

Inclusion of Kosovo Serb Civil Society in Policy-Making

The Council for Inclusive Governance organized on June 29, 2016 in Pristina a roundtable for Kosovo government officials, including the prime minister and the minister for dialogue, and a number of Kosovo Serb civil society representatives. The objective of the meeting was to discuss ideas about including Kosovo Serbs civil society in the discussions and formulation of policies and engage them more on issues of the Brussels dialogue.

The roundtable is part of a larger project on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia funded by and implemented in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The following points are based on the roundtable discussions and have not been reviewed by the participants. CIG takes responsibility for its content.

- The telephone code for Kosovo, agreement on energy, opening of the main Mitrovica Bridge, and formation of the Association/Community of Serb-Majority Municipalities are the main issues of the Brussels dialogue not implemented yet. The implementation of the justice agreement is underway.
- Government officials said that without the telephone code, energy, and dismantling of Serbia's parallel structures, they will not establish the Association/Community. However, they said that a management team is already in place and will start drafting the statute soon. In addition, the government will form another team that will deal with the dismantling of parallel structures. A speaker complained that three years after the agreement, the government is still working on the statute, but a government official replied that the existence of parallel institutions is delaying the process and that their dismantling is a non-negotiable precondition for the formation of the Association/Community. A speaker suggested to prepare the legal framework for the Association/Community and that establishment of the Association/Community and the dismantling of parallel institutions to take place on the same day.
- Parallel structures should not be dismantled before a model for their integration is found. Many speakers said that parallel structures are there for practical reasons, not political. They offer services—such as distribution of pensions—that no other institution offers. In addition, closing them would leave over 5,500 people without jobs. So closure of parallel institutions would cause chaos, panic, and lots of people might leave Kosovo, disintegrating rather than integrating the Serb community, many speakers said. Pristina should know that preserving jobs is important. Kosovo itself

has an overloaded administration, with over 80,000 people in the public sector, and despite repeated calls by the EU and IMF to reform and downsize the administration, Pristina has so far not taken any steps in such direction, primarily because it is aware that sacking employees massively would create chaos and would not be politically beneficial for the governing parties.

- Privatization of public companies in Serb-majority municipalities will give priority to Kosovo Serb investors, government officials said. Some speakers said that privatization of Brezovica should be given priority as it would offer employment opportunities for many people.
- Engagement of Kosovo Serbs in the Brussels dialogue directly or indirectly would contribute to reaching better agreements and implementation. A speaker said that Kosovo Serbs are left out of the dialogue and are simply served agreements they are not familiar with. Also, many said that the Serb MPs in Kosovo's parliament should be engaged in policy-making more.
- More offices offering services to the Serbs in the north should be opened. The nearest office for Leposavic residents to apply for ID cards is 15 kilometers away. Without offering details, many speakers suggested easing the administrative procedures for obtaining documents.
- Some funds from the Development Fund for the north should also go for grants for civil society organizations, though most of it is dedicated to municipalities.
- Improvement of Serb-Albanian relations in Kosovo would contribute to the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade, thus meeting a key condition for EU membership. Many speakers said that without good neighborly relations, prospects of Serbia and Kosovo to become members are not good.
- Promoting a "depoliticization process" is urgent and necessary. Almost every issue is politicized, thus complicating their resolution. This process should begin with the government where relations between Serb and Albanian ministers are dominated entirely by politics. A speaker said that the government itself is not integrated, let alone the society. "Serb ministers do a lot of things that are not always in line with the government policy."
- Belgrade is engaged more than it should in Kosovo politics, but this is not the Kosovo Serbs' fault, but Pristina's. Pristina says working with Belgrade is easier because it "delivers." Kosovo Serbs should not be blamed for Belgrade's increasing role in Kosovo's politics and policy-making, a number of speakers said.

The participants agreed to organize regular communication on the issues addressed in Brussels as well as on local issues. One of the strongest and consensual recommendations from the meeting was that the inclusion of Kosovo Serbs in the process is key.

Participants

Government of Kosovo

Isa Mustafa, Prime Minister of Kosovo

Edita Tahiri, Minister for Dialogue, Government of Kosovo

Bajram Gecaj, Deputy Minister of Local Government Administration and Adviser to the Prime Minister of Kosovo

Valon Murtezaj, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Kosovo

Kosovo Serb Civil Society Representatives

Milica Andrić, Project Manager, NGO Aktiv, Mitrovica North

Dragiša Krstović, Former Member, Parliament of Kosovo, Leposavic

Petar Miletić, Former Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Kosovo, Pristina

Miodrag Miličević, Executive Director, NGO Aktiv, Mitrovica North

Dušan Radaković, Director, Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture, Mitrovica North

Nenad Radosavljević, Director, RTV Mir, Leposavic

Živojin Rakočević, Director, Culture Center, Gracanica

Sanja Sovrlić, Journalist, RTV Mir, Leposavic

Rada Trajković, Executive Director, European Movement, Gracanica

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Council for Inclusive Governance

Shpetim Gashi, Vice President, Council for Inclusive Governance

Alex Roinishvili Grigorev, President, Council for Inclusive Governance

Arber Kuçi, Representative in Kosovo, Council for Inclusive Governance

Krystyna Marty Lang, Ambassador of Switzerland to Kosovo

Roland Salvisberg, Head, Peace Policy, Human Security Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland

Saskia Salzmann, Regional Human Security Adviser, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland

Talia Wohl, Program Officer, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland