. They have come from Serbia and are running in local elections in Kosovo." He said that these "election candidates" are rather aggressive and portray themselves as the saviors of Kosovo. "They are nationalist hardliners who came from Serbia recently and are behaving like leaders." He predicted that these "leaders" will not last long as they lack credibility. Furthermore, he maintained that even the Kosovo Serb leaders who claim to speak on behalf of the Kosovo Serb community, not only do not represent the majority opinion of the Serb population in the north but are detrimental to the future of the Kosovo Serb population.

However, the local Serb population will continue to officially support them for as long as no alternative is available to them. "The Serb population in the north supports them mostly out of fear. If you come out against them, you will lose your job and your family will be threatened." He believed that the Serbian local elections will not only exacerbate the

relations between Albanians and Serbs, but also between Serbs themselves - between structures that were elected at the Kosovo November 2007 elections and those that will emerge from the Serbian May 11 elections. "You can't have two Serb parallel political structures functioning in the same area."

It was clear to everyone that Serbia was determined to organize its local elections in Kosovo and it was known to the majority of the Serbs who the new elected leaders will be long before the votes were cast. The questions, however, that the Serb representatives raised were "what after?" Are these elections held just to challenge the Kosovo authorities, or are they really intended to produce legitimate Serb political leaders? Will these new leaders talk to Albanian and international representa-

Serb enclaves south of the Ibar River cannot function without cooperation with Albanians.

tives? The answer to these questions was that "no Serb will be able to answer these questions," and a lot will depend on who forms the government in Belgrade. "May 11 could be the D-day or Zero-day for Serbia and the Serbs," said one of our Serb interlocutors. According to this representative, if the Serbian

Radical Party comes to power in Belgrade, the matters will be complicated for Serbs in both Serbia and Kosovo. It is clear that in Kosovo the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) are set to win in these local elections.

Another Kosovo Serb representative, who is part of the Kosovo institutions, had a similar opinion regarding the Serbian elections in Kosovo. "These elections have no goals; they are held just to make a point." However, he believed that the international community will eventually recognize the "new" leaders and will talk to them. "If you allow elections, it is hard not to recognize the results." Another Serb interlocutor who was running in the Serbian local elections in Kosovo also said that Serbs have no plan of how to get out of this isolation, and the organization of Serbian elections is just to make them feel they are doing something to resist the independence of Kosovo. She said that some Serbs will be willing to talk with Albanians, but the Albanians may refuse to do so since they consider the "new" leaders 'illegitimate.' The Serb representative in the Kosovo institutions doubts these Serbs will talk

to the international community and Albanians for as long as they remain under Belgrade's control. He blamed Belgrade for its continued pressure on Serbs to boycott contacts with Albanians while not providing an alternative approach. "They tell us not to talk to Albanians, but offer no alternative strategy on how to address the daily problems facing the Serb community."

Speaking about the differences between the Serbs in the north and south of Kosovo, the Serb representative said that it is easy for the Serbs in the north to refuse any contacts and cooperation with Albanians, but not for the ones in the south surrounded by Albanians. "Interethnic cooperation in multiethnic areas is necessary to resolve problems." Most of the Serbs pointed out the fact that essentially no border exists between Serbia and northern Kosovo and this enables Serbia to provide all kinds of necessary supplies for this population, but anything coming to the south needs to be approved by the Kosovo authorities, including medical supplies for the Serbian medical center in Gracanica and the Russian humanitarian aid. Serbs in the south of Kosovo are marginalized by Belgrade and Serb hardliners in the north. A former Serb official stated that "Serb enclaves south of the Ibar River cannot function without cooperation with Albanians." She said that the Russian humanitarian aid is an insult for the Serb community in Kosovo. "What the Serb community in Kosovo needs is strategies to build a sustainable life, not expired food." Another Serb representative stated that "Belgrade's political elite behaves as if there are no Albanians in Kosovo." She pointed out that "Kosovo Serbs will never recognize Kosovo's independence but they are willing to live and work in Kosovo." Another Serb representative said that "the key to the stabilization of interethnic relations in Kosovo is in Belgrade." However, if the radicals form the government, the prospects are bleak. He said that if the democratic forces form the government, the Serbian government will consider establishing some informal working level contacts with Pristina.

Strengthening the position of Kosovo Serbs

A Serb representative whose party is in the Kosovo government stated that Belgrade and its appointed coordinators in charge of running the Serb enclaves continue to undermine the position of the Serbs willing to be part of Kosovo's public life. He said that the Kosovo institutions and

the international community have done little to strengthen their position and legitimacy within their community members. “Kosovo institutions do not go beyond rhetoric, they have not offered anything concrete.” The Serb representative said that Serbs have to push in order to get something from the Kosovo institutions. “They never take the initiative.” He complained that even though the formation of the government’s Office for Communities has been announced months earlier, it has not been formed yet.

A Serb interlocutor, who is running in the Serbian parliamentary elections but is against the local elections, said that if the Democratic Party wins, Belgrade’s position towards the Kosovo Serbs who are in the Kosovo institutions will change drastically. “Serbian officials will meet with the Serbs participating in the Kosovo institutions and help them deliver.” He said that these meeting will even be formal in the presence of media. He emphasized that it is very important that the Kosovo Serb leaders in the institutions do not get involved in affairs of corruption. “Involvement in affairs of corruption will undermine their legitimacy and prove that they are in the Kosovo institutions for personal benefits, not for helping their community.”

New strategies for integration

PER organized a meeting of Kosovo government officials, leaders of Albanian political parties, and representatives of international community to discuss the harmonization of strategies for interethnic integration between Kosovo and international institutions. Officials from security institutions, such as Kosovo Police, and KFOR, took part in the discussions. The head of UNMIK reiterated the position that Serbian elections are illegal and therefore the “new” leaders will not be recognized by UNMIK. A senior Kosovo government official also stated his objection to the Serbian elections but said that Kosovo’s institutions will not try to prevent them. Further, he reported that Kosovo’s institutions are implementing all the legislation according to the Ahtisaari plan, but admitted that an adequate legal basis is not sufficient for minority integration. “We need to do something to change the perceptions or misperceptions that we have about each other. A legal base already exists, but it doesn’t seem to be enough.” He admitted that no plan exists to integrate the north, but hoped that it will be formulated soon in cooperation with the international community.



Left to right: Sheremet Ahmeti, Zenun Pajaziti, Hajredin Kuci, Lukas Beglinger, Livia Plaks, and Joachim Ruecker.

A leader of an opposition party suggested that the Kosovo authorities be more concrete in their offer to the Serb community. “We should be more concrete, be more proactive, take initiative and not just respond to events.” He further stated that the Albanian political leaders have agreed on major issues, such as the Ahtisaari plan, but are not moving forward with the implementation process. “We need to have a financial and economic offer for the Serbs, to connect our activities with a goal.” He admitted that the Serbs may refuse anything at the moment, but that the Kosovo authorities should offer them a financial and economic package nevertheless so that they have it in their drawers, just in case the circumstances change and the Serbs want to take a look at it. A leader of another opposition party, however, stated that no new strategies for integration are needed. “We have done a great job. The Ahtisaari plan is good enough and we do not need to make further political concessions to the Serbs.”

We will neither recognize the parallel structures nor completely ignore them, anything in between is possible.

A minister in the Kosovo government said that his ministry has created several groups to identify areas in which action is possible. He however expressed his pessimism about building a safe environment without the



Left to right: Srdjan Sentic, Petar Miletic, and Armin Rieser.

involvement of everyone. Elimination of Belgrade's interference and Kosovo Serb participation were mentioned as two preconditions for the successful implementation of the Ahtisaari package and building of a functional state. Regarding the Serbian elections and the new structure that will emerge, he noted that his ministry will not behave as if these structures do not exist. "We will neither recognize the parallel structures nor completely ignore them, anything in between is possible."

Economic development was considered a crucial factor for the improvement of interethnic relations. An international representative stated that economic development of Kosovo needs to be taken into consideration to achieve any goals, including integration of minorities. "Economy is an important driver; it creates institutional forces that make Serbs stakeholders in the economy and the future of Kosovo." He said three challenges exist to economic development and the delivery of economic benefits to all communities in Kosovo: sustainable economic growth; delivering in a way that makes people stakeholders; and creating the political will to engage, if there is no will to cooperate, then there is very little anyone can do. He noted that his organization has a few small projects ready to be implemented in the Serb enclaves but it has proven very difficult to obtain Serb cooperation in the implementation process. He suggested that this will for engagement could be strengthened, among others, by investment in areas in question and implementation of small projects benefiting the local populations.

Conclusions and recommendation

The outcome of this series of activities was a number of consensual conclusions and recommendations:

- Identify more Kosovo Serb political leaders from the entire Serb political spectrum and involve them in political discussion aiming at creating an authentic and politically independent Kosovo Serb political elite;
- Strengthen the position of the Kosovo Serb leaders, who are part of Kosovo's institutions, by helping them to deliver tangible results to their communities;
- It is crucial for the Kosovo Serbs leaders in Kosovo's institutions not to get implicated in affairs of corruption. Involvement in corruption will undermine their legitimacy and will prove that they are in the Kosovo institutions for personal benefits, and not for helping their community;
- Dialogue and cooperation between Albanians and Serbs on practical problems, such as electricity, agriculture, or employment in public administration, is possible. Status issues could only be discussed between Pristina and Belgrade;
- Establish in Pristina a Forum for Dialogue and Reconciliation and convene monthly discussions between Albanians and Serbs. The formation of the Forum and its discussion need to be facilitated by an international organization but headed by locals;
- Resolution of property issues will relax the interethnic atmosphere and indicate that the Kosovo institutions are determined to establish the rule of law, encouraging the Serb community to become more involved in Kosovo's public life;
- Kosovo Serbs will not recognize the independence of Kosovo anytime soon but they are willing to continue to live and work in Kosovo, and gradually be involved in local issues. Only Kosovo's membership at the UN will resolve the status problem as far the Serbs are concerned. Until that happens, Albanians should not ask the Kosovo Serbs to recognize Kosovo's independence;
- Kosovo government officials and international institutions should not behave as if the Serb representatives elected in Serbian May 11 local elections do not exist. They should not recognize their legitimacy but should be willing to talk to them;

- More efforts need to be made on changing attitudes and perceptions that communities have about each other.

Four months after the declaration of independence and the subsequent termination of contacts between Albanians and Serbs, the organization of direct dialogue between the representatives of the two communities is within the realm of possibility. Based on these conclusions and recommendations, PER staff will continue to facilitate contacts between Albanian and Serb political leaders with the aim of building consensus on issue of mutual interest and strengthening the position of those who are willing to cooperate and take responsibility for the future of their communities.

MANAGING MULTIETHNIC MUNICIPALITIES

Skopje, September 2008

Introduction

In an effort to integrate the minority communities into the public life of their respective countries and improve public services at the local level, the countries of the Western Balkans have embarked on a process of adopting and implementing legislation on local governance. Decentralization reforms are currently being implemented in Macedonia and Serbia and are expected to begin soon in Kosovo. There is consensus that the reforms enhance public services and improves interethnic relations by giving more power to ethnic minorities that are in majority in certain localities. However, the process has proven to be complex and a major challenge to the governments of these countries. This is mostly because strategies and institutional capacities to carry out the process are lacking. In some countries it is the lack of political will that makes the implementation of decentralization impossible. In Kosovo, where an adequate roadmap exists and financial resources are available, it is the lack of political will that delays the implementation of decentralization. In Serbia and Macedonia, where there is adequate political will, the financial resources are scarce and the reform has failed to bring about substantial improvement of public services. Another important obstacle is the reluctance of minority populations that are majorities in certain localities to co-opt representatives of other ethnic groups, especially those of majority population at the national level, into the local governance.

Decentralization of power should go hand in hand with the decentralization of resources.

The lessons learned from the Balkan countries are that the strengthening of the local institutions before devolving power to them is a prerequisite for successful implementation of the reform; the process should not only be used as a mechanism to accommodate the demands of ethnic communities but also to improve public services; and decentralization of power should go hand in hand with the decentralization of resources. Increased political representation without increased resources and authority to make decisions has shown to be insufficient to provide for the accommodation of minority communities.

In this context, PER organized a roundtable of mayors of multiethnic municipalities in the Western Balkans. The roundtable titled “Managing Multiethnic Municipalities” took place in Skopje, Macedonia, and brought together mayors, ministers of local self-government, and other officials from Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro. Representatives of the international community accredited in Macedonia and Kosovo also attended the discussions. The objective of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for the mayors from the Western Balkans with experience in the decentralization reform in their respective countries and share their practices with their Kosovo counterparts who are expected to begin the implementation of the decentralization reform by the end of the year. Furthermore, PER intends to form a network of mayors of multiethnic municipalities in the Western Balkans that would assist municipal authorities in Kosovo in the implementation of decentralization.

The discussion sessions examined the benefits of the political participation of various ethnic groups in local governance and explored ways of strengthening such participation. Best practices of majority-minority cooperation in running multiethnic municipalities and how to replicate these practices in areas still dominated by ethnic grievances were discussed as well. The discussion provided local policymakers from the region with an opportunity to exchange experiences and ideas concerning efficient local governance, implementation of the decentralization reform, and municipal regional cooperation aiming to overcome political barriers and focus on concrete common problems.

Decentralization reform enhances local governance

The Decentralization reform was considered key to increasing the efficiency of the local authorities. A Swiss diplomat stated that local authorities feel more inclined to find solutions to outstanding issues when having more power and responsibility. She argued that by devolving responsibility and power to local authorities, national governments have more time and resources to focus on advancing national goals benefiting all the communities. “Sharing of responsibility and accountability makes the central institutions stronger and increases the efficiency of local authorities by bringing the government closer to the people.” However, she acknowledged that the process is complex and sensitive since the interests of the communities often collide.



Left to right: Fuad Nimani, Lukas Beglinger, Nicole Wyrsh, Livia Plaks, Musa Xhaferri, and Sadri Ferati.

Another international representative noted that decentralization has become a priority for both national governments and the international community. He argued that there is ample evidence that the local authorities are better equipped to address local problems. “Why do in Brussels what can be done at the local level.” However, he acknowledged that the process is challenging and assistance from higher levels of government is often needed. He illustrated his argument with the case of Kosovo where the decentralization reform has stalled because of the Kosovo Serbs’ rejection of the plan on decentralization. He further stated that the Kosovo case shows that in order for decentralization to be successful, leaders of all communities, and not only the government officials, should be involved.

Political autonomy without economic autonomy is not enough.

While decentralization in democratic countries is about strengthening local authorities and increasing their efficiency, in the Balkans the process is more about accommodating ethnic minority demands and less about improving local governance. But a minister of local government of a Western Balkan country stated this is a first necessary step that makes sure that all communities are represented in the government. The second phase of the process should focus more on improving public services. It was argued that decentralization is not the best mechanism to resolve interethnic problems, but the best one available under the circumstances. “Decentralization is a compromise between the majority and minority

communities. By being strengthened at the local level, the minority communities compensate for their inability to become a majority at the central level.” The minister said that although Macedonia has managed to implement a qualitative process of decentralization, more remains to be done since “the majority community at the national level is not willing to give up its power in localities where it is a minority.” He added that in order to make decentralization successful, more economic and fiscal power should be given to local authorities. “Political autonomy without economic autonomy is not enough.”

An international representative supported the decentralization reform stating that it transfers power from central to local institutions, which are better-equipped to address local problems, and, at the same time, it strengthens the voice of minority communities in local affairs. However, in order for decentralization to be beneficial for all ethnic communities, ethnic groups need to increase cooperation with each other in all areas: political, economic, and cultural.

Political participation and decentralization

The benefits of minority participation in local governance and strengthening of this participation through incentives that the majorities can create for minorities was addressed by a senior Kosovo government official. The official stated that the majority, more specifically the state institutions, is responsible to provide opportunities for the minority communities’ engagement in the political process and for achievement of equal rights. Obtaining the participation of minorities was considered central to implementing minority-related laws and projects successfully. He further noted that the Kosovo case best illustrates this challenge, where the Serb community is boycotting the process and where trust is lost between the Albanians and the Serbs.

Although the Kosovo Serb municipalities will have more rights than Albanian-majority municipalities, according to the decentralization legislation, and these powers will also be bigger than municipalities in Serbia, the Kosovo Serbs have so far refused to get involved in the implementation of decentralization in Kosovo. The lack of interethnic trust coupled with the pressure from the Serbian government is hampering the implementation of the decentralization in Kosovo, remarked the Kosovo government official. The approach of Belgrade is important in the implementation of the process, and he advised Belgrade to contribute to build-

ing a sustainable life for the Serb community in Kosovo rather than using them for its own political interests. “If the Serbs take part in decentralization there will be no need for parallel structures as they will be able to resolve all of their problems.” He concluded that strengthening the local authorities is the best and fastest way to strengthen the state.

Kosovo Serbs agree that decentralization is beneficial for their community but not when it is imposed. “Decentralization is useful when it is a result of compromises between the communities themselves and not when it is imposed from the international community,” argued a Kosovo Serb. She further stated that accepting the decentralization reform, as envisaged by the Ahtisaari Plan, “is tantamount to losing the state of Serbia and recognizing the state of Kosovo.” The feeling among the Serbs is that the Ahtisaari Plan is imposed and it is a big loss for the Kosovo Serbs. The speaker argued that the so-called parallel institutions are also a result of this imposed process. The participant suggested that the Albanians should talk to the “parallel institutions” since they are legitimate leaders of the Kosovo Serb community. “The Kosovo institutions have decided to engage with “loyal” Serb leaders who are not capable of delivering for the Serb community. They should talk to the legitimate ones instead,” This Kosovo Serb leader blamed the international community and the Kosovo government for portraying the Kosovo Serbs as the bad guys for refusing to accept something beneficial for them. “The process is more complicated than that,” noted the participant.

However, this participant suggested that the Albanians should start investing in areas envisaged to become municipalities without asking the Serbs to officially endorse decentralization. “The Albanians should start investing on sewage infrastructure, electricity, and employment, and perhaps this will strengthen interethnic trust and may attract Kosovo Serbs to cooperate on decentralization. The message to Kosovo leaders from the majority of participants was “to start working on practical steps and do not wait until the Kosovo Serbs endorse the Ahtisaari plan.”

Cooperation between local and central institutions

Cooperation between local and central institutions was considered crucial to the successful implementation of decentralization. A participant from Montenegro stated that the decentralization reform cannot be successful without cooperation between local and central institution. Such cooperation is also important for the post-implementation period, to

ensure the successful functioning of the empowered local authorities. An international representative addressed the challenges surrounding the functionality of municipalities after they have been decentralized. He pointed out that often when a minority at the state level becomes a majority at the local level and refuses to co-govern with minority communities in the municipality such a local government loses respect of not only the local minority but also of the central government. A mayor from a municipality where this is the case, the majority community at the municipal level did not include the minority community in local governance, stated that lack of democracy in the country and nationalist policies of central institutions make impossible the proper functioning of municipalities. "When state institutions take decision whose consequences are reflected in interethnic relations at the local level, such as the recent decision of the Serbian government not to recognize diplomas from the University of Pristina, the progress made in the improvement of interethnic relations in the region is reversed."

Cooperation between central and local authorities on issues such as security and police forces should be strengthened. An international diplomat praised Macedonia for adopting and implementing a rather successful law on the selection of local police chiefs. "This law makes police chiefs instruments of law and order and not instruments of party politics." In the recent national elections in Macedonia, the police forces were involved in actions that prevented some citizens from the right to vote. Decentralization in Macedonia is a success but needs to continue to be nurtured and more cooperation and coordination between government ministries and local authorities is needed, stated the diplomat. He emphasized that strong collegial work is required at the central level to make sure that the decentralization works. "The minister of local governance is not all in charge; the minister of transport decides about land permits, and the minister of education is in charge of education in multiethnic areas."

According to another participant, the relationship between local and central institutions needs further improvement also in Montenegro, often mentioned as a positive example of minority accommodation. A representative of the Albanian community in Montenegro stated that a lot more needs to be done. "Although the Albanian minority has proved that it supports the state of Montenegro, such as by voting in favor of independence in the 2006 referendum, the state has not done enough for

them." He complained that his urban municipality does not have as much power as municipalities in Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo, and has no financial independence. "The municipality has no voice in outlining priorities, does not receive financial resources from Podgorica, and social services (such as marriage ceremonies) still need to be carried out in the city of Podgorica." He rejected the government's justification that the municipality does not have enough resources to run itself. He noted that vineyards located in his municipality are abundant, but complained that the municipality does not receive any money from the wine revenues. In addition to Montenegro's central authorities, he accused the Albanian party that is part of the government for not doing enough and for putting their own personal and party interests over their community's interests.

Another participant from Montenegro replied that the status of this urban municipality is not "a holy book" and can be reviewed by the government soon. He reminded his colleagues that the law on the capital city allows for a possibility of a referendum in three years time on the future status of the urban municipalities.

Local governance and decentralization of resources

Making minority communities stakeholders in the process is a good recipe for a successful resolution of interethnic disputes. It was suggested that local governments should prioritize the resolution of outstanding interethnic disputes and engage leaders of all ethnic communities in the political process, aiming to make them feel part of the process, and increase their accountability and stakes in it. Minority parties should not be left outside local governance, and as one participant warned, although the election process is a democratic means, it does not provide a solution to multiethnic problems. Regardless of the electoral seats, "minority communities should be engaged in every decision to make them feel equal citizens." He argued that this is the case in the municipality of Medvedja and suggested this model be applied in other multiethnic municipalities in the region.

Another mayor from Serbia informed the participants about the difficult process of formation of the local government in his municipality following the last local elections. In his municipality, the Serb population represents a significant minority. The bloc of Serb parties that won the Serb vote was led by the Serbian Radical Party and represented an ideological

enemy for this democratic mayor, whose party won the biggest amount of votes. He had a choice of inviting another party into the local administration. However, he said, that in order to keep interethnic peace in his city he had to agree with the choice of the majority of the ethnic Serb voters and to include the Radicals and their allies into the government. “We already have an intra-ethnic conflict in our city, we cannot afford an interethnic conflict as well,” he concluded.

Decentralization serves two interests: democratizes institutions and accommodates minority demands. Pointing out the Macedonian experience, a speaker said that some elements of it would be useful for other countries. However, no model as a whole can be replicated in other

It is risky for politicians to accept less than their constituencies want, but it is also risky to continue to demand more than it is possible to get.

countries. The management of power is also more difficult than it looks. Many municipalities may not have sufficient human and economic resources to manage these powers. Increasing capacities should go hand in hand with devolution of power. He called on minority communities not to insist on maximum but focus more concrete

steps. “It is risky for politicians to accept less than their constituencies want, but it is also risky to continue to demand more than it is possible to get.” He said that countries should help each other as that would be helping themselves.

Although decentralization provides self-governance and gives more right to local people, these rights, in some cases, don’t seem to extend beyond the municipal border. A Roma leader stated that “when we ask for assistance from the government, the government says you have your own municipality now.” So, it resolves some old problems, but it creates new ones. In his experience, decentralization has deepened the ethnic divide. He argued that the Swiss model is quite the opposite: “they centralized what was a decentralized country and created a federation.” Smaller communities, such as the Roma, fare the worse when caught in crossfire between the two largest ethnic communities.

But resources are scarce. It was suggested that central institutions should always provide as much as they can and also pass the land ownership to local authorities to make it easier for investors. “For instance, an investor

comes to the country and wants to invest in a certain municipality. The municipality has the land to start the business but it belongs to the state and it takes forever to obtain a permit from the state. So the land turns out to be a problem instead of an asset.”

Conclusion

The participants agreed to increase their cooperation on decentralization reform and share their experiences and lessons learned. Some of the main conclusions from the meeting were that cooperation between central and local institutions is key to the implementation of decentralization reform and functioning of local governments; that decentralization reform compensates for the inability of minority communities to win a majority at the central level; the Kosovo authorities should start building the infrastructure for the new municipalities and not wait for the official endorsement of decentralization by the Kosovo Serbs; and that decentralization increases the level of democracy in the country and accelerates the process of European integration.

THE FUTURE OF THE SERB COMMUNITY IN KOSOVO

Budapest, March 2009

Introduction

Although Belgrade continues to reject the Ahtisaari Plan, it has endorsed the deployment of EULEX - an essential part of the Plan – throughout Kosovo and recognized it as a legitimate authority. However, unlike UNMIK, EULEX has limited executive power and shares it with the Kosovo institutions. This makes cooperation between Albanians and Serbs essential for resolving the many daily problems such as electricity supply, healthcare, education, and security, and for building a sustainable future for the Serb community in Kosovo. The cooperation of Kosovo Serbs with international community alone has not succeeded in resolving these problems. However, Kosovo Serb leaders need Belgrade's endorsement and support to start such cooperation with Albanians.

In response to the independence declaration, Kosovo Serbs withdrew from Kosovo's institutions, including police forces, courts, and local administration, and organized their own local elections, which produced the so-called parallel municipal institutions, funded and supported by Belgrade but not recognized by Pristina and the international community. However, these parallel institutions have not been able to resolve the problems confronting the Serb community in the areas south of the Ibar River. Serb enclaves in central Kosovo are not linked geographically with Serbia and are dependent on permits from Kosovo authorities to import medical supplies, to obtain Kosovo license plates, and to receive electricity from the Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK).

Recent electricity cuts to Serb villages in central Kosovo exposed these vulnerabilities. Because of the unpaid bills, KEK cut the electricity to the Serb villages. Belgrade and the Kosovo Serbs affected by the cut asked UNMIK and EULEX to intervene to restore the electricity. The answer from these two institutions was that this is not within their authority but rather that it is the responsibility of KEK and the government of Kosovo. This case illustrates the indispensability of direct dialogue between Albanians and Serbs in resolving local issues and the instrumental role of Belgrade in any future contacts between Kosovo authorities and Kosovo Serbs.

Aiming to contribute to the intra-Serb dialogue, on March 28, 2009, PER organized a roundtable discussion of Serb political and civil society leaders from Kosovo, government officials and parliamentarians from Serbia, and international representatives from EULEX and UNMIK. The meeting was also attended by officials from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary. The goal of the roundtable was to provide an opportunity for Belgrade officials, Kosovo Serbs, as well as international representatives in Kosovo to jointly explore ways of resuming cooperation between Albanians and Serbs and build a sustainable future for the Serb community.

The relatively calm post-independence period in Kosovo was considered as an encouraging indication for the future of interethnic relations in Kosovo. Addressing the post-independence situation, an international representative stated that although the independence did not bring about the violence or mass exodus that many feared, it burdened the relationship between Albanians and Serbs in a significant way. The Albanians expect the Serbs to accept the independence while Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs want it to be reversed. Putting aside these expectations and focusing on real problems aiming to improve the quality of life for the Serb community should be the priority for the leaders of all groups.

A Swiss diplomat noted that interethnic cooperation would not only improve the lives of the people but also the prospect of both Serbia and Kosovo to join the Euro-Atlantic institutions, and believed that this serves as an incentive to resolve problems peacefully and cooperate with each other despite the existing differences.

Belgrade's policy on Kosovo

The Serbian representatives made it clear at the outset that Belgrade is against any communication with the "illegal authorities of the Republic of Kosovo." However, they admitted that some cooperation between Albanians and Serbs at the local level is necessary. Belgrade officials admitted that there are differences among the Kosovo Serb leaders and between Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs regarding Belgrade's policy on Kosovo. The Serb participants from Kosovo were unanimous that Belgrade's policies towards Kosovo have not been successful and they should be modified. It is worth noting that Serb political representatives from the north of Kosovo did not accept the invitation to the roundtable, and only a few representatives from the Kosovo Serb "parallel

structures” were present, so the view of the Kosovo Serb participants does not necessarily represent the Kosovo Serb majority view.

A senior member of the Serbian parliament stated that more debate is needed to assess the relations between Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs and to correct mistakes of past Serbian governments, in reference to the previ-

Cooperation between Albanians and Serbs at the local level is necessary.

ous government run by Vojislav Kostunica. She stated that the international community is limiting the ability of Belgrade to help Serbs in Kosovo by transferring its powers to the Kosovo authorities. Although Serbia has the will to help the Kosovo Serbs, it can not do much because of limitations such as banning Serbian officials to enter Kosovo, allowing Albanians to cut electricity to Serb villages and imposing Kosovo laws on the Serbs. She stated that the international community should respect the UN Resolution 1244 and allow Belgrade to continue its work in Kosovo accordingly. Belgrade has intensified discussions with the international community to try to find a way to give Belgrade more authority and eliminate these restrictions. However, she was not optimistic that these discussions will produce any good results. “What the international community is offering is not in our best interests.”

Belgrade’s ability to help the Kosovo Serbs south of the Ibar River has been increasingly limited. This is illustrated by the electricity cuts to some Kosovo Serb villages by KEK for not paying the bills and Belgrade’s unsuccessful attempt to restore the electricity. As a result, some Serb leaders living south of the Ibar River have supported some level of engagement with the Kosovo authorities aiming to resolve the electricity issue and other problems affecting their daily lives. A Serb leader said that this has served for Belgrade as a reason to treat Kosovo Serbs in the north and south differently, and divide them into “traitors” and “patriots.” He stated that his political party, which is part of the Kosovo institutions, has achieved some results for the Kosovo Serb community, but instead of being supported by Belgrade, he and his party have been put into the “traitor’s list,” simply because “Belgrade does not like results, they undermine its policies on Kosovo.” He called on his Serb colleagues to support Kosovo Serbs participation in the political process and join Kosovo’s institutions, which he said could be done without having to recognize the independence of Kosovo.

A Serbian government official said that the Serbian government has already changed its policy towards the Serbs in Kosovo by requiring transparency and responsibility in fund allocation and project implementation. He criticized the Kosovo Serb institutions (known as parallel institutions) for failing to understand their tasks and help improve the lives of Kosovo Serbs. “The local Serb officials pay more attention to the relations between Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev than to the daily problems confronting the Serb community.” He said that his government will make sure that future projects address the most urgent needs of Serbs, and that people are trained properly to implement them. A Kosovo Serb supported this idea of investing more in human resources in Kosovo, since, he said, the majority of the Kosovo Serb elite have left Kosovo after the war in 1999.

The official also refuted the claims of some Kosovo Serb leaders that Belgrade is preventing them to articulate their needs and design a “home-made” policy in relations with Albanians, but admitted that it can not be done without coordination with Belgrade. “The key to the stabilization of interethnic relations in Kosovo is in Belgrade.” Acknowledging the changes that followed the independence declaration, he said that Serbia needs to modify its policies accordingly except for one: it will never give up Kosovo.

The key to the stabilization of interethnic relations in Kosovo is in Belgrade.

A Kosovo Serb stated the question for Serbia is not whether to give up Kosovo or not, but rather how to take it back, since Kosovo is already lost. Serbia does not have to recognize Kosovo’s independence, but it should recognize that it cannot bring it back. “A war is needed to bring Kosovo back to Serbia, and the question is whether Serbia is willing to launch that war, and can it win it?” He further stated that it is important to agree that Kosovo is lost, and we should ask who lost it, clarifying this issue once and for all, and stop using the same rhetoric that was popular twenty years ago. “It is profitable to mention Kosovo, it helps you win enough votes to become a member of parliament, but it harms the lives of the Serbs population, especially in Kosovo.” He criticized the Serbian government for lacking consistency and logic in policies regarding Kosovo. He recommended that Belgrade should support the Serb participation in Kosovo’s political life as “it will improve the prospect for a sustainable future in Kosovo for the Serb community.” He proposed that at

least Serbs south of the Ibar River should participate in the upcoming Kosovo local elections and elect “legitimate representatives that will challenge the Kosovo authorities from inside the institutions.”

Kosovo participants supported Serbia’s rejection of Kosovo’s independence but asked that Belgrade offers a more realistic policy to enable the Serb community, especially those south of the Ibar River, to protect its interests better, and stop “improvisation of institutions.” A Kosovo Serb participant asserted that Belgrade’s strategy to appoint Serb residents of Gracanica as mayors of municipalities that have no Serbs, such as Gillogovac, and pay them salaries bigger than that of the Serbian President is pure improvisation, which is not benefiting the Kosovo Serbs. Another speaker stated that “we have established a municipality in a village, which, according to the statute, covers the entire municipality of Gnjilane, with 95 percent of the population consisting of Albanians.” The speakers reported that Serb drivers are fined by the Kosovo police for driving with Serbian license plates, medical supplies are seized at the border for lack of permits from the Kosovo government, and electricity to Serbian villages has been cut off because of Serbs’ refusal to pay the bills to the Kosovo Energy Corporation. “The government of Serbia should offer solutions for these problems, not just tell Kosovo Serbs not to talk with Albanians.”

A participant predicted that Serbia will change its policy as it moves closer to EU membership. However, he asserted that the Kosovo Serbs cannot afford to wait that long, therefore a consensual policy providing for a peaceful and sustainable future for the Kosovo Serbs should be formulated as soon as possible. Another participant said that Belgrade was aware of the concerns of the Kosovo Serbs but the government is not doing enough to help them. Belgrade means well for the Serbs in Kosovo, but it has not been able to create a strategy to help them. “Opposing independence is not a strategy, it is a process.” Many suggested that Belgrade should intensify its cooperation and coordination with the Serbs on the ground. A participant stated that “the difference between Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs is that Belgrade knows what it does not want and Kosovo Serbs know what they want.”

A representative of the international community in Kosovo said that Belgrade is preventing the international community to help the Serbs by telling the Serbs not to fully cooperate with us. He feared that if this situation of uncertainty continues, the number of Serbs leaving Kosovo will

be higher than the number of Serbs returning. A Serbian official stated that the international community is to be blamed for the position of the Serbs in Kosovo. “The international community rewarded the Albanian extremists by allowing the declaration of Kosovo’s independence to take place.” He further argued that the role of the international community is controversial, stating that while EULEX says it is there to ensure the enforcement of the rule of law, it allows Kosovo authorities to cut electricity to the Serbs, an action which is in “clear violation with the rule of law.” In response, an international representative argued that electricity cuts are a result of the Serbs’ refusal to pay the bills, which “is in violation with the rule of law.”

Kosovo Serb approach

Kosovo Serb participants argued that daily problems can not be resolved by working with Belgrade alone. Some form of cooperation with the Kosovo institutions is needed but that requires Belgrade’s support. There was consensus that electricity cuts in Serb villages are a form of political pressure against the Kosovo Serbs. Kosovo Serbs are advised by Belgrade not to sign electricity agreements with the KEK. Despite some efforts of local Serbs to negotiate with Albanians, the electricity was not restored. Participants agreed that Kosovo Serbs will not be able to resolve these problems without changing their strategy. The role of Belgrade in this regard was considered instrumental.

Several participants suggested that Belgrade should encourage local Serbs to cooperate with Albanians on issues of electricity, vehicle registration plates, returns, and property rights. Above all, they proposed that a debate be launched on the issue of Kosovo Serb participation in the upcoming Kosovo local elections with the goal of assessing costs and benefits of such a sensitive step. Although some Serb expressed their personal opinions on these issues, most of them agreed that no action should be taken by Kosovo Serbs without Belgrade’s approval but appealed to their Belgrade colleagues to give them more freedom of action.

Belgrade’s role was deemed crucial. A Kosovo participant said that the interests of the Kosovo Serbs are best protected by Belgrade. Education, salaries, and many projects in Serb areas are funded by Belgrade. However, she said that Belgrade is not in a position to help as much as it wants; therefore cooperation with Albanians in some areas is a must. “I had to meet with the minister of health of Kosovo to resolve the prob-

lem I had with medical supplies.” She said that Kosovo Serbs need a clear vision, which, according to her, should be building sustainable living conditions for the Serb community to prevent them from leaving Kosovo. “We do not need to fight for a Kosovo without Serbs.”

Some argued that Serbs should take their place in Kosovo’s institutions not because they recognize the independence of Kosovo but because they want to build sustainable lives for their community. Parallels were drawn between the situation in the 1990s when Albanians did not recognize Serbia but used Serbian passports and car registration plates. However, the Albanians did not join the Serbian institutions and boycotted the Serbian elections throughout the 1990s. Nevertheless, it was recommended that Serbs join the Kosovo institutions and defend the interests of Serbs and Serbia through adoption and implementation of legislation within Kosovo’s institutions. Another reason for joining the institutions was the inability of the Kosovo Serb parallel institutions to protect the Serb interests because they are not recognized by Kosovo’s institutions and the international community.

Kosovo Serbs asked for more clarifications regarding Serbia’s policy on Kosovo, and posed the following questions: is it possible for Serbia to have sovereignty over Kosovo? Is it possible to have status negotiations again? What would be the consequences of repeating the negotiation process? What would happen if the International Criminal Court says the independence was against the international law? Would the Kosovo status question be raised again? A participant said that the message that comes to the Kosovo Serbs from Belgrade is that everything is possible. Answers to these questions would clarify the position of the Serbs. It is not a mistake to listen to Belgrade, it is necessary, but it also could not be a mistake to join the Kosovo institutions.

An international participant stated that it would have been useful if the invited representatives from the office of the Serbian president and the foreign ministry had taken part in the meeting, and suggested that the status of Kosovo and the resolution of daily problems should be addressed as two separate issues. If Kosovo Serbs take part in elections, they may become the second strongest party in Kosovo’s parliament and become a kingmaker of future governments. He illustrated his argument with examples of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo in Kosovo that took the position of prime minister with only seven percent of the vote,

and the Socialist Party of Serbia in Serbia playing a crucial role in the creation of the coalition government with only five percent of the vote. He recommended that Belgrade do more to revive and strengthen the Kosovo Serb leadership.

A Serb participant agreed that Belgrade is a crucial factor and not much can be done without it. He suggested that perhaps Kosovo should organize both local and national elections, so that Serbs could take part in them and elect their representatives in both local and central levels. The south should consider taking part in elections even if the north is against it. He considered that Belgrade has two policies; one for the north, and one for the south. He claimed that official Belgrade is afraid to confront Kosovo Serbs and that’s why representatives from the office of the president and foreign ministry did not come to the meeting. A representative from Serbia agreed that Belgrade holds the key for the future of Kosovo Serbs. A participant stated that Serb politicians in the north are making the situation of the Serbs in the enclaves more difficult. The Serbs in the north have an advantage being linked geographically to Serbia. Serbs in the south face basic problems that are unfamiliar for the Serbs in the north. He suspected that the north will remain dependent on Belgrade since everything is financed by Belgrade, the international community is allowing Serbia to do it, and that there is nothing the Kosovo institutions can do about it.

The status of Kosovo and the resolution of daily problems should be addressed as two separate issues.

Conclusion

There was consensus that the dialogue between Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade should be intensified with the aim of finding ways to resolve the daily problems confronting the Serb community in Kosovo, especially those living in enclaves south of the Ibar River. It was recommended by many speakers that Kosovo Serbs should take part in the upcoming local elections in Kosovo.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several conclusions and recommendations for action by Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo Serbs, and the international community emerged from the discussions.

- Kosovo institutions should intensify their efforts to persuade the Serbs that they have a safe future in Kosovo. Clear and strong messages, accompanied by concrete actions, should be sent stating that their future and security is not endangered by an independent Kosovo;
- Central institutions should coordinate their actions with local institutions in implementing governmental policies on the ground swiftly and efficiently. It was alleged that some mayors of opposition parties refuse to implement governmental policies in their municipalities;
- Kosovo institutions and international community should help newly elected Serb representatives deliver tangible results to their community with the goal of bolstering their support within the Serb community and increase the number of Serbs participating in the political process;
- Kosovo Public Television broadcast airtime in Serbian language should be increased or a second national TV channel in Serbian be established. Albanians and Serbs receive their information from separate source with clashing agendas – Pristina versus Belgrade media outlets;
- An advisory group on health issues facing the Serb community should be formed within the Ministry of Health and a Serb representative be appointed as advisor; If successful, the example should be replicated to other ministries;
- An interethnic forum for dialogue and reconciliation should be formed in Kosovo;
- Employment opportunities should be created for Serbs in public enterprises, such as Post and Telecommunications of Kosovo, Pristina Airport, municipal administrations, and Assembly of Kosovo;
- Kosovo Serbs should have influence on the selection of police chiefs in their municipalities;
- Serb political leaders from the entire Kosovo Serb political spectrum should be involve in political discussions with Albanians;

- An intra-Serb dialogue aiming to create a Kosovo Serb leadership should be organized;
- Kosovo Serbs leaders in Kosovo's institutions should avoid getting implicated in affairs of corruption. Involvement in corruption will undermine their legitimacy and will prove that they are in the Kosovo institutions for personal benefits, and not for helping their community;
- Resolution of property issues should become a priority for Kosovo's legal system. It will relax interethnic tensions and indicate that the Kosovo institutions are determined to establish the rule of law, encouraging the Serb community to become involved in Kosovo's public life;
- Kosovo Serbs will not recognize the independence of Kosovo anytime soon but they are willing to continue to live and work in Kosovo, and gradually be involved in local issues. According to many Kosovo Serbs, only Kosovo's membership at the UN will resolve the status controversy. Until that happens, Albanians should not ask the Kosovo Serbs to recognize Kosovo's independence;
- Kosovo government officials and international institutions do not have to recognize the legitimacy of the Serbs elected in the Serbian May 2008 elections but should be willing to talk to them in personal or political party capacities;
- Kosovo authorities should start building the infrastructure for the new municipalities and not wait for the official endorsement of decentralization by the Kosovo Serbs;
- Dialogue between Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade should be intensified in order to search for ways to resolve daily problems of the Serbs in Kosovo.

The list of conclusions and recommendations that came out of these meetings was sent to local and international policymakers.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS*

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