

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

KOSOVO



FALL 2009 - SUMMER 2010

INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE
AND RECONCILIATION
IN KOSOVO - YEAR TWO

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PREFACE

The activities carried out by PER in Kosovo between the summer of 2009 and the fall of 2010 were concentrated on helping to resolve specific, practical issues that the Serbian community encounters in everyday life in Kosovo with the purpose of improving the life of this community as well as improving interethnic relations in Kosovo. Issues such as how to deal with budgets and employment and how to bring more investments to a community, united Serbs and Albanians around the table preparing them to cope with the real challenges that need to be overcome.

Another topic of importance in our work this past year was the effort to start a dialogue between Albanians and Serbs to help overcome and heal wounds that have been festering for many generations. Although it will take a considerable amount of time before there will be understanding and acceptance between the two communities, PER through its Forum for Dialogue has created one such venue for dialogue. The discussions have been very open and sincere on both sides. The open TV debates that followed some of the discussions with key representatives of the Albanian and Serb communities showed very clearly that interethnic dialogue can take place across the table even on some of the most sensitive topics.

We judge that significant progress has been made in Kosovo south of the Ibar River in improving the living conditions of minority communities and advancing their political integration into Kosovo's mainstream society. The local elections that took place in November 2009 resulted in expanded participation by the Serbs. The start of the process of decentralization which marked a significant change in access to power and influence at the community level, that is reflected in a more relaxed atmosphere in Kosovo and is visible in the interaction of Albanian and Serb politicians at all levels. With a number of municipalities now under the control of pragmatic mayors, mostly from the Serbian community, more decisions are made at the local level and this empowerment of the communities has helped to improve the situation in Kosovo.

There are still however, limitations and frustration, nevertheless, Kosovo Albanians seem more comfortable with their decision to move past grievances and address the real every day needs of the Serbian community. The situation has also improved due to the less aggressive position of the government in Serbia which gave some breathing room to the Serbs in Kosovo

to allow them to make their own decisions about whether to participate more fully in the life in Kosovo.

Thus, PER believes that some building blocks are now in place to improve Serb-Albanian relations in Kosovo for the long term. This report outlines in brief the activities that PER organized during the time period of the project. It was written by PER's Head of Office in Kosovo, Leon Malazogu who has also been responsible for organizing the PER meetings. The report was edited by the PER staff in Princeton, NJ. The text has not been reviewed by participants and PER takes full responsibility for its contents. I would like to thank my colleagues in Kosovo and Princeton for the outstanding work carried out during this second year of the project.

The initiative was generously funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). I would like to express our sincere appreciation to USAID and to its mission in Kosovo. I would also like to express our sincere thanks to all the participants in our events in Kosovo, who came from the government, the Assembly, opposition, civil society and the international community.

Livia B. Plaks, *President*

Princeton, New Jersey
November 2010

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

In the first mentioning of a geographic location, both the Albanian and Serbian language names are used. However, to simplify the text, in any other mentioning the name most commonly used in the English language is provided thereafter.

“Serb” is used as an ethnic distinction, whereas “Serbian” is employed when referring to Serbia.

Except as otherwise noted, the terms “Albanian,” “Bosnjak,” “Roma,” and “Serb” are used to refer to persons belonging to ethnic groups living in Kosovo.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AHTISAARI PLAN

Political Will and Decentralization

The decentralization process in Kosovo and the functioning of the new municipalities has been one of the main priorities of the Kosovo Government, however, all those involved in this process have acknowledged that some difficulties persist in its successful implementation particularly when it comes to full Serb participation. Responsibilities and competencies have been specified on the Law on Local Self Government and new responsibilities have emerged since becoming more accountable to the citizens.

Despite some of the difficult trends in the decentralization process, there has been some evidence that the decentralization process in Kosovo provided municipalities with much greater competencies to manage local infrastructure projects and offer more efficient services to its citizens. The financial resources remain a real challenge for the newly established municipalities to achieve self-sustainability despite various initiatives and income generating projects.

In the Year Two of the project the activities of PER were mainly focused on the following multiethnic areas: Gjilan/Gnjilane, Novo Brdo/NovoBerde, Strpce/Shterpce, and Gračanica. PER has continued to work closely with the Ministry for Local Government Administration with whom it has agreed to become informal partners in the process.

Central level Roundtable In Prishtina – Interethnic Relations In Kosovo

On 3rd of February, PER organized a high-level roundtable of Albanian and Serb political leaders and international representatives residing in Kosovo to discuss the current state of interethnic relations in Kosovo.



Left to Right: Petar Miletic, Alfred Boll, Sadri Ferati, Hashim Thaci, Livia Plaks, and Christopher Dell.

The objective of the meeting was to address the challenges in the formation of new municipalities and ways central institutions can assist in the process. The roundtable was opened by the Prime Minister of Kosovo, the US Ambassador to Kosovo, PER President, Livia Plaks, and the President of the SLS Parliamentary Caucus, Petar Miletic.

The Prime Minister thanked PER for having served as a bridge among communities in Kosovo, enabling an open and sincere dialogue and was encouraged by Serb participation. He expressed full support to the new Mayors as legitimate partners with democratic mandate to implement projects to the benefit of local communities. Supporting new municipalities in their development projects will be among the top priorities of the Kosovo Government, he assured.

The US Ambassador highlighted that the November municipal elections were just the beginning of the decentralization process. No less important challenges are impending in ensuring that the new municipalities succeed and provide the services that their citizens demand and need. While Kosovo has made great progress, now is the time to deepen engagement and strengthen those new institutions that will carry inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation forward.

Delays are not well-understood by citizens who have been waiting for this moment for several years.

Municipalities need flexibility and control over their own resources while the Government must ensure timely transfer of competencies.

Crimes such as illegal construction plague Kosovo as a whole and raise issues of implementing rule of law. These need to be addressed by all levels of government and delays are not well-understood by citizens who have been waiting for this moment for several years. To keep the momentum, the new municipal leadership needs to improve the lives of their citizens. To carry the momentum of Serb participation further, economic opportunities will sooner or later make skeptics wish the same.

In her opening remarks, PER President, Livia Plaks, lead the roundtable into the topic. Work has barely commenced with the new situation after elections. The challenge for the majority was to find ways to make it not only palatable but even desirable for the various communities to be part of Kosovo. In this regard, she asked what it would take to form and consoli-

date the new municipalities and help them overcome their many upcoming challenges successfully. Municipal finances, parallel structures and other challenges will define the level of success of new municipalities in improving the situation of the Serb population of Kosovo. The main communities in Kosovo should seek to make small steps together but the main responsibility rests with the majority. The Kosovo authorities should prove—concretely—that they are partners to the local Serb and other populations and that they are truly concerned with the well-being of the ethnic communities residing in the country.

A senior representative of the Government urged all to build on the positive examples and multiply them. He praised these roundtables for they gathered the most courageous individuals who helped the process all along when everybody else criticized it. Was it not for the leading courage shown in PER roundtables, it would have taken 50 years for mainstream political opinions on both sides to reach to this level. Now the extreme positions have lost ground and he thanked all for grabbing the chance.

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Some participants who lost in the last elections were very critical. One labeled the Serbs who participated in the elections as not authentic and accused the authorities of ‘putting a single family in control’. Several mayors reacted and accused him of generalizing and urged him not to portray his loss as failure of democracy. Even those who do not participate in the Kosovo institutions sided with continuation of participation. Problems in the election process were recognized but this remains to be addressed in due course.

In order for new municipalities to succeed, one senior politician who works for a Belgrade institution urged the new mayors to be careful in appointments for there are examples of those appointed who allegedly have criminal background.

The lack of financial support is a major problem since the ability to make an impact on people’s lives was very limited. A senior member of the Government promised that the budget re-balance would occur sometime in Spring. Serb politicians recognized that budget limitations are a problem for all municipalities, Serb and Albanian alike, however, the political importance of Serb municipalities at this juncture should be sufficient to justify an addi-

tional impetus to do more. The new mayors were not part of the drafting of this budget, but they are all now busy with various meetings for everyone wants to help them.

Several Serb politicians expressed dissatisfaction regarding the timing of the strategy for the north. More time was needed to allow municipalities in the south to show results, but given the low resources given to them, they cannot be a showcase. A Mayor argued that to portray his municipality as a success, he faced three main problems: 1. Unemployment, 2. Conduct privatization in a way that benefits the public, and 3. End illegal construction. To consider winning over the north, Kosovo would have match Belgrade's 4 million Euros each month for salaries. This strategy now looks like 'occupation' of the north by Prishtina and will not bring results.

A diplomatic representative conceded that the timing may not be the best from the perspective of using southern examples. Ideally, a more intensive outreach would have been attempted once there were specific successes to show. But Belgrade's decision to go forward with its agenda meant that the strategy on the north would go forward to counteract partition.

A Serb representative from northern Kosovo warned that the north was a major challenge and it should be approached cautiously with each step for it could return Kosovo back in its dark past. He advised not to rush there, but make small windows of opportunity and use these as entry points. It is impossible to put some functions in Prishtina's hands. He expressed regret that some gave full control to Belgrade, for Belgrade was not honest either. The north must be linked to Prishtina and Albanians must have sufficient vision to allow solutions that make this happen.

A senior government official urged that rule of law must be established by working together. He lowered the expectations that anything should happen fast, but expressed conviction that citizens in the north do not want a vague situation and would like to see some structures disappear. He blamed the situation partly on daily politics, which is not necessarily in line with the real long-term interest of the people.

Intra-Serb Roundtable - Role of Belgrade, Intra-Serb dynamics and Serbian Institutions

Intra-Serb relations are essential to improve relations with the Kosovo Albanian majority. The scene is currently dominated by quasi-patriots and quasi-traitors and one former mayor thought that this would not improve as

long as Belgrade is ignored. A senior opposition leader assured Kosovo Serbs that Kosovo Albanians do not mind their relations with Serbia. "We only worry about their relations with Kosovo," he said.

A senior Serb official argued that there is no reason for the excessive caution when discussing about parallel structures. One should distinguish among the various types of parallel structures, e.g. education and health were well regulated in the Ahtisaari package, and could be discussed. He went further to request that parallel plates of Gjilan/Gnjilane (GL) car plates receive the same treatment as those from Serbia. He called on all institutions to focus on their own tasks and if the Kosovo institutions work properly, things should change in several months. He warned the new Serb leadership against attempts to put down parallel structures, for this could seriously endanger them. Several senior Serb leaders argued not to call them 'parallel' but 'Serb' institutions.

Decentralization should lead to positive interdependence in order to make the process irreversible.

The process establishing the Serbian TV was also criticized for the process is occurring furtively and several Serb politicians expressed worries that this extremely important process may be going wrongly.

The role of 'parent' municipalities and the transfer of competences is essential in order to deliver services and one mayor assured his counterpart of his will to transfer competences swiftly and effectively. Personnel problems clearly present a significant bottleneck for new municipalities since the challenges are too high for the low calibre of the staff. Some expressed worried about the lack of university degrees in their CVs while the new mayors worried over the low number of employees under their command. The high number of staff employed in the parallel administration presents an insurmountable potential problem in case these were closed.

A senior opposition leader argued that Serbs need not just get involved with Serb-specific issues, but need to involve in issues of Kosovo-wide importance. Serbs are not involved in these discussions in the Parliament or elsewhere. It was concluded that decentralization should lead to positive interdependence in order to make the process irreversible. There is an urgent need to pass the Law on Local Government through the Parliament. Overall, the discussions have moved from anger and disagreement to searching for solutions.

Inter-ethnic Roundtable – Consolidation of the new multiethnic Institutions in Strpce

On February 4th, the Project on Ethnic Relations organized a roundtable of Serb and Albanian local political leaders from Strpce. Participants were invited to discuss the consolidation of the newly formed local multiethnic institutions, the inclusion of all stakeholders in the political process, and widen the support of the local population for the new municipality. Another goal of the initiative was to improve the cooperation between Albanian and Serb leadership as well as between the local and central authorities in a range of issues, such as decentralization, privatization, and economic development in the municipality.

The Mayor opened the roundtable jointly with the PER President who chaired the discussion. The Mayor highlighted Strpce as the best example of multiethnicity and listed three main priorities for the municipality: (1) the functioning of the municipality (since it has not functioned in the past five years) and vowed to tackle some of the problems that nobody tackled in the past ten years; (2) address illegal construction in the touristic area; and (3) improve its relations with Prishtina. Due to the presence of illegitimate mayors, Prishtina did not want to invest in the past because it did not find good partners on the other side. Various individuals have derived benefits due to such state of vacuum in the past two years.

The new leadership came under pressure to do more regarding the parallel structures. The Mayor complained that there is no debate where parallel structures are not mentioned and criticized the Albanian leadership of having done nothing themselves. He retorted that he already removed them from the building, something that no previous administration could do. Moreover, he argued that the municipality has many smarter things to do. A former mayor argued that this problem stems from the dispute between Prishtina and Belgrade regarding statehood. This problem must be tackled at the highest level which should also address whether Belgrade can hold future elections there or not.

Serb participants see the process of decentralization as just starting, hence the need for substantial support by Prishtina and the international community. A senior representative from Prishtina assured that all priorities of Strpce will be pushed through the Assembly of Kosovo and promised that all doors in Prishtina are open for Strpce. Besides photo

opportunities, real support was needed in investment, infrastructure and economic development – more specifically, to work as fast as possible in the privatization of the Brezovica ski resort. Opposition members accused that this outlook focused only on conducting privatization for private benefit.

The Albanian deputy Mayor (until recently his counter-candidate) praised the massive Serb turn-out which has ensured the election of a legitimate mayor. The legislative and the executive branch were formed in record time and all expressed hope that the additional mandatory committees would soon be established too. A senior political representative praised Strpce for having passed three democratic tests: (a) Good elections; (b) Elected legitimate leaders; (c) The Mayor has quickly and effectively consolidated the institutions and has shown that he will be a Mayor of all citizens. As part of the priorities, the Mayor listed the school in Brod in need of reconstruction. Overall, all Albanian participants expressed confidence that these accomplishments bode well for the whole mandate.

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Apart of the general discussion summarized above, the debate also raised several specific issues:

1. Recommendation to establish a committee for security;
2. Economic development. Strpce is the only sustainable municipality in Kosovo, and with some help it could boost self-propelled development.
3. Halt illegal construction, especially until the town develops urban, development and spatial plans. Albanian participants were against a ban on construction and expressed hope that the municipality will be able to develop its urban plan as soon as possible in order to allow regulated construction to resume.
4. Albanian participants highlighted the total absence of information outlets in Albanian. Numerous past initiatives failed to address this problem. The Mayor promised to lobby through a member of the Media Commission who comes from Strpce.

5. Albanian participants requested to consider ethnic composition of the municipality and use an ethnic key for job creation. Some Serbs suggested not to allow workers from other municipalities, which Albanians disagreed with.
6. The lack of professional staff was also discussed and one suggested to establish a Higher Vocational School for Tourism.
7. The lack of Serb opposition in the Assembly was also deemed problematic and there was skepticism whether the municipality can function as it should considering that many Serbs and Albanians have not been involved.

Implementation of the Inter-Municipal Agreement on Transfer of Competences to Gracanica

The Project on Ethnic Relations brought together the political leaders of Gracanica and senior political leaders of Kosovo. The municipality of Gracanica recently signed an inter-municipal agreement to transfer powers from the parent municipalities of Prishtina, Lipjan and Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje.

This roundtable gave additional impetus to an effective hand over of responsibility and sought ways for Gracanica to serve as a model for decentralization in Kosovo. A major positive example of this type of collaboration was the mutual agreement over the construction of a hospital in Prishtina using public funds. Yet three weeks since the signing of transfer agreement, there were still a multitude of problems, including: (a) funding, (b) illegal construction and issuance of permits, (c) cooperation with 'parent municipalities', and (d) the transfer of civil documentation.

The Minister of Local Government Administration stated his commitment to making the municipality a success. The recently signed memorandum on the transfer of competences is a work-in-progress. He promised that the funding issue would be resolved. Several participants expressed high hopes that Gracanica could become a tourist destination and that this could bring additional revenue to the municipality.

The Mayor of Lipjan committed to being actively involved in the transfer of competences and resources. The hand-over has yet to be finalized since it involves handing over cadastral records for eight more villages.

Illegal construction and issuance of permits dominated the discussion. The lack of an urban development plan, the transfer of cadastral documentation and the destination of land parcels (for industry, or agriculture) were cited as obstacles to fair issuance of construction permits. The Minister promised his support for the municipality, and committed to guaranteeing that minimally the proceeds from licensing belong to the municipality of Gracanica, and not that of Prishtina.

Transfer of civil documentation was another issue dependent upon an upgrade of Gracanica's capacities. The deputy mayor of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje expressed full support, including a readiness to bring his staff to the municipality of Gracanica to stay for as long as needed in order to ensure a smooth transition. The officials of Gracanica praised this readiness and noted that they are in the process of preparing the relevant space and infrastructure.

All agreed that these municipalities need to succeed and that all efforts must be made to see this is achieved. The lessons drawn from these efforts have the potential to influence outcomes in similar situations including Partes and beyond. PER urged the participants to produce results and committed to organizing a follow-up roundtable at the beginning of July, immediately following the deadline for a full hand-over of responsibilities.

Lessons Learned from the New Municipalities

Kosovo Serb representatives from Klokot and other parts of Kosovo met with Kosovo authorities, senior officials from the Ministry of Local Government and the Municipality of Gjilan. They had an in-depth discussion of what the Gjilan and central leadership can and should do to improve the situation of the local Serbs. The Mayor of Gjilan advised the Serbs not to waste any more time. The decentralization process is ongoing and the Serbs should grab this historic chance to form their own municipality. The Deputy Minister explained the benefits of creating a new municipality and how direct grants from the government work and what other sources of funding are available. Several projects were discussed and additional needs in the area were highlighted. PER committed to returning to Partes after the municipality is formed to ensure a smooth transition.

Inclusion of Gjilan/Gnjllane villages into Novobardo

Aiming to smooth the transition of Serb villages from Gjilan to Novobardo, PER convened a meeting between five Serb representatives from relevant villages with the Mayor of Novobardo. The mayor expressed readiness to deal with all the requests and do everything possible to include those villages in the service coverage of the municipality. Both sides cited numerous challenges. Cadastral zones need to be transferred to Novobardo, but this was problematic since the boundaries were not yet clear. Budgets need to be established while the number of residents has grown. A representative from a radical party that did not take part in elections expressed a willingness to cooperate and assist in any way needed.

Most of the Serb participants were primarily interested in the issue of employment. They feared that the offices for communities and the local community office there, which employ around twenty Serbs, would be closed after they are cut off from the Municipality of Gjilan. There were also talks underway with the central authorities to secure funding from external sources since Novobardo's budget is very small. The Serb participants expressed willingness to alter the location of their office and provide a variety of services on behalf of the municipality. They urged the Mayor not to close the local office because it serves as an economic lifeline to numerous families. The Mayor assured the Serb representatives that he will do everything in his power to ensure that this does not occur.

Serb representatives asked the mayor to help reduce unemployment in the Serb community. The Mayor explained that the public sector is no longer engaged in direct job-creation.

Many of the issues continue to remain contingent on transfer of power from Gjilan. Working groups with Gjilan are dealing with transfer issues in various areas, but there were problems in some of the sectors because not all officials were ready to fully cooperate. The Mayor also vowed that despite funding challenges, the problems of school supplies and maintenance that were common under Gjilan's administration would also be addressed.

Significantly, several months after the hand-over, the municipality of Novobardo was still struggling to secure the funding to ensure payment to health and education employees. Some teachers had not been paid for months. Serb representatives also complained that the Municipality of

Gjilan took away the only ambulance that serviced the four villages and gave it to Silovo, a locale that already has one ambulance.

Inter-ethnic Roundtable - Addressing Key Challenges of New Municipalities: Budget and Property

The Project on Ethnic Relations organized an inter-ethnic roundtable on budgetary and property-related challenges facing new municipalities. Previous PER roundtables revealed that budget and property issues are the two major obstacles facing new municipal authorities. PER took the initiative to invite a number of officials from new municipalities to discuss those two issues with the central government.

The new mayors were not part of the drafting of this year's budget, and a more vigorous relationship is needed to ensure that the 2010 budget is able to help them improve the situation on the ground. The roundtable aimed to review obstacles presented by budget limitations and to assess what further support is necessary. The second session discussed whether the new mayors can become fully responsible for developments within the boundaries of their municipalities and how this milestone can be achieved as quickly as possible.

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During opening remarks, a senior Serb leader noted the timeliness of the subject and that there is seemingly the necessary will within the communities to resolve these problems. The presence of representatives from all relevant institutions was praised.

A senior governmental representative in charge of municipal budgets said he valued the meeting and expressed his hope to have regular ones, claiming that many accomplishments and good progress has been achieved. He stated that the challenge that remains is to make statistics and other data compatible among the various institutions. This includes issues of property tax and the involvement of 'parent' municipalities and line ministries. The Ministry of Economy and Finance organizes regular forums, but this is insufficient for the staff of new municipalities. "We need opportunities to train the staff how to manage budgets, which is an urgent priority to be conducted with the involvement of the Treasury," he said.

He reported on the municipalities including a variety of developments. While the secondary health care facility in Gracanica is being constructed with 2010 funding, the Ministry has budgeted secondary health care for Strpce and Northern Mitrovica for 2011. The grant commission allowed extra staff for the two health centers and adequate budgetary resources to ensure their normal functions.

An official from a central Serb-majority municipality expressed disappointment that the municipality did not receive the amount of resources the donors promised. New municipalities need disproportionately more

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funding than established ones since they have no self-generated revenues to rely upon. New municipalities also face additional challenges, and it takes time for their staff to be up to the task. The authorities felt that new municipalities have all the

information needed. In turn, municipalities complained that the entire budget is already earmarked for specific purposes (mostly salaries) and the newly elected authorities have little flexibility in budgeting for other needs.

An Albanian mayor of a Serb-majority municipality expressed his disappointment with the treatment of his municipality. Despite having concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the parent municipality, he felt ignored. He was faced with a sudden decision by the Mayor of Gjilan to stop all services to the newly transferred areas, without the transfer of sufficient resources to replace the resources. Worse still, his budget was cut at the same time the municipality acquired a large area with a number of large villages to maintain. In the new areas people are taking advantage of the legal vacuum and have started to build illegally. He expressed dissatisfaction that the allocation of funds is not conducted on the basis of need, while instead politically-important municipalities seemingly receive the majority of funding. The representatives of the central authorities explained that their initial assumption was that Novobrdó would not struggle since it has existed as a municipality for a long time. However they now recognize the challenge they face and promised to address it appropriately.

Competencies had been transferred to municipalities earlier, however their implementation had only picked up in the week before the roundtable. Several participants reported that this is now happening - the relevant documentation and files on property are being transferred. This process requires some mobilization and can be measured by the number of files that have been transferred. The International Civilian Office (ICO) addressed the dispute of the municipal boundary, and the whole process is being round up. The process has now picked up steam and the stakeholders seemed visibly determined to speed up to compensate for time lost.

An international participant appealed to the participants to realize that the changes brought about by decentralization were fundamental. The municipal budgets are to double in the next five years. Aside from the grants by the state, municipalities will choose their priorities, and they will be free to hire staff if they are financially capable to do so. However, to get to that point, the municipalities need to negotiate with the central authorities.

The construction in the new municipalities is problematic. Procedures are clear and must be respected, and parent municipalities should not be allowed to issue licenses any longer. The

In the new areas people are taking advantage of the legal vacuum and have started to build illegally.

deputy mayor of a southern municipality reported that they have full control over developments within the boundaries of the municipality and they have stopped illegal construction in three cases. However while there is stability, the needs are massive. Besides the lack of resources, there are administrative challenges, including adherence to budgetary codes. He requested that this be addressed ahead of the re-balance, yet there are more challenges.

A representative of a central institution responsible for spatial planning expressed readiness to support municipalities through direct provision of material, experts, documents, software and hardware, or through donors. Indirectly, this can help the budgets of the municipalities too.

Inter-Ethnic Roundtable - Future of Brezovica and Illegal Construction, Strpce

The Project on Ethnic Relations organized a meeting of Serb and Albanian local political leaders, primarily focusing on the policy on construction in the tourist zone. This is a contentious issue with diverse opinions and is a pressing priority. The central challenge is managing this process in a way that allows investments to flow but that maintains sensitivity to local needs and interests. It is essential to build consensus around this vital issue in order to avoid conflict, as well as to ensure that this major asset of the municipality is well-preserved. The mayor described the current situation with regard to illegal construction. As a result of illegal construction, the tourist area has 250 houses, 200 of which are illegal. Any further construction has been banned. The municipal leadership is ready to deal with all the problems there.

The second priority is privatization which would create new potential for economic growth, including through promoting summer tourism. The mayor described a skiing resort he recently visited in Bulgaria, where the entire tourist infrastructure is located in the village and there are no lodging facilities next to the ski slopes. This model has attracted many tourists and is similar to the model that Strpce should follow. Strpce has already started to do so as they have removed all the construction of temporary nature (stands and kiosks) and they have a multiethnic police and court, as well as strong cooperation with their coalition partners.

The director of Urban Planning has initiated a spatial and urban plan for the whole municipality of Strpce, which should address the problem of construction in the long-term. Since the new municipal government took over there has been no new construction. The deputy mayor highlighted that both partners in the new coalition government are in unison and this has already yielded results. The task is not simply to stop construction, but to pave the way for development of respectful and applicable law. The municipality has already entered into agreement with LOGOS, a Swiss-funded project for assistance with the development of the spatial and urban plan. The next task is to find ways to legalize all buildings that can be legalized, as well as to develop a master plan for the privatization and development of the ski resort.

All participants supported tax increases which would lead people to build smaller houses and allow the municipality to gain in terms of high-

er tax revenues. The municipality will have a higher budget due to the introduction of higher property taxes. The Albanian community expressed particular interest in this. They have little interest either in selling assets or in participating in construction, but do have an interest in a larger budget. The opposition was in full support of the Mayor, especially because he has begun to clean up the center of Strpce, which itself is a very rare initiative across Kosovo in general.

It is encouraging that the plans thus far provide for the development of a large portion of touristic potential in the town of Strpce itself, creating opportunity for a wider array of beneficiaries. Interethnic relations are essential to this effort, for tourists will come from various countries, as well as from within Kosovo, and they will need to feel comfortable in Strpce in order to spend their money.

All participants agreed that the parallel administration has only exacerbated the problem. They have controlled the transportation ramp to access the touristic area, but illegal construction has only intensified during this period, since they have used the ramp simply as a means for raising money for themselves.

Review of the Transfer of Competencies to New Municipalities

June 15 2010 was the official deadline for the transfer of competencies in Kosovo. PER brought mayors and senior officials from 'parent' municipalities, central authorities and new municipalities to Gracanica for a roundtable discussion about the process and to examine what issues remain to be addressed. The results were varied: there are lingering challenges and continued support from mother municipalities and the central government is needed. At the same time, the new municipalities must develop their resources and capacity to effectively handle the new challenges.

A central government official explained the process began in March when the transfer agreement was signed. Two divisions were tasked with monitoring and managing the transfer of competencies with the primary goal of increasing the speed of transfer to meet the deadline. A Deputy Assemblyman from the Serbian community expressed concern about the assassination attempt against a Serb political leader in Mitrovica. He viewed this incident as an added incentive to engage in the process and become part of the institutions of the state of Kosovo. Despite the com-

plex conditions under which the transfer is occurring, he expressed gratitude for the support of the mayors and affirmed the central government's commitment to following the matter closely and intervening if necessary.

Challenging conditions and uneven starting ground have led to varying results. According to one leader of a larger municipality, overall the transfer of competences has occurred and the municipalities are operational.

Interethnic relations are essential for tourists will come from various countries, as well as from within Kosovo, and they will need to feel comfortable in Strpce in order to spend their money.

According to one deputy mayor of a small municipality, the process is slow and citizens that have moved from one municipality to another are losing out. In this municipality not all officials had a copy of the transfer agreement and the participant was clear in his opinion that the municipality was not in a position to competently handle its expansion. He

used this opportunity to request help for those municipalities having trouble completing the transfer process.

One mayor of a 'parent' municipality responsible for the transfer of competencies to 2 municipalities succinctly outlined the challenges they face: a. Capacity – human and technical; b. Funding; c. Safe and organized transfer of documentation and databases to new municipalities; and d. Timeline for overlap of service provision.



Participants at the September 2010 interethnic roundtable in Novobrdë/Novo Brdo

Funding and timeline issues in the municipalities are closely linked to the planning and execution of decentralization at the upper level. Mother municipalities also have a direct effect on capacity and the ability to organize and complete the physical transfer of resources and data. In municipalities such as Novobrdë satellite offices are needed closer to the outer villages. In Gracanica the number of municipal workers formerly employed by Prishtina cannot be supported under the current budget. There is also a major funding gap for education. Parent municipalities in some cases have agreed to continue to cover costs and provide services, but there is concern over how long these subsidies can and should continue.

Many of the participants voiced concerns on the rate and the ability to transfer documents, databases, maps, etc. These tasks are technically detailed and the information is sensitive. Participants have requested resources and the hands-on procedural guidance of the Ministry of Administration. A participant expressed that it was a serious oversight to create budgets and allocate resources without any hard demographic data or analysis of new municipalities. Also detrimental to the development of the new municipalities is the lack of straight line provisions to the new municipalities.

For there to be meaningful transfer of power at the local level municipalities must be able to serve their constituents. In Novobrdë, after the transfer, all services and communication with citizens who rely on the Gjilan services were stopped as per the law. However, the inability of the new municipality to take over services and an uproar from the citizens caused the Mayor of Gjilan to suspend this resolution. It is clear the mother municipality's subsidy of the new municipality is not sustainable. The central government must provide contingency plans and allocate resources to mitigate this gap in service provision.

There have been some issues with municipalities effectively cooperating with each other. After several missed rounds, the Municipality of Prishtina attended the meeting. A senior representative of the Municipality of Prishtina reported that they began working with Gracanica and established an agreement that Gracanica handle its own services for its citizens starting on April 28th.

In the face of these challenges the municipalities and their leadership continue to evolve in their ability to handle these responsibilities.

Directors were noted as having established relationships and agreements amongst each other to manage the transfer of services and information.

Employment and education remain very sensitive issues. The prospects for employment are low and there are continued difficulties in resolving land ownership, corruption and cronyism. In Gracanica, there are major education funding shortfalls expected for both staff and students. The municipality is actively working with the Ministry of Education to procure additional funds and make arrangements before the start of the school year. In response to education needs and the parallel structures that continue to exist, several issues were raised by the Ministry of Education: (a) Salaries from Kosovo and Serbia by the same staff, (b) All Serbian language texts used for teaching in elementary schools were reviewed, (c) incompatible educational systems between Kosovo and Serbia (5, 4, 3 levels in Kosovo vs. 4, 4, 4 in Serbia), (d) that religious classes in Serbia have become mandatory.

High level working dinner, Prishtina - Representation of Serbs In Public Institutions

On 15 September 2010, PER organized a high-level discussion regarding the representation of Serbs in the public sector. The goal of the meeting was to identify common ground that can increase employment among Serb community members. All participants shared a similar view of the problem and agreed that the level of Serb representation in the public sector remains low. Participants also provided some specific ideas on how to improve the situation. Considering the nature of problems and the need for a long-term solution, PER committed to review and monitor the progress over time.

The Office of Community Affairs within the Office of the Prime Minister of the Government of Kosovo presented key findings of a recently conducted research study regarding underrepresentation of minorities in the public sector. The briefing clearly showed that the number of Serbs employed in the public service was well below the level required by law. PER urged all attendees to reflect and examine these challenges and to identify potential avenues for achieving the required quota as outlined in the Comprehensive Status Proposal.

In the opening remarks, a senior government official acknowledged the problem of underrepresentation of the Serb community and stressed that

this hurts the government's ability to have true representation of minority communities in Kosovo institutions. Two years ago, Kosovo's declaration of independence resulted in many Serbs leaving their jobs. However, the situation today has changed and paints a more encouraging picture. All Kosovo institutions have expressed their good will for better inclusion of Serbs into Kosovo society which is seen as an important step for higher representation and employment of Serb community in the public sector, particularly after 2008. As published in the recent government report, the percentage of Serb representation in the public sector stands at around 4% (with variations among institutions); well below the required 16.67% of the total employed minorities in the public sector.

There is a widespread perception that “working with Kosovo institutions means literally recognizing Kosovo’s independence”.

Political membership was identified as another significant problem in increasing the number of employed Serbs in the public sector. It was expressed that it would be challenging to increase the number of employed minorities if political divisions persist. Different methods and examples should be identified in order to overcome this challenge.

The government declared it has political will to introduce new opportunities for minority employment, however, it was stressed that it is also up to the Serbian Government to ease its pressure and encourage employment of Serbs within Kosovar institutions. Some participants argued that the current political climate among Serbs is similar to the Albanian resistance during Milosevic's time.

Another issue raised by PER was the misperception within the Serb community about employment within Kosovo institutions and the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding limits on new public sector employment. Employment in public enterprises was mentioned as potentially problematic mainly due to privatization of companies, due the massive expected lay-offs, which reduces the overall number of jobs available.

One Serbian representative pointed out that a significant reason for under-representation and barriers facing Serbs in applying to jobs in Kosovo institutions is a widespread perception that “working with

Kosovo institutions means literally recognizing Kosovo's independence". In addition to this important factor, low salaries and the difficulty of advertising positions in Serbian media were considered as further impediments to efforts to recruit Serbian staff. Based on these facts, it was suggested that the Government of Kosovo consider the possibility of creating a central office or committee that would assist the employment of minorities across the public sector.

In the last part of the meeting, PER urged all parties to develop a more concrete approach that would produce tangible results and desirable progress. It was suggested that a working group be formed at the central level. In addition, three levels of challenges were identified for the Government of Kosovo which were related to employment issues: a) the local/municipal level (considered the easiest level); b) the central level (of moderate difficulty) and c) Mitrovica north (the most difficult level). It was proposed that the Government focus on creating opportunities for youth employment, scholarship opportunities with some neutral universities such as the American University in Kosovo (AUK), and by committing to help them return and to work in Kosovo institutions in the next three years.

More efforts from the Government to work on the inclusion of Serbs in the public sector and encourage employment;

- Support initiatives that promote employment of minorities with the support of the international community;
- Consider the creation of a central office or committee that would focus on employment of minorities;
- Encourage the Government of Serbia not to put pressure on Serbs employed in the Kosovo public sector.

Inter-Ethnic Roundtable - The future of Municipal Community Office In Kusce

On 16 September 2010, the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) organized a roundtable to discuss the future of the Municipal Community Office in Kusce/Kufce, now part of the Municipality of Novo Brdo/NovoBerde. The main objectives of the roundtable were to: (a) look at the outstanding issues for completing the process of transfer of competencies; (b) identify innovative ideas on how to make the most of such an office; and (c) to look at potential long-term solutions.

The roundtable was opened by the President of PER who stressed the importance of the new municipalities and their functioning as a way forward for minority groups to make decisions on important issues that directly impact their communities. Meetings of this nature create space for communication and constructive discussion, which in turn is positive for all communities in Kosovo. The community office in Kusce/Kufce is beneficial for all members of the community, therefore PER urged all participants to provide concrete proposals for how to permanently resolve the outstanding issue.

The Mayor from the host municipality expressed his appreciation for the organization of this roundtable, calling it an important element to finding common ground and addressing the challenges of this process. The Mayor provided a briefing regarding the previous meetings and discussions with the Mayors of Gjilan/Gnjilane and Partes/Partesh which touched on several issues, including the future of the community office in Kusce/Kufce, but he stressed that there is more that needs to be done in this regard. Financial challenges that municipalities are facing today, and in particular new municipalities, are as a result of the Government administrative instruction to all municipalities to establish community offices, especially since the administrative instruction does not clearly define the financial responsibilities for the functioning of such offices. He also said that they have requested that the Municipal Committees develop procedures and regulations in order to facilitate the functioning of the Office for Communities, however, the issue of staffing and the continuation of their work remain unsolved, therefore he urged all three municipalities to make a decision regarding the staff and funding of the Office in Kusce/Kufce.

The Deputy Minister of the Ministry for Communities and Returns emphasized the importance of this project and of the value of previous USAID supported projects. He also focused on decentralization and expressed a commitment to go forward with the process enabling municipalities to be closer to its citizens. He



Left to Right: Srdjan Sentic and Gradimir Mikic

stated that one purpose of the administrative instruction for the Office of Communities was to have a unified system that would serve as a base for communities to address their needs. Financial difficulties were acknowledged and efforts are being made for all staff to keep their posts.

One of the Mayors of the 'parent' municipality said that the majority of tasks related to transfer of documentation and competencies have now been completed and some progress was also achieved in regards to staff training and providing copies of the documents. An additional challenge was the transfer of staff since they are currently contracted by the parent municipality. The hand-over of responsibility and budget did not go hand-in-hand – the new municipality was handed over personnel responsibility without the budget. Future hand-over the health and education sectors may be much more complicated.

A representative from the Prime Minister's Office urged the Mayor of both the 'parent' and the newly established municipality to discuss all remaining issues thoroughly and find common ground that will lead to effective functioning of the community office and the provision of quality services to citizens. A representative from the 'parent' municipality urged others not to focus on the problems of the past but to concentrate and provide practical suggestions regarding the remaining problems.

The representative from the Ministry of Local Government Administration viewed current difficulties being mainly of a technical nature and no longer a question of whether the office itself should exist or not. He said that the experience of people working in the community offices is invaluable and that municipalities should not only consider who funds the community office, but should also consider engaging the staff in other municipal departments. Each municipality has its own competencies and issues related to the community office and they can be solved through inter-municipal cooperation.

A member of the community of Kusce present in the roundtable stated

that the success of these offices depends mainly on the readiness of the administration to work properly, and that everyone agrees on ways to solve the remaining issues. The location of the office and rent was reported to be an additional issue as this puts additional burden on the already limited budget of the municipality. Sharing of offices and staff by municipalities should be considered a temporary option, however, this would create additional obstacles.

One Serb politician was of the opinion that the completion of the transfer of competencies and the financial resources are the two major issues that are regarded as problematic and it remains for the mayors of both municipalities to find a solution that is acceptable to all. In addition, he suggested that a meeting be held between the two mayors to discuss the contracts of the staff working in the community office, as they are contracted to the parent municipality through 2012.

There was general understanding among all participants that the main challenges in relation to the functioning of the Community Office in Kusce are financial in nature and not on the issue of how many staff will work in the Community Office or whether the office itself should exist or not. Several mayors agreed in principle to jointly develop a request proposal to the Ministry of Economy and Finances with a specific budget for 2011 taking into account the expenses of the community office. They also agreed to be more engaged in solving technical issues and communicating this to other involved parties. PER further encouraged them to examine the possibility that staff working in community offices would be able to work in other departments of the municipality, thus keeping expenses to a minimum;

Consolidation of Kosovo Serb Moderate Political Leadership

The Serb political leadership in Kosovo has long avoided discussing many important issues that have had an impact upon their lives because they were perceived as relating to the status. This position has gradually changed towards a more pragmatic approach whereby the Serb leadership showed understanding that the best way to defend the interest of Serb community is to engage with the Kosovar Albanian leadership in resolving practical issues, primarily in forming several new Serb-majority municipalities.

The financial support that Belgrade provides to the Kosovo Serbs (often double of what is allocated by the Kosovo institutions) continues to remain particularly appealing. As long as Belgrade provides unconditional financial support to the Serbs, it will remain their main partner. However, this financial support has a significant deficiency—it does not improve the lives of the Serbs in Kosovo. Very little effort is made in creating economically sustainable Kosovo Serb communities. Now most Serbs south Ibër/Ibar are open to assistance coming from any sides, including Prishtina.

Intra-ethnic roundtables – Election campaigns and Serb participation

On 18th of November 2009, PER convened two intra-ethnic roundtables in Strpce, one among Serb participants and one among Albanians. Expecting that a Serb and an Albanian would face each other in the local mayoral run-off, PER organized this exchange soon after the first round aiming at influencing participation and interethnic accord in the upcoming period.

The campaign was described as peaceful, albeit different from the rest of Kosovo. Serb leaders complained that 80% of their campaign had to focus on explaining to their Serb co-citizens reasons for turning out to vote, and not on the candidates' specific programs. Albanians complained of a rural environment that prevented them from running a 'normal' campaign. Tourism, development and job creation dominated the list of top issues for the municipality and for a future mayor.

It was already clear that the run-off is to occur along ethnic lines – a Serb candidate of the Independent Liberal Party was pitted against a candidate of the Democratic Party of Kosovo. Prior to the run-off, both ethnic camps had sharp political divisions within, which seemed to become irrelevant once their mayoral candidate had to face 'the other side' in the run-off. Not that relations are tense, but both ethnic communities have a strong preference to elect one of them to run the affairs and sought to use the next four weeks ahead of the run-off to mobilize the voters along ethnic lines.

Despite internal differences among Albanians, some of them expressed a wish that if a large number of Albanians vote and majority Serbs boycott the process, the Albanian candidate may win despite the unfavorable ethnic demographics. When asked if this was auspicious for good relations in

Strpce, the Albanian candidate said that it was normal for him to seek the support of Albanian political entities, and it was also fine for the Serb candidate to do the same. The Serbs accurately assessed that Albanian political groupings hate each other and would not be able to rally behind one candidate. While this was correct prior to the first round, there are signs that Albanians may also be overcoming their differences in order to muster sufficient power to channel priorities to the areas that they live in.

Belgrade's inability to help Strpce during their electricity crisis earlier this year was definitely the most important event that helped to persuade the local Serbs that they have to take matters in their own hands and 'think with their heads.' Various individuals from the parallel structures recorded those who took part in the vote and the following day threatened them with loss of jobs and benefits from the Republic of Serbia. Most local politicians are convinced that the threats did not come from Serbia, but from the local level. Moreover, the pressure had somewhat of a counter-effect and reportedly an increasing number of people realize that the reality on the ground has changed and they had to make the best of it.

Serbs realize that a boycott of elections would complicate matters even further and would not resolve anything. They can make it difficult for an Albanian mayor to carry out his function, but could not make it impossible. They lament that most of the projects went in the past two years to the Albanian villages. The opportunity cost for the next mandate is even bigger considering the large sums of money to be disbursed to the municipalities due to decentralization. Apart of the Albanian mayoral candidate, most Albanian politicians expressed to PER their relief with the signifi-



Left to Right: Mimoza Kusari, Ardian Gjini, Anamari Repic, Srdjan Popovic, Bojana Gudzic and Ramadan Ilazi.

cant Serb turn-out in Strpce. They realize that the Serb boycott has harmed them as well, so the advent of a functional municipality was seen as good news regardless of who wins.

A former mayor who also ran in these elections was forced to swallow a bitter pill. He did not stage an active campaign and chose to support the SLS candidate for the sake of 'not losing the municipality'. He criticized some of the methods used by the winning party, but conceded that there was no other way. "If they would have relied only on those who would turn-out by themselves, there would have been two Albanians in the run-off," he said. He was convinced that the Serb candidate would win in the second round even if they "have to mobilize all resources" in order not to lose the municipality.

Serbs realize that a boycott of elections would complicate matters even further and would not resolve anything.

While this Serb politician was most critical towards Belgrade, he was also critical towards the international community which, according to him, tried to sort out some issues with Belgrade, by using the weak-

ened Serb community. Due to such policy, he expects the pressure from Belgrade is to mount on the future Serb mayor if he gets elected. He thought that regardless of Belgrade's position, it was an imperative to have Serb representatives on the ground. But the new mayor will have serious problems simply because of this type of strategy of the international community towards Belgrade and it will be unable to help the mayor out.

SLS is clearly not appreciated widely. One participant thought that some Serbs would rather see an Albanian mayor than SLS's Bratislav Nikolic. Other Serbs see Nikolic as useful only because he belongs to a party that has direct access to the prime minister and the government. Several participants expressed readiness to support Nikolic, but mostly from the distance or with advice. This hands-off approach could mean that from now on the Serb camp can often mean SLS only, while the rest will have to be involved as former politicians and act on the margins. It is imperative for SLS to try to establish alliances and coalitions with other Serb parties and groups wherever possible. This may not only increase the pressure on SLS but also set them up for failure if they cannot deliver quickly, for which they need the support of Prishtina and the international donor community.

As both sides were mobilizing along ethnic lines, it was difficult to get them to think about interethnic cooperation. Unfortunately, the battle is perceived as a 'winner-takes-all' situation where one wins or loses the municipality. Most had not thought about coalition-making and this was clearly not a priority. However, a former mayor cautioned the others on such a simplistic outlook. He recalled when four Albanian councilors caused ample obstruction during his stint in power, and now with the majority of councilors, they can do much more. This is somewhat mitigated by the greater competences of the mayor.

The very first issue that is likely to dominate the agenda of the new municipality will be the 'office space' and the flag in front of the municipal building. Both have to do with the parallel structures. They may even have to be evicted and the flag removed, but it will take much more to dismantle the structures themselves, which is the main expectation of the Albanian politicians. At the same time, the Serbs expect serious challenges to come from the parallel municipality, and the fact that only one Serb candidate will dominate the political spectrum does not bode well. A long-term deputy mayor expressed caution with regard to the dismantling of the parallel structures. He saw their marginalization only if the Kosovo authorities can offer better economic development and offer the Serbs all of the services, to persuade them that they no longer need the parallel structures. The parallel institutions will continue to pose a challenge and exist for some time also because Serbs benefit from them. These bodies distribute pensions, run the mail service between Serbia and Strpce, etc.



Left to Right: Sasa Dedovic and Lutfi Haziri.

Only a strong municipal administration that provides tangible benefits to the population can successfully battle the parallel structures, agreed both the Albanians and the Serbs.

The other serious issue where the two communities have very different opinions is that of the (illegal) construction in the tourist area of Brezovica. One of the main fears of the Serb community is the changing of the ethnic structure of this small municipality, hence they prefer to introduce a total ban on new construction. Albanians, who control half of the Municipal Assembly consider that permits cannot be limited. They argue that some of the illegal construction that egregiously violates standards must be destroyed, but the vast majority should be legalized and the proceeds should be used to raise significant additional funding for the municipality. Several participants went further to caution that they will not allow the municipality to put an end to construction in general. Since Serbs see a major threat in this trend, this is bound to cause tremendous friction in the next four years.

Relations are improving and since Serb youth is leaving, Albanian youth can provide the much-needed labor force. With stable supply of electricity, this winter may also see record Albanian skiers. Despite the multiple challenges, these and other considerations serve as reasons for confidence that Strpce could be a role-model for inter-ethnic governance.

Intra-Serb Roundtable in Gracanica – The functioning of the municipality after local elections

When the roundtable on Gracanica occurred, the preliminary results had already given the victory to the SLS candidate without the need for a run-off. Most other candidates expressed dissatisfaction and two of them had scheduled press conferences denouncing the alleged rigging stating the same at the roundtable. The roundtable started off with accusations that the elections were falsified and that the Prime Minister of Kosovo and the Albanian mafia were involved in the fraud. Some went as far as to conclude that Belgrade was right to suggest that there were no conditions for free and fair elections. The Ahtisaari Package was endangered and the parallel institutions would be strengthened since a vassal relationship of rule through a single Serb family has been imposed upon the Serb people, was a conclusion of one of the participants.

While this was not on the agenda, it was important to spend some time

on the elections before moving forward. After hearing several key politicians that they intend to boycott the future Municipal Assembly, the chair asked them to ponder the consequences of doing so. Serb leaders that challenged the electoral outcome vowed to do everything to annul the elections and the most senior of them predicted that the situation could go in the direction of Mitrovica, what one participant called “Afghanisthanization of Gracanica”. The chance has totally been wasted and this would be a reference for the rest of the Serbs about the level of trust they can have in the international community, he said.

The chair tried to explain that such problems affect most transitional societies and reminded them that in the immediate neighborhood there are countries governed by one single party for very long periods of time. They would have to learn to play within this environment, he said, for they lose more by boycott or parallel action. The address for violations is different, and the chair encouraged them to pursue those in a legal manner. Instead, he urged the participants to focus on the outlooks for Gracanica from this point on – It may not be what everyone asked, but it is not a complete zero.

What is next for Gracanica? What is more important for Gracanica? Is it more important who runs it or whether it is a strong municipality? All have agreed that decentralization is of key importance and that this is the only answer for the municipality. He urged them to focus on what should be done for the next year by the municipality, Government, and the international community.

Several participants came to his support. An old time Serb leader asked his peers not to allow these problems to destroy something that they have been preparing for seven years and from which the community can benefit. The trading of votes is a common occurrence and they have to be ready for that battle too. He said that he has more pressure than anybody else since he publicly supported elections and they need to move jointly from now on. Whatever happened, it is a big mistake to go back now. Now this is a chance to use, because there are divisions in Belgrade vis-à-vis elections. Now is the time to pressure Belgrade and Pristina to create better conditions and allow more people to vote.

It is good services by the local authorities that prevent the parallel structures from strengthening their position.

A Roma leader said that these were dirty elections, but next ones will be even dirtier. The price may even go up, but this only means that they have to put even more efforts to do what needs to be done. Several disagreed, arguing that the Serbs are too small to influence overall mode of governance in Kosovo, but due to their importance, they need to be treated differently.

The President of PER pleaded that giving up poses the greatest danger to the future. The chair highlighted the importance of the moment. It can be concluded that this period will define the degree that the new structures may be considered illegitimate by a most other political parties and the majority of the population in Gracanica. If SLS is left alone in the process, it will come under severe attack by the parallel structures. Unlike Strpce, there is no fear of an Albanian mayor taking over. Like in Strpce, a quick attention and delivery of projects by the newly empowered leadership can boost their chance of success. It is also essential to persuade a wide array of stakeholders to involve themselves in the political process as much as possible in order to convey an image of legitimacy.

Inter-ethnic roundtable In Novobrd: Serb Leaders from new villages Meet with the Mayor

On 20 November 2009, PER organized a discussion in Novo Brdo. The peaceful relations in this municipality received a jolt as the run-off is taking place between an Albanian and a Serb candidate. The relations were peaceful but there seems to be greater mobilization among both sides to elect one of them.

The participants appreciated the organization of elections and all noted that it is inevitable for Novo Brdo to avoid a battle among a Serb and an Albanian and prevent the second round from turning into an ethnic race. Most even expressed fear that this dynamic may become a defining feature of electoral contests from now on with adverse effects on interethnic relations.

The Serb side criticized the majority of Serb voters for not taking part and blamed Belgrade for the low turn-out which will allow the Albanian mayor to most likely win in the second round. They expect a higher turn-out for the second round but they can hardly quadruple the turnout they need in order to win against the incumbent.

The Albanian mayoral candidate expects that a number of Serbs will vote

for him once again. The Serb mayoral candidate recognized the positive governance of Ymeri and vowed to follow his steps and make no distinctions between Serbs and Albanians if he wins. Both candidates are trying to demonstrate and to prove their cross-ethnic outreach. The current mayor appreciated that in the past years the Serbs have chosen not to block the work of the municipal authorities. "They could have blocked us, I thank them for not doing so", he said.

Most Serb representatives argued that all they can do is to provide the services that the parallel administration does, and it is not the mandate of the local authorities to dismantle the parallel structures. Some Albanian representatives said that there will be no sincere and serious cooperation between Albanians and Serbs as long as parallel institutions and their extensive bodies such as security service operate. The two sides also agreed (though not all participants) that the most effective way against the parallel structures is a good work of the future municipality and delivery of tangible improvements in the lives of those who live there.

Intra-ethnic discussion on Institutional Consolidation of the Municipality of Gracanica

On February 5th 2010, the Project on Ethnic Relations organized a roundtable of Serb political leaders in Gracanica. The objective of the meeting was to discuss institutional consolidation of the new municipality. In his opening remarks the chairman confronted the numerous Serb politicians who did not win the race for mayor, to weigh the importance for the municipality of Gracanica to succeed despite the imperfect process that may have taken place during elections. He also urged the participants to leave aside the disputes dating from the time of elections, for a greater challenge and common cause lying ahead.

The Mayor of Gracanica reported that the municipality was in the process of transferring competences from the 'mother municipalities'. In this regard, Gracanica is rather specific for it needs to transfer from three 'mother municipalities'. While Prishtina, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje were cooperating partially, Lipjan was not cooperating at all. The map that was presented to Gracanica did not reflect the map as prepared by the Ahtisaari Plan, a problem that the Mayor managed to resolve with the help of the international community. He listed other challenges for which he needs support, e.g. the funding for capital investment had not been

allocated yet. The problems are politicized by default and he called to depoliticize them. The Mayor expressed dissatisfaction with the work of the MPT. He criticized the organogram that provides for 37 staff, whereas he insists to have 60.

All agreed that if this Mayor fails, the biggest losers would be the people of Gracanica. He said that they were no one's stooges and will protect their interests robustly, and asked for support of all those in the roundtable. In order to help, some argued that the mayor has to open the doors and call them. The latter committed to introduce regular meetings with them as people with experience and invited all to be part of the process.

A parallel official criticized Serb politicians in the north who have sent a very worrisome message that they only care about themselves. By doing so, they push the rest of the Serbs in Prishtina's embrace but at the same time diminish their bargaining position. Several complained that Serbian

If this Mayor fails, the biggest losers would be the people of Gracanica.

authorities do retribute towards those participating in the Kosovo institutions. Others argued that this pressure does not come from Belgrade, but from local scions driven by their personal interest. They

expressed belief that Serbia was not a cruel country, but they do not have the good information from field.

The lack of information was also a problem for Gracanica for all participants highlighted the need for a media outlet in Gracanica. Several expressed concerns that the community is facing serious processes, and despite their great will, the human resource capacities may not be up to the task.

One complaint that all shared was the recent arrest of Kosovo citizens who work for the Serbian Government. They argued that this would mobilize those in the north to fight tooth-and-nail against the northern strategy. While all agreed to try to depoliticize issues, they saw these arrests as political. It becomes very difficult to tell their supporters to be in favor of Kosovo institutions when such arrests occur.

The test for the hearts and minds was real, and most participants had no dilemma as per the winners of such a race. The next three months were deemed decisive in this regard. There is ample support from all sides, but

more is needed and of a different kind. It is insufficient to receive just advisory support. Specific support is needed, mostly in assuming the competences. They are currently still trying to resolve problems through the structures at the lower levels.

Regardless of pressure, several argued that chances must no longer be missed. The municipality could have prevented the construction of many residential buildings. This regret has now mobilized them to stop a neighborhood planned for 1,500 houses. If they failed to assume the municipality now, they could have ended up with a change of Gracanica's demographic structure. All agreed that should the Mayor do what he committed during this roundtable, he would have their support. As a follow-up, it was requested from PER to host an intra-roundtable with Belgrade.

Intra-Serb Retreat on the Future of the Kosovo Serbs

Serb leaders from various parts of Kosovo, including the north, gathered for a one-day event that was held in Kolasin (Montenegro). The aim of the event was to address the various challenges facing Kosovo Serb in a constructive setting, and encourage them to seek a joint vision and interest for Kosovo Serbs as one united front. Several senior Belgrade participants were also invited, but only one agreed to join along with several other local representatives from Serbia. As PER expected, the discourse of Serbs who participate in Kosovo institutions was heard clearly and was better understood by those who do not. There was no hope that this would change the position of those in the north, but PER concludes that it has blunted their criticisms of those in the south, and lowered the pressure on those from the north who may decide to cooperate further with Kosovo institutions.

Participants were initially encouraged to explore possibilities for practical improvement of the Serbian community. Inter-community dialogue is more widely understood as a minimum condition to enhancing the position of the Kosovo Serb community and other communities as well. In light of the recent incidents in Mitrovica, participants were encouraged to openly discuss the challenges facing the community.

Kosovo Serb communities in the north and other parts of Kosovo are facing different challenges. PER emphasized the importance of a constructive dialogue that focuses on similarities first. The importance of gaining

a better understanding of each others' position was also underlined; The participants believed that a stronger position for the Serbian community would be essential in order to ensure their demands are met. Moreover, a more unified position would also encourage Belgrade to be more supportive and sympathetic to the position of Serbs throughout Kosovo.

Belgrade and Pristina were equally important for the Serb participants from southern Kosovo, and all emphasized that it was important to have flexibility regarding Serbian participation in Kosovan. Some participants

More support is needed and of a different kind. It is insufficient to receive just advisory support.

believed that good will from Belgrade as well as Pristina is a precondition to improved interethnic relations. Until Belgrade and Prishtina do not start to talk to each other it is difficult to expect any further major improvements in the

field. The climate for dialogue was considered to be improving. Several participants expressed regret that some radical Serb representatives from northern Kosovo chose not to attend the roundtable.

There was wide agreement that the political goals of Serbs from the northern municipalities are different from those in the south. Participants from northern Kosovo generally agreed that there is a need for imposing law and order in the north but had refused that education and health system should be the subject of any changes.

Just one day before the roundtable, a Belgrade media outlet quoted a senior Kosovo official stating that Prishtina may use force to impose its authority in northern Kosovo. Forceful attempts by Pristina to impose its authority in North Kosovo would be counterproductive and would certainly result in conflict. One of them said, "If someone wants to come forcefully to the north there will be thousands of dead people as a result". All agreed that there is little communication between northern Kosovo and Pristina and that such a channel of communication should be established.

Once the accumulated energy from the recent turmoil was out of the way, participants focused on the representation of the Serbian community in Kosovo. One of the leaders emphasized that there are not enough Serbs in relevant political positions in the Government of Kosovo and this is one of the reasons why the Serbian community is not sufficiently active.

To amplify their voice and create unity, most participants expressed a desire for some type of a body that would bring together representatives of all Serbs of all factions in Kosovo, including those currently representing Serbian institutions. North and south Serbs should form a panel and find a common ground to fight for. The community support of both groups was questioned, including by those from the north. Several suggested the formation of an association of Serb-majority municipalities. It was also noted that Ahtisari's proposal was convenient ground for development of southern municipalities, but it was not sufficiently used by the community.

A civil society representative underlined the need for Kosovo Serb representatives to develop a common ground for participation in the institutions of Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians will only accept the Serbs if the latter have unity in their demands. Serbs must develop ownership of those institutions, for they will not get much if they see them as merely 'Albanian institutions'. Ultimately, the Serb community must become a factor and acquire real power, electoral and financial, in order to matter in Kosovo politics.

The issue of returnee's emerged as an important topic and everyone agreed that all groups have a responsibility to work on this issue. It was further concluded that Serbian leaders from Kosovo should impose them-



Left to Right: Lejla Kolenovic, Ferhat Dinosh, Livia Plaks, Alfred Boll, Sasa Djokic, and Slobodan Petrovic.

selves as partners with the international community. They should proactively participate in decision making processes and act through institutions of Kosovo in order to facilitate the return process. Until now, their representation in Kosovo institutions has not yielded significant results in the process of returnees. Although laws are in place there is a low level of implementation. Leaders said that the role of Belgrade is quite confusing and destructive in this regard.

Kosovo Serb participants were joined by a prominent Serb politician from Belgrade during the last session of the roundtable. His knowledge of Belgrade's reasoning turned the session into a question and answer session about Belgrade's position towards Kosovo in general and the Kosovo Serbs in particular. Most of the participants were posing questions trying to discern the true position of Belgrade towards Kosovo and the related issues.

He also reflected on the long historic roots of Serbian politics towards Kosovo. The position of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) has been radical and its influence is higher than is often portrayed – and it is rising. An additional reason for such low flexibility is that Serbia's consensus for a European future is built precisely on its consensus over Kosovo. These factors seriously reduce Serbia's maneuvering space towards Kosovo rendering it very inflexible.

This session enabled the Kosovo Serb politicians to understand the position of Belgrade better, concluding that the international community is clearly discouraging current actions of Belgrade towards Kosovo. He expected a clear decision from the ICJ that will not necessarily be in Serbia's favor. Despite Belgrade's official position, Kosovo Serb participants were encouraged to participate in Kosovo institutions. He advised Kosovo Serb representatives to build a clear position towards Belgrade and Pristina. Belgrade's position will not change by itself.

Overall, the roundtable pointed out the different interests and agendas between the Serbs in the south and those in the north, but also the need and desire to find common ground. It was encouraging that the northern participants did not object to the necessity of those in the south to participate in Kosovo's institutions. Most importantly, all the participants shared the opinion that if they came up with a joint stance, their position vis-à-vis all other actors would be stronger.

Cooperation in Regional Context

PER's experience shows that Kosovo Serbs are more comfortable in interacting with their Albanian counterparts in a regional setting. In fact, for some topics it is almost the only way they are willing to meet with Kosovo Albanian officials. Over the past eight years, sessions with regional participation played an important role in strengthening the inter-ethnic dialogue and complemented other activities in promoting inter-ethnic relations at all levels. Past experience of regional participants who went through PER's dialogue events in the past was indispensable to help those still in the dispute learn about examples from other countries.

Regional roundtables addressed a range of issues related to interethnic relations and regional cooperation. Participants from Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo have used these opportunities to exchange their experience regarding interethnic relations at municipal level, the transfer of power from the central to local level, level of participation of minorities in public life. Kosovo Serbs of various political backgrounds also attended these meetings and exchanged ideas and received tips how to improve their situation. Cooperation with central authorities was one of the main topics discussed as well as lessons learned from other multi-ethnic municipalities.

Regional Dialogue: The Future of the Kosovo Serbs

On purpose of following up with the intra-Serb discussion, PER expanded the dialogue with regional participants to continue the discussion about the future of the Kosovo Serbs. The previous day's meeting paved the way to a more honest discussion on how the region sees the future of the Kosovo Serbs. This was a good opportunity for the Kosovo Serb leaders to acquire new experiences and recognition from others; in addition it opened a path for northern participants to meet with southern Serbs as well as the Kosovo Albanian participants.

The discussion focused mainly on the outstanding issues of the Serb community such as the issue of returns, establishment of new municipalities and the relationship with Belgrade.

A diplomatic representative opened the discussion with a reflection on the need to resolve problems within and between Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo. He reiterated that the political position of the United States of America has not changed, and underlined Kosovo's sovereignty.

A representative of the host country also addressed the participants with an example of the status of Albanians in Montenegro and how this could serve as a good illustration for the Serb community in Kosovo. He mentioned the challenges of the past and difficulties in confidence that Albanians had towards the government. However, today some of these challenges were left in the past and Albanians do now participate in the government in an active way and influence positive change in Montenegro.

A senior Kosovo Serb leader praised the decentralization process in Kosovo and the high turn-out of Kosovo Serbs in the recent local elections. He also praised the efforts of the authorities in Pristina and underlined that the Government of Kosovo has invested much more than planned for the development of new municipalities in Kosovo.

A long-time Serb official from Kosovo argued that Kosovo Serbs face diverse obstacles and hence cannot achieve the types of results that Albanians had in Montenegro. A different situation is with the Serb community in the south who have now decided to participate in institutions of Kosovo, partially thanks to Belgrade and the fact that the Government in Belgrade was not aggressively against the elections as before.

In light of the developing position of the Serbian community, it was concluded that progress was needed on three fronts: (a) dialogue by Kosovo Serbs with Belgrade, (b) returns, and (c) decentralization. One of the Serbian representatives stated that only three out of five municipalities are functional and this process is still too slow, and added: “Decentralization is an ongoing process and we should definitely take part in it as a community, but there is also economic development that is needed and human rights compliance which is also very important”.

Establishing a process for returnees was identified as one of the main priorities for the Serb community, and most highlighted by a participant from a northern municipality of Kosovo. A Kosovo Albanian parliamentary member stressed that Kosovo has failed in issues of returnees and that problems remain for those returning back home.

Mitrovica was another topic discussed in the roundtable. One of the Serbian representatives from the South stated that any conflict in Mitrovica would reflect negatively on the Serbs in southern Kosovo and added that both Belgrade and Pristina must talk about the situation in the north. The representative of Serbs from Mitrovica stated that the police

and justice system is disorganized in the north and this is the main problem for this part of the region.

One of the Serbian civil society representatives from Mitrovica stated that there are many problems in Mitrovica and that too much pressure was put on citizens in the north. He identified three options for Mitrovica; the current status quo, autonomy within Kosovo or an exchange of territories. “The EU should take over the responsibility of north Kosovo until Serbia and Kosovo enter the EU.”

Belgrade politics towards Kosovo and the Kosovo Serbs was also elaborated by a distinguished Belgrade intellectual and political leader from Belgrade. There is a wide consensus about Kosovo in the political scene of Serbia, and the political influence of the church has contributed to this consensus. There is a gap in Serbian politics towards Kosovo and Serbia has many problems in defining its new regional politics and developing a relationship with neighboring countries.

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A representative of the EU praised the fact that all participants in the discussion believe in the European perspective of the region. Kosovo has better chances to join the EU before Turkey given the unresolved issues over Turkey’s candidacy. He added that the respect of minorities is an important condition towards this path. “The EU is the only option for all the countries in the region and we are working hard to get you there.” A representative of the minority community from northern Serbia stated that there are many parallels between minority communities in northern Serbia and Kosovo. He stressed the progress made in Serbia with the establishment of minority councils represented and elected by the minorities. These councils are seen as a very good tool for self-protection where the minorities participate in decision-making on issues related to education, employment and other practical issues for protection of the community’s national identity.

Finally participants concluded that the discussion was very concrete and constructive. There are conditions which the Kosovo Government must still fulfill. On the other hand people should not hide behind status. A diplomatic representative condemned the shooting on the member of the parliament and a tragic death of a doctor in Mitrovica.

Working with Belgrade

As part of its work in Kosovo to encourage better relations among the communities, especially between the majority Albanian and the Serbs, PER also carried out a side dialogue with politicians in Serbia interested in the situation in Kosovo. Since PER is also engaged in Serbia, PER staff took the opportunity of being in Belgrade and met on several occasions with the leadership of the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, including with the Minister and the State Secretary of the ministry. In addition, there were meetings with members of the Serbian Assembly and its committees dealing with issues related to Kosovo, as well as with politicians who are part of the government and those who are in the opposition. Discussions with Serb civil society members and the international community present in Serbia also took place.

The main topic of discussion with the above offices centered on how to improve the life of the Serbian community in Kosovo and whether to encourage the participation of the community in the political and administrative life of Kosovo, regardless of the status issue.

It was clear from our discussions in Kosovo that one of the main concerns of the Serbian community is to get a clear message from Belgrade as to whether they should become more active in affairs that concern the Serbian community, or whether they should continue staying on the sidelines and let the majority there make decisions that affect the wellbeing of the community. This was even more relevant at a time when decentralization was taking place in Kosovo and when competences were about to be moved from the central level to the local level and when “parent” municipalities were obligated to relinquish power to the new municipalities, most of them to be controlled by the Serbian community.

The position of Belgrade was not clear and no clear signals were given to the Serbian leadership in Kosovo as to how to act during the upcoming local elections. As a result, there was a split among the Serbian leadership in Kosovo but with a strong leaning towards more participation. The end result brought heavy involvement from one segment of the Serbian leadership, those adhering to the Serbian Liberal Party who managed to obtain the leadership of several municipalities. Others who stayed on the sideline were contemplating becoming part of the municipal structures and contributing in other ways. All of this was relevant only south of the Ibar river.

PROMOTION OF INTERETHNIC RECONCILIATION

Forum for Dialogue and Reconciliation

Forum for Dialogue - The formal launch

In February, the Project on Ethnic Relations marked the formal launch of the Forum for Dialogue, comprised of distinguished Albanian and Serb political and civil society representatives. PER has organized a series of discussions in the past year with various representatives of both communities who fully supported the initiative.

The purpose of this event was to outline an agenda of issues that the Forum for Dialogue should address in the upcoming year. The Forum has tasked itself to organize a series of debates at the central and local levels on ways how to improve interethnic understanding in Kosovo, and eventually bring about reconciliation among Kosovo’s communities through dialogue. The Forum plans to organize dialogue and roundtables, as well as public outreach activities.

Although the inclusion of other communities had already been decided, several new members made the team revisit the issue. The rest of the Forum had clearly internalized the previous discussions for they all spoke in unison, of a need for a Serb-Albanian forum for this is the main dividing line in Kosovo. A senior representative of the Government said that it is precisely the Albanian-Serb dimension that makes this Forum unique. That the Forum should not be restricted to one topic only was accepted and room was left for the inclusion of other communities in the future.

It is precisely the Albanian-Serb dimension that makes this Forum unique.

Despite other PER activities, it was concluded that there is merit to have a structured dialogue where the same participants discuss on periodic basis, issue written statements and influence the opinion. This dialogue outlet should take a life of its own as soon as possible. There were recommendations to include some additional participants, namely the Serb mayors of the new municipalities. People are ahead of politicians in dialogue and reconciliation and the Mayors could bring some of those stories (e.g. the mixed marketplace in Kamenica and Gracanica) to the rest of the group.

As planned, the rest of the discussion focused on potential topics for discussion for the remainder of the year. One suggested to approach by the system of elimination, and start from what one should not discuss, for example the missing persons or status. A senior leader of the opposition

There should be no forbidden issues for the Forum, but all agreed to start with those that can make it easier to discuss more difficult ones later on.

argued that there should be no forbidden issues for the Forum, but all agreed to start with those that can make it easier to discuss more difficult ones later on.

Participants were also cautious whether they would have to take positions or not, and this depends

on the technicality of the topics. For example, one said that he could not contribute anything to a topic such as health. Another participant argued that the Forum should speak with one voice on some issues and make it a consensual body.

The following specific topics were suggested for discussion:

1. Selected parts of the Ahtisaari Plan and their implementation. While the Ahtisaari plan is gradually moving forward, Serb and the Albanian communities have different views regarding its implementation. The Forum could give comments, feedback, lessons learned, or measure the level of progress.
2. Challenges that the new Mayors are facing in Gracanica and Strpce. The Forum should see if there is any possibility to assist them.
3. Inter-Governmental Relations. The Forum should encourage the Kosovo administration at all levels to show readiness to cooperate with the Serbs who have entered the institutions but who face obstructions.
4. Discuss issues that are not discussed in the Assembly. A senior opposition leader assessed that Serbs are not meaningfully involved in the governance of Kosovo in general. Serbs should not only be part of Serb-specific matters, but they should be part of the general discourse of issues of national importance for this does not occur in the Assembly.
5. Relations of Kosovo Serbs to Belgrade and reflection on the Albanian community. Kosovo Serbs desire to nurture their relations to

Belgrade but fear its reflection among Kosovo Albanians. Most Albanian participants thought that Serbs have nothing to hide, and this should be discussed openly. They expressed worry about the Serbs' relations with the Kosovo institutions.

6. Other issues that were proposed, but were not elaborated in greater detail, were: (a) Decentralization; (b) Security in Kosovo (including human security); (c) Use of language and script; (d) Formation of Serbian TV, or TV in Serbian language; (e) Kosovo's role in CEFTA and potential reciprocity measures; (f) Economic activities in Serb areas; (g) Property.

One new participant still thought that this project was too ambitious. "These topics could drive us further apart instead of bringing us closer", he said, but the others thought the same in previous meetings, and were much more upbeat this time. At this stage, the participants agreed that PER makes the decisions for the next topics. A statement intended to go to the press was circulated in the roundtable and commented by the members.

The Forum for Dialogue: Should It support the New Municipalities?

The fifth meeting of the Forum for Dialogue was the first to start with deliberations over specific topics. As agreed upon, PER outlined a practical agenda of issues that the Forum should address in 2010, and consolidation of the new municipalities was atop the list. PER suggested beginning by discussing ways to further consolidate the new municipalities. Regardless of one's outlook on the elections, it was in the interest of Albanians and Serbs alike for these municipalities to succeed.

The roundtable highlighted some new realities created by the recent local elections, which could potentially improve relations between the two major communities. With the formation of the new Serb municipalities, the ongoing decentralization presents additional opportunities to improve and strengthen the dynamics of the political dialogue in Kosovo.

This roundtable invited two guests, the mayors of two municipalities (one new municipality and one expanded municipality). The mayors briefed the Forum about the challenges that they face and one said that the model of decentralization was not to be carried out as originally envisaged. The Forum deliberated ways these municipalities could be more effective and how dialogue could be one of the key strategies to success.

Some saw decentralization as a form of political posturing that would not bring meaningful benefits to citizens. Politicians who put their popularity at stake by encouraging Serbs to turn out to vote now worry about a letdown and are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to illustrate its benefits to the public.

Local mayors are confronting obstruction from their respective 'parent' municipalities, i.e., Kamenica and Ranillug. For example, the staff was transferred from the Municipality of Gjilan to Novo Brdo without a reallocation of the budget to reflect the staffing changes. The mayors also complained that Gracanica receives a disproportionate share of the funding destined for new municipalities.

Some municipalities were not fully prepared when they initially assumed power. It is evident that every beginning is difficult and these municipalities are still building up their capacities. Resistance is also to be expected from parent municipalities, which are reluctant to cede their significant powers. The division of responsibilities and the rate of hand-over still remain somewhat unclear. A Serb civil society representative called for the mayors to be more transparent, and highlighted the need to strengthen the human capacity of the new municipalities.

The discussion was instructive for future municipalities, including Partes. One positive lesson is that the new municipalities have seemingly been well accepted by the majority. Unlike the difficult beginning, this roundtable was a joint endeavor to seek consensus on ways to make new municipalities successful. PER insisted upon issuing a joint statement of support for the new municipalities to be signed by all the participants during the next roundtable.

The Forum for Dialogue: New municipalities and transfer; Contributing to a joint vision

On 1 June 2010, the Project on Ethnic Relations organized a roundtable discussion for the Forum for Dialogue, where it focused on the specific challenges faced by the new municipalities. The Forum affirmed in a joint statement the need to support new municipalities and agreed that ensuring new municipalities are a success must be a shared priority for all of Kosovo. It was also agreed that competencies were not being transferred at a satisfactory pace from "parent" municipalities to new ones.

In the second session, the Forum was encouraged to discuss open-ended issues that can contribute to building a joint Albanian-Serb agenda. PER

encouraged the Forum to prioritize elements of the Ahtisaari proposal which have mutual agreement but that have not yet been implemented. The Forum realizes it may be in a position to advance the implementation of Ahtisaari.

The Forum then opened to discussing revisions of the joint statement regarding the Forum's support for new municipalities. There was a long discussion over the appropriate degree of criticism regarding the pace of decentralization. Realizing that they agreed on a majority of the points within the statement, the participants adopted the statement with limited changes.

One civil society participant suggested the Forum request support from Belgrade for the Serb municipalities. Most of the participants disagreed with this suggestion. Others included a call for all institutions, especially the ministries, to build up the capacities of the new municipalities by contributing to their infrastructure.

The Forum probed its capacity to engage in mediation processes. There have been a number of disputes among other stakeholders, including among several mayors, and an attempt by the Forum to mediate these disputes could be helpful. Most participants were not amenable to this type of activity. Some felt this was a lowly task for them, while others felt that this was a task for the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA).

A festering issue at the time was the issuing of licenses by the Municipality of Prishtina for the territory of Gracanica. Some feared that if the Forum entered into such 'details', it would fall into a trap. "We should be doing more global and bigger things, and not dealing with issues such as licenses," one of the participants said. Others supported this view arguing that the Forum needs to address joint problems of greater substance and weight, such as reconciliation and dialogue. They contended that if the Forum discussed technical issues it would reduce its own value.

At the same time, even if it was not mediating specific issues, one mayor saw the Forum as a useful tool for repairing relations among municipalities in the long run. A Serb participant understood PER's attempt to have the Forum mediate as an attempt to transfer the power of PER to the

The Forum is comprised of distinguished Albanian and Serb political and civil society representatives and has a mandate to organize a series of debates at the central and local levels on how to improve interethnic understanding in Kosovo.

Forum. However, the Forum cannot intervene in the competencies of institutions; it can only organize small forums where issues can be discussed and proposals can be put forward. A senior government official shared in the notion that it is important to have greater ambitions, "We have sufficient weight, and we should get involved," he said. The Chairperson also encouraged the Forum not to underestimate its own strength, and this issue was left open for future discussion.

In the third part of the roundtable, several participants suggested discussing cultural heritage and special protective zones in the next rounds. There is a specific dispute with the Municipality of Deçan which is not allowing a Monastery to build a wall around its compound. Due to the construction projects occurring adjacent to protected sites, the Monastery of Deçan feels it is necessary to build a wall to maintain the integrity of the Monastery.

Dialogue is aimed at the prevention of incidents, and discussion should take place despite disagreements over the subject. A senior opposition participant argued that the Forum is overestimating its potential and its role in the settlement of the dispute over the Decani Monastery. He further stated that the Forum is at an early stage of its development and would risk its own functioning if it attempted such a challenging task so early on. A Serb participant contended that the Forum should openly discuss the issue as its strength will emerge from the strength of its members. "I perceive the Forum as an informal gathering. If we conclude with things without building a joint consensus, then this could be counter-productive," he said.

The same participant also opened up to all the participants by analyzing the rebellious mentality that flourishes during conflict. He stated that Kosovo is facing this challenge because it is moving from a rebellious mentality to an institutional mentality, and this shift is not easy. "It is quite difficult for us to adapt to something invisible, such as institutions. I ask the Serbian community for some patience as we go through this transition," he added.

A Serb participant was delighted with the discussion, not because the previous participant ridiculed his people, but because of the sincere messages to the Serbs about how they should make the best of a difficult situation. Such an open dialogue is very important, and it should try to produce as many small-scale solutions as possible. Another participant added that such messages should be forwarded on to ordinary people as well. She

added that the Serb community should be critical too, since it has lost its course as a community as well, and it has grown too accustomed to playing the role of a victim. Finally, she also praised PER for organizing the intra-Serb dialogue.

The roundtable closed with a message that the minority cannot go very far if it does not earn the trust of the majority. Perhaps this can be the primary topic of the next roundtable, while cultural heritage is put on the backburner for a while.

Televised Forum Activities

TV Debate: Dialogue about the Ilfe of Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo

The inter-ethnic agenda is in many ways a precondition to achieving progress in other fields, ranging from economic development to European integration. PER's work has begun to bring the dialogue into the open - from private roundtables to public forums. In order to broadcast the message about the importance of improved interethnic relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, the Project for Ethnic Relations (PER) and the Kosovo institute for Journalism and Communication (KIJAC) organized a TV debate on the topic 'Dialogue and life of Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo'. The discussion was moderated and lead by Anamari Repic, the regular host of the program 'Sve je moguće sa Anom' (Everything is possible with Ana), who is also a regular participant in PER's Forum for Dialogue.

The main objective of the debate was to discuss the prospects for interethnic dialogue between Serbs and Albanians. The show focused on two main questions: a) how much do Serbs and Albanians talk about real problems, and b) what is the status of interethnic relations between Serbs and Albanians ten years after the conflict, and two years following the declaration of Kosovo independence.

The importance of effective communication was emphasized as one of the central elements in sustaining interethnic dialogue in Kosovo. Communication has significantly improved, particularly in the last three years, as a result of concrete actions from both communities. A senior political leader argued that both communities should use this increasingly relaxed climate to further improve the quality of interethnic dialogue. Participants mentioned business as an example of how inter-ethnic cooperation is succeeding, and they emphasized that these examples should be further showcased and promoted.

The Mayor of NovoBrdo/Novo Berde, Bajrush Ymeri, praised efforts towards reconciliation and interethnic dialogue in Kosovo. Serbs are returning to this municipality and inter-ethnic relationships are considered to be some of the best in Kosovo. Novo Brdo is also one of the few examples in Kosovo where the municipal government was formed in coalition with Serb political parties. His election was partly due to the significant number of votes he received from Serb and Roma voters, which he felt was a clear example of democratic spirit and growing trust in the region.

A Serb civil society representative expressed disagreement that truthful dialogue and reconciliation exists in Kosovo. He stated that Kosovan society does not demonstrate true responsibility in its relationship between the communities. He added that the hostile attitude towards returns in *Zac/Zallç* village is a step backwards for Kosovo, and decisive action is needed to prevent similar action that can impede dialogue in the future. Albanian civil society representatives also praised the dialogue initiatives, but highlighted incidents (such as publishing the names of Serbs working in international organizations, as happened in Mitrovica) as obstacles to constructive dialogue.

The debate concluded that there is still mistrust and political differences between the two communities, but that many Albanians and Serbs have established true friendships. It is important to continue dialogue, especially due to the fact that interethnic relations and security in Kosovo have improved significantly in recent years. Honesty between communities was seen as a key element for more constructive interethnic dialogue in Kosovo. Both communities should avoid any political or nationalist statements that could harm efforts for continued honest interethnic dialogue.

TV Debate: Future of Gracanica Municipality

Eight months after the official establishment of the newly decentralized municipality of Gracanica, the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) organized a TV debate between the Minister of Local Government Administration, the Mayor of Gracanica, the local Serb leader and a representative from civil society to discuss two main issues concerning the new municipality: a) how is the new municipality functioning following the decentralization process, and b) what are the main challenges facing the municipality in this process.

The implementation of the decentralization process is considered as one of the main priorities for the Kosovo government, however, some challenges ranging from financial to complete transfer of competencies, slow down the process and efforts to address current issues in a more effective way.

Despite some of these challenges, the efforts and achievements of the newly formed municipality of Gracanica were praised by those in the debate. At the beginning of the debate, the mayor of Gracanica presented some facts outlining his view that the establishment of the municipality was positive with respect to improving the functioning of the municipality through institution of more effective management and efficient services to citizens. The transfer of competencies has concluded in almost all spheres and discussions are ongoing regarding the transfer of remaining responsibilities.

These positive facts were acknowledged by the Minister who stressed the importance of the functioning of the municipality and praised the municipality for its provision of administrative services to citizens and its operating at full administrative capacity. Municipality investments undertaken thus far are positively impacting the lives of citizens, which in turn contributes to the improvement of services and helps promote new perspectives regarding the potential future of the municipality.

There was disagreement expressed by the Serb leader regarding the positive figures presented at the debate. The functioning of the municipality was challenged with the example of the municipality budget, which is currently generated from the central budget and donations. It was contended that this will have a negative impact as it will make it more difficult for the municipality to generate income in the future, and in turn



Left to Right: Zarko Korac, Riza Hailimi, Yiber Hysa, Ardian Gjini, and Laszlo Jozsa.

this will weaken the services provided to citizens. The full transfer of competencies was seen as another challenge mainly related to delays in defining municipality borders, cadastral books, and office premises.

Some criticism was directed towards the transparency of the municipality in its work. Allegedly, few tenders were awarded to Serbian implementing companies and few Serb employees from the community have benefited from large infrastructural projects. It was stated that according to research conducted by MLGA and USAID, the participation of citizens in the decision-making process in the municipality is at a very low level. According to this data, results regarding the functioning of the newly formed municipality of Gracanica are below Kosovo's average in all areas of local governance.

The future of the education system was also an important topic for the participants in the debate. It was stated that the Serbian community would not accept any changes in the education curriculum taught by Serbs and none of the Serb Mayors would accept implementation of such direction. Education is a serious issue that requires broader consensus at the central level. One of the Serb representative argued that there should be no obstacle in cooperating with the Serbian parallel institutions. One of the examples given was the work of the health centre in Gracanica and the expansion of its services to all citizens despite some of the challenges faced in the field.

A common understanding among all present in the debate was that there are difficulties for the Kosovo government in taking full responsibility in the health sector, however, some discussions were held and it remains to be seen how this will be concluded. In addition, budgetary constraints hampers the efforts of the government to take full responsibility over the education sector currently managed by the Serbian government. Due to the high numbers, including the 'parallel' students and teachers in the payroll of the Kosovo institutions will present a formidable challenge. With respect to future integration of the Serbian community into Kosovo, participants mainly stated that there is a need to increase the standards and quality of life within the Serbian community in Kosovo before requiring the community to widely integrate into Kosovan society.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS*

(English alphabetical order)

Kosovo Participants

Arban Abrashi, Adviser to the Minister, Ministry of Local Government Administration
Urim Ahmeti, Development Assistance Specialist, Office for Democracy and Governance, USAID Mission in Kosovo
Enver Ajvazi, Director, Department of Administration, Municipality of Kamenica (2)
Petar Aksic, Serbian Radical Party, Gjilan/Gnjilane (3)
Ahmet Aliu, Director of Administration and Personnel, Shterpce/Strpce
Hamdi Aliu, Deputy President, Municipality of Strpce/Shterpce Democratic Party of Kosovo (3)
Nexhmedin Arifi, Mayor, Municipality of Viti; Democratic Party of Kosovo
Igor Aritonovic, Deputy President, Municipal Assembly of Gracanica; Technical Secretary, Independent Liberal Party
Jefta Arsic, Djurdevdan Herdelezi (2)
Snezana Arsic, Democratic Party Municipality of Strpce/Shterpce
Xhevat Azemi, Deputy Director, Kosovo Property Agency
Laura Bahtiri, Decentralization Officer, International Civilian Office, Regional Office Gjilan/Gnjilane
Naim Behluli, Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Local Government Administration
Burim Berisha, Mayor, Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje; Democratic League of Kosovo (1)
Xhevat Bislimi, Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Viti
Alfred Boll, Political Officer, Embassy of the United States Pristina, Kosovo (3)
Flora Brovina, Member of the Parliament, Democratic Party of Kosovo
Shukri Buja, Mayor, Municipality of Lipjan/Lipljan, Democratic Party of Kosovo (2)
Nenad Cvetkovic, Mayor, Municipality of Partes/Partesh (2)
Samet Dalipi, Senior Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Local Government Administration
Sasa Dedovic, Social Democratic Party of Serbia, Mitrovica (2)
Christopher Dell, US Ambassador to Kosovo
Radovan Denic, Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Novo Brdo; Union of Independent Social-Democrats of Kosovo and Metohija (3)
Ferhat Dinosh, Minister for Human and Minority Rights, Member, Parliament of Montenegro; President, Democratic Union of Albanians
Sasa Djokic, President, Serbian Democratic Party of Kosovo and Metohija (5)
Slobodan Draskovic, Mayor, Municipality of Medvedja
Zivojin Dzaklic, Citizens Group "Za evropsko Gnjilane"
Raif Elezi, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Local Government Administration (4)
Shpend Emini, Senior Project Officer, Project on Ethnic Relations Kosovo (1)
Beqir Fejzullahu, Engineer, Democratic Party of Kosovo (4)
Sadri Ferati, Minister, Ministry of Local Government Administration (3)

* The number in parentheses indicates the number of PER roundtables the participant attended. Where no number appears, the person took part in one roundtable only. Some participants have changed their titles during the time period in which this project has taken place. Only the titles at the time of their latest attendance are listed.

Jose Garzon, Director, Office for Democracy and Governance, USAID Mission in Kosovo
Abdullah Gashi, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo Municipality of Novoberde/Novobrd
Alush Gashi, Member of the Parliament, Democratic League of Kosovo (2)
Shpetim Gashi, Senior Project Officer, Project on Ethnic Relations (8)
Ardian Gjini, President of the Parliamentary Group, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (5)
Dukagjin Gorani, Adviser to the Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo (3)
Branislav Grbic, Member, Kosovo Assembly; New Democracy (5)
Predrag Grbic, Together for the Sirinic Valley, Municipality of Shterpce/Strpce
Lirim Greiçevci, Advisor to the Prime Minister
Alex Grigor'ev, Executive Director, Project on Ethnic Relations (8)
Bojana Gudzić, Communication for Social Development, Gracanica
Ali Halimi, Socialist Party of Kosovo, Municipality of Strpce/Shterpce (2)
Fadil Halimi, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (2) Municipality of Strpce/Strpce
Halim Halimi, Director, Department of Administration, Municipality of Prishtina
Riza Halimi, Member of Parliament of Serbia, Presevo
Hamdi Haliti, Democratic League of Kosovo (3)
Ismet Hashani, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Communities and Returns
Lutfi Haziri, Minister, Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports
Enver Hoxhaj, Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo, Government of Kosovo
Ylber Hysa, Government Coordinator for the North (2)
Agim Hyseni, Deputy Minister for Education, Science and Technology, Government of Kosovo
Bahri Hyseni, Member of Parliament, Democratic Party of Kosovo, Chairperson of Legislation Committee (1)
Valdete Idrizi, Director, Community Building Mitrovica
Sladjan Ilic, Serbian Democratic Movement, Strpce/Shterpce (7)
Tefik Islami, Democratic League of Dardania, Municipality of Strpce/Shterpce(2)
Sreten Ivanovic, Citizens' Initiative for Novo Brdo (2)
Velibor Ivanovic, Leader of Village Kusce, Novo Brdo/Novoberde (2)
Aleksandar Janicevic, Hotel Narcis, Inex
Naser Jashari, Committee for Community Affairs (1)
Jugoslav Jovanovic, Gradjanska inicijativa - Pasjane (1)
Srdjan Jovanovic, Independent Liberal Party (7)
Vesna Jovanovic, Social Democratic Party, Partes (4)
Laszlo Jozsa, Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians
Avni Kastrati, Mayor, Municipality of Mitrovica (2)
Nebojsa Kenic, Municipality of Ranilug
Lejla Kolenovic, Project Management Specialist, Office for Democracy and Governance, USAID Mission in Kosovo (12)
Zarko Korac, Member, Parliament of Serbia; President, Social Democratic Union, Belgrade
Mita Kovacevic, Democratic Party, Gjilan/Gnjilane (2)
Fadil Krasniqi, Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje
Dragisa Krstovic, Liberal Democratic Party, Laposavic (2)
Albana Kusari, USAID Mission in Kosovo
Mimoza Kusari, Deputy President, New Kosovo Alliance (3)
Srecko Letic, People's Party of Kosovo, Shterpce/Strpce (3)
Avni Limani, NGO Sharri, Shterpce/Strpce
Marjan Ljubic, Department of Education, Municipality of Shterpce/Strpce
Ibrahim Makolli, Deputy President of the Alliance New Kosova, New Kosovo Alliance; Head of the AKR parliamentary group in the Kosovo Assembly
Sadik Makolli, Socialist Party of Kosovo Novoberde/Novo Brdo (1)

Nenad Maksimovic, Center for Peace and Tolerance (2)
Leon Malazogu, Head of Kosovo Office, Project on Ethnic Relations Kosovo (20)
Shkelzen Maliqi, Publicist (2)
Alexandros Mallias, Special Advisor to ELIAMEP; Former Ambassador of Greece to Washington, Skopje and Tirana
Branislav Markovic, Political Assistant, Embassy of the United States Pristina, Kosovo
Maja Markovic, Embassy of the United States Pristina, (2)
Nenad Markovic, Village Leader of Stanisor, Municipality of Novo Brdo/Novoberde (2)
Agron Maxhuni, Director of the Legal Department, Ministry of Local Government Administration (2)
Murat Meha, Director, Kosovo Cadastral Agency
Jason Melfi, Senior Local Government Advisor, USAID's Effective Municipalities Initiative
Christelle Melly, Decentralization Officer, International Civilian Office, Regional Office Gjilan/Gnjilane
Aleksandar Mihajlovic, Serbian Democratic Party of Kosovo and Metohija (2)
Gradimir Mikic, Mayor, Municipality of Ranilug/Ranillug (6)
Petar Miletic, Chairperson, SLS Parliamentary Caucus; Secretary General, Independent Liberal Party, Pristina/Prishtina; Member, Assembly of Kosovo (5)
Verica Milosevic, Municipal Preparation Team
Jelica Minic, Deputy President, Serbian Party of Kosovo and Metohija
Dragisa Miric, Member, Assembly of Kosovo; President, Serbian Party of Kosovo and Metohija (2)
Sasa Mirkovic, Mayor, Municipality of Klokot/Vrbovac
Bojan Mladenovic, Radio Herc
Shkelzen Morina, Director, Property Tax Department, Ministry of Economy and Finance
Wolff-Michael Mors, Director, Human Rights and Communities Department, OSCE Mission in Kosovo
Dejan Mrdjinnac, Independent Liberal Party, Shterpce/Strpce
Valon Murati, Human Rights Center of the University of Prishtina (2)
Qemajl Mustafa, Mayor, Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane (3)
Rafael Naegeli, Head, Community Affairs Unit, International Civilian Office (2)
Bratislav Nikolic, Mayor, Municipality of Strpce/Shterpce (5)
Dragan Nikolic, G17 Plus, Partes
Kosara Nikolic, Member of Parliament; Member of the Committee on Budget and Finances
Randjel Nojkic, President, Kosovo Branch, Serbian Renewal Movement, Gracanica (12)
Angelique Olmo, Development Officer, Project on Ethnic Relations
Besnik Osmani, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government Administration (2)
Bozidar Peric, Municipal Preparation Team, Partesh/Parteš
Nebojsa Peric, Adviser, Municipality of Gracanica; President, Citizens Group Vidovdan (6)
Igor Petrovic, Serb Party of Kosovo and Metohija
Slobodan Petrovic, President, Independent Liberty Party, Pristina (6)
Zvonko Petrovic, Municipal Preparation Team, Partesh/Parteš
Livia Plaks, President, Project on Ethnic Relations (20)
Petrit Popova, Director of Local Budgets, Ministry of Economy and Finance
Srdjan Popovic, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (2)
Viktor Popovic, Project Officer, Project on Ethnic Relations Kosovo (2)
Ljubisa Racicevic, Activist, Coordinator for Culture, Shterpce/Strpce
Patricia Rader, Director, USAID Mission in Kosovo (2)
Nenad Radosavljevic, Director, RTV Mir, Laposavic (4)
Anamari Repic, Deputy General Director, Radio Television of Kosovo (2)
Randy Repola, Chief of Party, USAID's Effective Municipalities Initiative
Vidak Ristovic, Citizens Group Vidovdan
Mihailo Scepanovic, Member, Assembly of Kosovo; Serbian People's Party (2)

Patrick Schmelzer, Policy Officer, Political, Economic and EU Integration Section, European Commission Liaison Office to Kosovo

Oliver Schmidt-Gutzat, Senior Adviser on Non-Albanian Communities, OSCE Mission in Kosovo

Srdjan Sentic, Adviser to the Prime Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo (9)

Ahmet Shala, Minister, Ministry of Economy and Finance

Gianluca Siega-Battel, Chief of the Communities Section, OSCE Mission in Kosovo

Haki Sinani, Democratic League of Dardania (2)

Khaldoun Sinno, Head of Political, Economic and EU Integration Section, European Commission Liaison Office to Kosovo (2)

Dragana Stanic, Center for Peace and Tolerance

Aleksandar Stojanovic, Center for the Development of Local Areas (3)

Bojan Stojanovic, Mayor, Municipality of Gracanica; Independent Liberal Party (3)

Milan Stojanovic, Vice President, Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane (2)

Dragana Stolic, Assistant Policy Officer, European Commission Liaison Office to Kosovo (2)

Shaip Surdulli, Mayor, Municipality of Kamenica (1)

Sabit Sylejmani, Democratic League of Kosovo (3)

Edita Tahiri, Minister, Ministry of Public Administration

Hashim Thaci, Prime Minister of Kosovo

Radoica Tomic, Director of Urbanism, Municipality of Strpce

Rada Trajkovic, Serb National Council of Kosovo and Metohija (2)

Momcilo Trajkovic, President, Serb Resistance Movement, Gracanica (2)

Vladan Trific, Decentralization Officer, International Civilian Office

Rozafa Ukimeraj, Director, Department of Local Self-governance, Ministry of Local Government Administration (1)

Vlasta Velkovic, United Serbia Party, Shterpce/Strpce

Malisa Venhari, Program Officer, Kosovo Office, Project on Ethnic Relations Kosovo

Dejan Vlajkovic, Director, Department of Administration, Municipality of Klokot/Vrbovac

Musa Xhaferi, Minister, Ministry of Local Government; Deputy Premier, Democratic Union for Integration, Skopje

Bajrush Ymeri, Democratic League of Kosovo (6)

Sinan Ymeri, Deputy President of the Municipal Assembly, Shterpce/Strpce

Izmi Zeka, Municipal Assembly, Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane (1)

Saranda Zeqiri, Office Manager, Project on Ethnic Relations Kosovo

Milivoje Zivkovic, Office of Community Affairs, Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane

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