

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN KOSOVO: TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS

Pristina, April 12, 2005

ROUNDTABLE GOALS

The roundtable "Interethnic Relations in Kosovo: Toward Implementation of Standards" was organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) and took place at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Headquarters in Pristina on April 12, 2005. This session was a follow-up to PER's regional roundtable on Albanians and Their Neighbors held in Lucerne in May 2004 and co-organized with EDA, PER's Kosovo roundtable held in June 2004 at the U.S. office in Pristina, and PER's Kosovo regional roundtable held in Bucharest in November 2004, co-organized with the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The main goal of the April meeting was to bring together leaders of the Kosovo institutions of provisional self-government (presidency, government, and assembly) and Kosovo political parties with leaders of various political factions of the Kosovo Serb community to discuss the state of interethnic dialogue within Kosovo, progress achieved in implementation of standards pertaining to interethnic relations, and to start an early review of the Kosovo government's pilot decentralization projects.

The roundtable broke a stalemate in Serb-Albanian contacts in Kosovo that developed following the Serb boycott of the Kosovo institutions since the fall of 2004. The meeting's main goal was achieved by bringing together heads of Kosovo's institutions and the three major Kosovo Albanian political parties with leaders of the Serb community in Kosovo (both so-called "cooperative" and "non-cooperative" Serbs) as well as senior international diplomats stationed in Pristina (the final list of participants is attached).

ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

The roundtable was chaired by PER's president Livia Plaks and was opened by Kosovo's President Ibrahim Rugova, the Principal Deputy Special Representative in Kosovo of the UN Secretary General Lawrence Rossin, and the Head of Democratization of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo Johan te Velde. The latter three said that PER roundtables in Kosovo and their unique atmosphere present an exceptional opportunity for the sides to discuss pressing issues. A Serb participant said that he does not consider PER roundtables as mere events but thinks of them as "a beginning of the dialogue."

The Kosovo president in his opening remarks said that he expects a positive evaluation of the standards. Kosovo had an orderly and a democratic election. He said that Kosovo was fulfilling priority standards such as ensuring Kosovo's stability, providing for the protection of minorities, and for a meaningful decentralization. However, he stressed, that the integration of the Serb community, as opposed to all other non-Albanian ethnic communities, into Kosovo's life remains an open and difficult issue. In line with his previous statements, he also stressed that after the independence of Kosovo is recognized the positive democratic processes there would accelerate.

An opposition politician also gave his analysis of the current situation in Kosovo. Among the positive trends he named the work of the dynamic new Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, the emergence of a credible opposition in the Kosovo Assembly, and the

activity of the Kosovo Protection Corps. Among the negative trends he named the absence of the rule of law, weak governing institutions and an inability to resolve Kosovo's pressing problems, poor economic development, lack of progress in interethnic relations, and lack of intra-Albanian consensus on crucial issues regarding Kosovo (decentralization, constitution, talks with Belgrade, etc.).

A senior opposition leader claimed that the following four issues were of the utmost significance for Kosovo: (a) the implementation of standards, (b) interethnic dialogue, (c) the reform of local government and (d) the issue of Kosovo's status. He further added that the process of evaluation of the standards' implementation must be transparent, fair, and time-appropriate. He encouraged a more open debate on the implementation during the Kosovo Assembly sessions and invited the Serb deputies to take part in this debate but firmly rejected any interference from Belgrade.

"It is a fact that [the standards' implementation] will be evaluated positively, although it must be stressed that the new government of Kosovo did not take a very active role in this," he said. Most notably, he claimed that the Head of the UN administration in Kosovo is failing in building institutions in Kosovo and primarily in building democracy there.

A senior Kosovo Serb leader welcomed an internal Kosovo dialogue as "the beginning of everything," although "we do not agree on many issues regarding the future of Kosovo." "The problem is that the well entrenched positions will not change in the next six months to one year," he said. Hence, "the only reason why [the Serbs] demand decentralization is security (this is the only issue where [the Serbs'] reasoning differs from the Albanians'), and for this reason we need the kind of institutions in which we can integrate." "Only a political consensus would bring stability," he said.

Another Serb representative tried to explain that even though today a number of Serb leaders are considering reentering the Kosovo institutions of the provisional self-government, their previous bad experience of lack of cooperation within those institutions makes it more difficult. The Serbs are weary, he said, especially after the many promises regarding a meaningful decentralization that were never fulfilled.

A member of the Kosovo government responded that a consensus on decentralization was necessary, and not only because the Contact Group has asked for it (even though this new stand contradicts the international community's demands for a fast-track process). He also blamed Belgrade for playing a negative role in the ongoing processes. As an example, he took Serbian President Tadic's recent call on the Serbs not to return to Kosovo. This participant accused Belgrade of forcing displaced Kosovo Serbs to integrate as displaced persons in Serbia or Montenegro, which was problematic from the human rights point of view. [Only days before the PER roundtable this member of the Kosovo government, together with another minister, an ethnic Serb, returned from visiting displaced Serbs in Montenegro encouraging them to return to Kosovo.] He also encouraged the Kosovo Serb representatives to return to the government's working group on decentralization, adding that the government has the financial resources to help the Serbs take part in the decentralization process. He did, however, stress that the government cannot sit and wait for the Serbs for much longer. "This is the time for you to participate," he concluded.

A number of Serb participants replied that they will re-join the group only if an appropriate atmosphere is created there. One of them said: "Please help me to convince my people that communication is a good thing and that it brings results."

The organizers asked the Serb participants to be more specific about these requests and expectations from their ethnic Albanian counterparts. Later in the meeting this call was seconded by a leader of a major Kosovo parliamentary group who asked the Serb representatives: "What

can we do to make it easy for you to join the working group on decentralization? Is there anything that you believe that we ought to do and are not doing? What is the solution that you want to hear?" However, he added, "we need to be clear that decentralization is a process, not an outcome."

A leader of the main Serb list in the Kosovo elections replied that decentralization was a political topic, but there was no need to politicize it. He stated that "decentralization should be all inclusive" and should not stop with the five pilot municipalities selected by the Kosovo government. For him the importance of decentralization is in the fact that it would produce a new Kosovo by the end of 2006. If the new decentralized Kosovo is acceptable to the Serbs, they will, he said, actively take part in the next Kosovo elections. If, however, the current decentralization stops after the five current pilot projects are completed and the rest drags on until 2008, this would not be acceptable for the Kosovo Serbs. This was the beginning of a constructive dialogue between the two sides. Another Serb leader, also in a constructive manner, added that although he had doubts over the sincerity of the Albanians' call for the integration of the Serbs he would be willing to be engaged in the discussion.

In underlying the importance of the process to the Serbs, another Kosovo Serb leader said that 'decentralization is important for both Serbs and Albanians, but for the Serbs it is an existential issue.' Yes another Serb leader added that irrespective of the decision on Kosovo's status the decentralization reform there should proceed. He also called for extending the number of the current pilot projects from five to fifteen.

Visible differences within the Kosovo Serb leadership were apparent at the meeting. While some leaders (those who took part in the last Kosovo election) endorsed Serb participation in the current decentralization process, others believed that the decentralization reform should start anew and include as many Serbs as possible.

A local Serb leader said that Belgrade should be present in the Kosovo decentralization process. This participant also asked for a "region of Central Kosovo" to be created, as well as the introduction of Serb veto powers in the Kosovo assembly (vetoes regarding education, security, identity cards, health and social services, etc.).

The call for the inclusion of Belgrade into an intra-Kosovo dialogue was rejected by a senior Kosovo opposition leader. He did, however, in a conciliatory way, suggest that "there is some space for Belgrade because it does have a legitimate right to care for the well-being of the Kosovo Serbs" especially in the fields of education, health, and human rights. (A representative of a Kosovo ruling party agreed that there will be space for Belgrade's advisory role to the Kosovo Serbs when they take part in the institutions.) He also called for continuation of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue on technical issues and for a start of the status talks. According to him three levels of dialogues should be established regarding Kosovo: (a) an intra-Kosovar dialogue for resolving Kosovo's needs and for establishing a strategy vis-à-vis Belgrade and the international community; (a) a Pristina – Belgrade dialogue, including on the issue of decentralization; (c) status talks between Pristina and the international community.

He also suggested making a catalogue of issues that could be included in a dialogue with Belgrade. Especially, an inventory of the number of refugees that want to come back to Kosovo and a feasibility study for their return should be made. "We need to sit down with Belgrade and sort out what the mutually accepted questions are for discussion," he said.

This Kosovo Albanian political leader also pointed out the lack of consensus among the Kosovo Serb leaders over the ways of becoming legitimate and on their cooperation with the Kosovo institutions. Lack of such consensus, according to him, harms the political process in Kosovo.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Kosovo Participants

Alush Gashi, Head, Parliamentary Group of the Democratic League of Kosova, Assembly of Kosovo

Azem Hajdari, Political Adviser to the Prime Minister of Kosovo

Lutfi Haziri, Minister of Local Self-Government, Government of Kosovo

Oliver Ivanovic, Member, Assembly of Kosovo (Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija)

Dzezair Murati, Member, Presidency, Assembly of Kosovo (GP 6+ Group)

Randjel Nojkic, Member, Assembly of Kosovo (Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija)

Ibrahim Rugova, President of Kosovo

Veton Surroi, Leader, Civic List ORA

Gjylnaze Sylva, Head, Parliamentary Group of the Alliance for Future of Kosova, Assembly of Kosovo

Hashim Thaci, President, Democratic Party of Kosova

Milorad Todorovic, former Interministerial Coordinator for Returns in the Government of Kosovo; Vice President, Democratic Party of Serbia

Rada Trajkovic, President, Serbian National Council of Central Kosovo

International Participants

Francesco Bastagli, United Nations Deputy Special Representative of Secretary General, United Nations Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo

Jay Carter, Chief, Office of Community Affairs, United Nations Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo; UNMIK Representative to Ministry of Community and Returns;

Mark Dickinson, Head, United Kingdom Office in Pristina

Nenad Djurdjevic, Representative in Belgrade, Project on Ethnic Relations

Yvana Enzler, Head, Swiss Liaison Office in Pristina

Philip Goldberg, Head, United States Office in Pristina

Alex Grigor'ev, Senior Program Officer, Project on Ethnic Relations

Leon Malazogu, Representative in Pristina, Project on Ethnic Relations

Kirk McBride, Chief, Political and Economic Affairs, United States Office in Pristina

Andrzej Mirga, Chairman, Romani Advisory Council; Chair, Project on Ethnic Relations, Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies, Council of Europe

Clarisse Pasztory, Senior Political Adviser to the Minister, Ministry of Local Self-Government of Kosovo

Livia Plaks, President, Project on Ethnic Relations

Lawrence Rossin, United Nations Principal Deputy Special Representative of Secretary General, United Nations Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo

Roland Salvisberg, Program Officer, Political Division IV, Human Security, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Johan te Velde, Director, Democratization Department, Mission in Kosovo, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe