Report

APRIL 17-18, 2004
TIRANA, ALBANIA

JULY 9-11, 2004
BLED, SLOVENIA

WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS PER

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PREFACE

PER has been mediating interethnic disputes in the Balkans for over a decade, working closely with political leaders. The number of women occupying senior elective positions, although still disproportionately small (except in Kosovo where a quota is mandated by the international community), is nevertheless significant and growing. Against considerable odds, a group of exceptional women politicians, many of them young, has emerged—holding forth a promise of fresh approaches within this political neighborhood. Most are well-educated, and have enjoyed significant international exposure. But they face exceptional challenges. Despite the lip service to women's equality, political activities and public decision-making remain male-dominated arenas.

PER does not subscribe to the cliché that women have a larger stake than men in avoiding violent conflict. Indeed, it would be naïve to suggest that women politicians automatically bring moderation to interethnic issues. Rather, the promise of women politicians lies elsewhere: their very participation introduces a new dimension—gender—to the list of variables that the political system must take into account in reckoning with constituencies.

Left to right: Liljana Popovska, Vesna Perovic, Livia Plaks, Gordana Comic, Ermelinda Meksi and Edita Tahiri.

As marginalized figures in their societies, women policy makers share a bond that has the potential for expanding understanding across ethnic, national, and party lines. However, until now, they have not had the opportunity nor the institutional capacity to meet and consult as a group. With the financial support of the U.S. Department of State, the Project on Ethnic Relations has sought to change this reality—creating a framework for senior women parliamentarians of the region to discuss their common problems and to fashion a set of policy recommendations and proposals to advance interethnic cooperation.

Designed as a two-part program, PER's project on "Women in Governance and Interethnic Relations" is to be distinguished from more general discussions of gender issues, because it takes place in the context of our ongoing regional series "Albanians and Their Neighbors"—a project of international prominence in which prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs, and heads of political parties take part. (Please see www.per-usa.org for reports of previous meetings in Athens, Budapest, and Lucerne.) By bringing more women politicians into this regional dialogue, and incorporating their findings into this discussion, PER hopes to elevate women's voices to the highest levels of decision-making in managing interethnic relations.

The "Women in Governance and Interethnic Relations" project occurred in two phases: The first, a regional roundtable held in Tirana, Albania, in April 2004, brought together a group of senior-level women politicians from the Western Balkans as well as their counterparts from the international community. The second phase, a smaller meeting of select women policy makers from the region, took place in Bled, Slovenia, in July 2004. During this historic meeting, participants deliberated for two days over the content of a set of policy essays and proposals devised to address the potential for alternative paths in the management of interethnic conflict. (A summary of both meetings is included herewith, as are excerpts of the policy essays debated in Bled.)

As evidenced by the exchanges documented herein, the communiqué issued in April, and the participants' thoughtful essays, the quality of these discussions well surpassed PER's expectations. In addition to exploring the role of women in conflict and public life, participants delved into the intricacies of the region's thorniest disputes, including the future of Kosovo, and relations between Albanians and their neighbors.

PER is hopeful that the relationships formed through this project will help to forge a lasting partnership among women politicians in Southeastern Europe. By introducing such new and overlapping complexities to the interethnic question, we aim to dilute the nearly exclusive and destructive focus on ethnicity that now characterizes the politics of the region.

PER expresses our deep appreciation to the participants for their insightful contributions and tireless commitment to this project. We would also like to thank the U.S. Department of State, Ermelinda Meksi, Albania's Minister for Integration, James Jeffrey, former U.S. Ambassador to Albania, and Rima Koyler, a Political Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tirana, for their critical support of this initiative. Alex N. Grigor'ev, PER Senior Program Officer, and Patrice Chadwick, PER Administrative Associate, who were both conference participants, were responsible for organizing the meetings. Barbara Feinstein, PER Associate, who was also a conference participant, is the author of this report, which was edited by PER staff.

Both meetings were chaired by PER Executive Director Livia B. Plaks.

Except as otherwise noted, participants' statements are without attribution, following PER's practice of encouraging frank and open discussion. Views expressed in this report are of the participants only and not those of PER. PER does not endorse or support any particular views expressed by the participants and recorded in this report. The participants have not had the opportunity to review the text of this report, for which PER assumes full responsibility.

Allen H. Kassof, *President*
Livia B. Plaks, *Executive Director*
Princeton, New Jersey

September 2004

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

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

For the sake of simplicity, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is referred to as "Macedonia."

Left to right: Anna Karamanou, Elizabeth Rehn, Livia Plaks and Ermelinda Meksi.

Participants in the Tirana roundtable.

INTRODUCTION

On April 17-18, 2004, the Project on Ethnic Relations, with financial assistance from the U.S. Department of State, convened a regional roundtable in Tirana, Albania—the first of a two-phase program on "Women in Governance and Interethnic Relations." Attended by a select group of women members of governments and parliaments from the Western Balkans as well as representatives of the international community, including the U.S. Ambassador to Albania, senior representatives of the European Parliament and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Macedonia, and the former Vice President of the German Bundestag, the objectives of the meeting were threefold: 1) to strengthen the voices of senior-level women politicians as participants in the region's interethnic dialogue; 2) to gain an understanding of the role of women in interethnic relations and the obstacles they face within their respective countries; and 3) to assess the possibilities and lay the groundwork for a region-wide interethnic network of women policy makers.

Facilitated by PER's Executive Director, the meeting centered on the following questions:

- Are there important intra-country differences among political parties in the countries of South Eastern Europe with respect to the role of women in politics? Do women bring a different perspective to interethnic issues than do men?

- Is it a political liability or a political advantage for women politicians to be involved in interethnic issues? Do women politicians have to be "tougher" than their male counterparts to remain competitive?

- Can women politicians campaign across ethnic lines by appealing to all women voters on issues that concern them as women? If so, what are those issues? What are the political costs and advantages in addressing those issues?

- Do women political leaders bring special advantages in efforts to bridging social and cultural divides by working with their counterparts across ethnic lines?

- How do women in local governance figure in national and regional inter-ethnic politics?

- How can women politicians from all ethnic communities benefit from regular or organized contacts and communication? How should these be arranged?

What follows is a characterization of these exchanges.

WOMEN POLICY MAKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF "ALBANIANS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS"

PER's Executive Director opened the meeting, underscoring the importance of situating the discussion within the context of PER's regional dialogue on "Albanians and Their Neighbors," a project of several years standing that brings together heads of state, ministers of foreign affairs, and chiefs of political parties. (The fourth roundtable held in Lucerne, Switzerland, took place one month after this meeting, on May 21-22, 2004, and featured two participants from the Tirana roundtable.) Calling the tensions between Albanians and their neighbors "the most serious" of "all the ethnic divides in Southeastern Europe," she noted that the region's most recent conflicts, "in Kosovo, Macedonia, and south Serbia," have been "fought across this divide." That is why, she said, "we have around the table high-level women politicians from countries where Albanians represent a high percentage of the population."

Indeed, both the meeting's most promising example of accommodation—Macedonia's interethnic governing coalition—as well as its most divisive issue—Kosovo's final status in the wake of recent violence—revolved around the question of Albanians and their neighbors.

Recent Violence in Kosovo

Discussions concerning the relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, the province's "final status," and the recent violence there, were among the meeting's most heated exchanges. The events of March 2004, which claimed the lives of nineteen persons and injured more than five hundred, were fresh in the minds of all participants, but were particularly salient for Serb and Kosovo Albanian politicians, who argued over both the characterization of, and impetus for, the violence.

According to most Serb participants, the atrocities represented a systematic campaign of "ethnic cleansing" targeted at the province's Serb minority—a charge that Albanian participants rejected as preposterous. Said one Kosovo Albanian politician: "What happened in March was a rather complex process. The Serb minority was a target, but it was not the only one."

Citing attacks on local structures in Kosovo as well as the buildings that house the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), this participant characterized the violence as "a revolt of citizens" expressing their "dissatisfaction with international and national institutions." "Let us consider it a gross incident," offered a politician from Albania, contrasting the violence with what she considered to be the "real ethnic cleansing" committed against Kosovo Albanians and Bosnjaks "in the former Yugoslav space."

"We have to call things by their real names," countered a Serb politician from Belgrade. "If you burn people's homes," she argued, "forcing an ethnic minority community to take refuge" in order to "save their lives and the lives of their families and children, that is called ethnic cleansing and it should be openly stated as such." The events of mid-March represented "the most brutal form of ethnic cleansing," continued a Kosovo Serb participant; "ethnic cleansing occurred in both a material and spiritual way—more than 500 houses were burned; more than 4000 had to flee their homes."

Final Status for Kosovo—Premature or Not Soon Enough?

Participants also tussled over the cause of the violence in Kosovo as well as its broader implications for the region's future. Whereas Kosovo Albanians argued that the province's future stability was contingent on resolving its "final status," Serb participants viewed the recent violence as evidence that such talks are still premature.

Said one Serb participant from Belgrade who had visited Kosovo during the previous week: "Unfortunately, the seed of trust that was planted in 1999 has vanished." Echoing this sentiment, her colleague called it "completely irresponsible" to discuss Kosovo's final status, arguing that such talks can only go forward once "we establish the right to life, freedom of movement and respect for [the tenets of UN Resolution] 1244."

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Yet, it is this very issue that fuels the instability in Kosovo, argued Kosovo Albanian participants. "Recognizing the independence of Kosovo will stabilize the region," offered one politician, adding that the region's

interethnic problems can be attributed to three "open political questions": the status of Kosovo, "the future of the Montenegrin state, and the issue of the Bosnian protectorate." Only by recognizing nations' rights to "self-determination," she argued, can leaders resolve these difficulties. Indeed, added another politician from Kosovo: "the sooner that Serbia understands that there was a divorce, the better it will be for Serbia and Kosovo."

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Seeking to remind Serb and Albanian participants that their predicament is by no means unique, the chair shared with the group PER's five "rules of interethnic conflict," noting the similarities between the situations they describe and the Albanian-Serb conflict. "In interethnic conflict," she noted, "everyone is right…Bad behavior always displaces good behavior, but good behavior rarely discourages bad behavior." In "trying to resolve interethnic conflicts," she continued, the timing is always wrong; by the time the timing is right, it is usually too late." In "resolving interethnic conflicts," noted this participant, "the devil is in the details; agreements in principle often break down when they are to be implemented." Finally, she offered, "in every two-sided interethnic conflict, there are at least four sides."

Exhorting her colleagues to consider "what kind of society [they] want to live in five or ten years from now," this participant urged those around the table to take heed of the unprecedented interethnic cooperation exemplified by women politicians in Macedonia. "One of the reasons Macedonia has been successful [in averting further conflict]" she argued, is because "politicians on all sides of the ethnic divide have started talking *to* each other rather than *at* each other."

Interethnic Cooperation—The Macedonian Case

The chair highlighted a number of examples of interethnic cooperation, which, she counseled, should serve as a source of inspiration for all participants. Most notable among these is the Macedonian case, she contended, whereby two women politicians—one ethnic Albanian, the other, ethnic Macedonian, "initiated the working relationship between the two parties that eventually grew into a governing coalition agreement."

Remarkably, she added, "they achieved this following a bloody conflict between their two communities."

According to a Macedonian participant, the partnership was formed in the aftermath of the 2001 conflict, when this participant reached out privately to her counterpart on the other side of the ethnic divide. On the basis of this encounter, she added, the two women established a "political partnership" that would help spur the formation of the interethnic coalition that has governed the country since the fall of 2002. "We crossed borders not only of ethnicity," she offered, "but of prejudices created after the conflict."

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As senior members of both the Macedonian government as well as their respective political parties, these women continue to serve as key contributors to PER's senior-level dialogues among members of Macedonia's governing coalition and opposition parties concerning the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement—an internationally brokered truce credited with ending the 2001 conflict. (Please visit www.per-usa.org to read past reports from the Mavrovo series.)

The Macedonian case was cited repeatedly throughout the discussions as evidence of what can be achieved through interethnic alliances among women leaders.

Interethnic Tolerance—The Kosovo Case

Participants were also inspired by the message of tolerance promoted by an ethnic Albanian physician-turned-activist from Kosovo, described by one participant as "perhaps the only politician from [the Democratic Party of Kosova] who can freely travel to Serbia and has done so."

Arrested in 1999 during the NATO bombing, this participant—a pediatrician and recent candidate for Kosovo's presidency—served two years in a Serbian prison under the Milosevic regime. Subjected to

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psychological as well as physical torture, today she speaks of tolerance and the need for greater understanding, above all, between Serbs and Albanians.

"Hatred doesn't help us," she counseled participants at the Tirana round-table. "I want to see a Kosovo equal for all citizens," she declared, adding that this includes "equality for Serbs." "Dialogue is the only means to accomplish" this goal, she continued. "Dialogue requires at least two parties, political will, and reciprocal tolerance." Moreover, she added, it requires "courageous steps to be undertaken by both sides—the majority and the minority."

UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

While the Macedonian case is laudable, noted several participants, it belies a fundamental reality—relatively few women in the region occupy positions of real influence or power. "Men set political priorities, and political culture continues to be highly male-oriented," observed one participant. "The lack of gender balance on mediation and negotiating committees," she observed, is "particularly striking."

Marginalizing women minimizes the chances for successful conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict democratic processes.

Women face significant barriers to participation in public life, noted the participants, adding that this takes place despite the fact that women policy makers are, on the average, better educated than their male colleagues. "In spite of the role and recognized contribution of women to the promotion of peace and security," commented an international participant, "women are still marginalized or excluded from peace-building processes during conflict as well as the democratization processes in societies in transition from conflict."

Marginalizing women in these areas, she maintained, represents not only "a waste of resources, skills and competence," but more troubling yet, it "minimizes the chances for successful conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict democratic processes."

Seeing Through Quotas

Although women may "often have the solution," argued one West European participant, "they don't have the power to solve the conflicts." The issue of equitable representation for women in government loomed large over the weekend's discussions. While participants agreed that more women are needed at all levels of government in the region, fulfilling gender quotas, they argued, is not enough. Rather, they maintained, it is vital that women fill positions of authority—that they assume a principal role at the negotiating table.

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It is important to take an in-depth look at "gender mainstreaming," noted another West European participant; while countries point to the increasing number of women in parliament, she cautioned, "we have to pay attention to the real decision-making bodies." Just because women are better represented in government, does not mean, she argued, "that they are making key decisions."

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Indeed, added a Kosovo Albanian participant, in Kosovo, women make up "30 percent" of the government, but "where," she asked, "is the decision-making?" Responding to this critique, a West European participant asked: "How much is the international community guilty of this?" At the senior-most levels of international decision-making, she noted, the situation for women is not much better. "At the highest levels," she said, "the internationals are men who are negotiating with your men."

"Twofold Discrimination": Women as Ethnic Minorities

The ramifications of women's under-representation are particularly acute for women in ethnic minority communities, observed a U.S. participant. These communities are represented "almost exclusively by males when it comes to discussing their position, interests and problems with the majority community," she noted. At the same time, when "specific questions pertaining to women in general are being dealt with," she

continued, "the voices of these groups of women are seldom heard." The result, noted this speaker, is that women in ethnic minority communities are "likely to suffer from twofold discrimination," both as members of an ethnic minority and "when they are compared to men in their community."

DOES GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Issues of representation aside, participants were asked to consider whether women are qualitatively different from men when it comes to interethnic disputes. Must they be tougher than their male counterparts in order to remain competitive; and is the terrain of interethnic relations riskier for women than men? On these issues as well as others, the participants offered varying perspectives.

Women may bring a unique outlook to the issue of interethnic relations, said several participants—in large part, because as mothers and educators, they understand the importance of promoting tolerance and under-

Women approach situations differently— they are more in favor of dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

standing. Women can help to reduce hate and fear, said one participant from Kosovo: "We can raise our families and tell our children that it's just history."

According to several participants, women's values are indeed different from men's; women, they suggested, are less likely to resolve conflict through violence. In the words of one participant, "women approach situations differently—they are more in favor of dialogue and peaceful coexistence." Women can more easily "forgive the painful stories of our past," added a politician from Albania, principally because they are less likely than men to have been active participants in war and conflict. When elected to positions of power, suggested one West European participant, women leaders articulate more benevolent "women's priorities," including environmental protection, and "giv[ing] aid to developing countries."

Yet not all participants drew such a clear distinction between the genders. "In one way we've made women saints around this table," commented a West European participant, adding that "women are not saints." Pointing to "warlike" leaders such as Britain's Margaret Thatcher and Israel's Golda Meir, she noted that above all, "women are human."

Echoing this perspective, a Belgrade participant maintained that in their tolerant outlook, the women around the table were perhaps "the minority" in their countries. "More than fifty percent of active women voters in Serbia vote for nationalist forces," she said, a trend which "arises from their upbringing and from their traditional roles." Women "simply follow a man's way," she noted. As such, she argued, it is women politi-

More than fifty percent of active women voters in Serbia vote for nationalist forces. Women simply follow a man's way.

cians' obligation to "provide them with the education and upbringing that is in line with [democratic] standards and values."

The world of politics is still fundamentally a man's domain, offered a Kosovo Albanian participant; thus, "when women enter politics, they enter the framework of politics" and all that that world entails. A woman has to "be tougher" and work "ten times harder than [her male] colleague to achieve the same kind of influence," added a Serb participant. Still, added a participant from Montenegro, it is important that "women should remain women in politics." "If we say that politics needs women," she continued, "it is because women are different from men." Moreover, added the previous Serb speaker, as women, "[we] have an additional duty to create space for those who come after [us]. That's a debt that we have to our grandmothers who fought for the right to vote."

"Do women offer a different perspective than do men?" she asked. "Not yet. We are messengers of our political parties, of our states—but we are not creators with the opportunity to offer a vision."

This vision is critical to the future of the region, agreed all participants. Said one participant from Kosovo: "We have a responsibility to build a better future for the new generation. Regardless of the marginal role we have today, we have to not only empower ourselves but also work for change in the region."

NETWORKING AS A MEANS TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS

Several participants spoke of the necessity for a regional interethnic dialogue among women policy makers, underscoring the way in which women's networks have exercised a powerful influence on the political situation within their individual countries. Participants from Belgrade,

Skopje, Pristina, and elsewhere, testified to the power of women's networking, offering examples of how such networks have helped to bridge the ethnic divide in their countries, promote women candidates for elective office, and support those already in government.

One ethnic Macedonian participant spoke of the "Macedonian Women's Lobby," an "informal coalition" started more than four years ago as a gender taskforce of the Stability Pact. Because the group met "at the will and need of women in Macedonia," she said, it soon evolved into a formidable political network encompassing women "from all sectors," including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, and government. The Lobby can claim several successes over the past four years, she added. Perhaps its most important contribution was the network's role in bringing together "a critical mass" of women from different faiths, ethnicities and political parties during the 2001 conflict in that country. "We talked a lot; we cried and quarreled," she added, but within "four to six hours," she noted, the women's lobby drafted "an appeal to the international community for peace. Indeed, continued this participant, it is this experience that has "enabled us to work together after the conflict."

A further example of interethnic women's networking was offered by a Kosovo Albanian participant active in the promotion of women's rights in Kosovo. In addition to putting into place officials (such as the Kosovo Assembly's Ombudsman for Gender Equality) charged with safeguarding the rights of women, she said, women leaders, in cooperation with NGOs and ethnic minorities, "have develop[ed] a program called 'Women Propose'" which includes [representatives] from all municipalities in Kosovo, including the Serb, Albanian, Turkish, and Bosnjak communities. Working together, she said, these women "have come up with a manifesto that lists the requests of women," as well as their goals.

"We need networking," argued a Serb participant from Belgrade, offering an example of how in 2000, a group of women in Serbia successfully worked to promote the elevation of women to serve in higher office. This network, made up of female political leaders, as well as women from NGOs, trade unions, and the media, shared a common goal—to involve "more women in politics, to get more women out to vote…and to hear the voices of the women of Serbia." Like the Macedonian Women's Lobby, this network also experienced success at the ballot box. According

to this participant, the group "brought…a huge number of women into parliament"; whereas before the 2000 elections, women made up only 1 percent of the parliament, "afterwards, women represented 15 percent of all parliamentarians."

However, members of the network made "one crucial mistake," conceded this participant—upon taking office, women policy makers grew complacent and "the network was not that active anymore." Consequently, she noted, the situation for women in Serbian politics today is more dire today than in 2000, in that women currently make up "less than one percent" of the parliament.

IN PURSUIT OF COMMON GOALS

In each of the aforementioned cases, participants cited the existence of "common goals" as being critical to their organization's success. As such, several of the women urged their colleagues to unite behind a set of shared goals and principles, including: Euro-Atlantic integration; respect for "universal human rights and the rule of law"; the battle against organized crime and human trafficking; and the rejection of violence as a primary means to solve conflict.

"The Rule of Law is the Best Friend of Every Woman"

"The rule of law is the best friend of every woman," observed a European participant. "For the last ten years of transition," lamented a Kosovo Albanian politician, "we've built a democratic infrastructure, but we've not built a democratic culture." Indeed, added a politician from Belgrade, "we can all agree that the most effective way to overcome our differences is the achievement of certain basic democratic values such as the respect for human rights, basic democratic rules and principles, institutions, tolerance, and trust-building."

The rule of law is the best friend of every woman.

Yet identifying common goals may not be enough to reduce interethnic tensions, argued one participant. Instead, it is critical that these goals also be superordinate—that is, that they require the cooperation of both sides in order to reach the intended aim. "Being already marginalized

[in their own societies]," observed a politician from Albania, "women need to cooperate over interethnic barriers." In short, it is in their collective interest to work together.

"Dreaming" of Euro-Atlantic Integration

In a similar fashion, continued this participant, policy makers across the region must work together to achieve the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration. "All of us dream of joining Europe," she said, adding that it is a "region-wide process," not one that can be carried out "by a single country alone." "We need to cross these borders—to enter Europe," continued a Macedonian politician, exhorting her colleagues to "work together to enter it." "My dream," she added, is that "one day through entering the [European Union], we'll come to the same situation in which citizens of the United States live."

> *All of us dream of joining Europe.*

ESTABLISHING A REGIONAL WOMEN'S INTERETHNIC NETWORK

Upon the conclusion of the Tirana roundtable, all participants indicated their willingness and commitment to pursuing this dialogue, through both formal and informal channels. Two politicians from Macedonia quickly seized this opportunity, inviting their Serb and Albanian counterparts from Kosovo to make an official parliamentary visit to Skopje. Still others pushed for a continuation of formal talks to be moderated by the Project on Ethnic Relations. Several of the Kosovo Albanian participants requested that the next meeting take place in Kosovo.

Above all, the participants were enthusiastic at the prospect of forming a regional women's interethnic network, charged with devising strategies to achieve their common goals, including the promotion of interethnic accord. A critical first step was taken in Tirana, where, at the conclusion of the meeting, participants issued the following joint communiqué:

COMMUNIQUÉ

"We, the participants of the roundtable "Women in Governance and Interethnic Relations" thank the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) for organizing this meeting, which we have found productive and worthwhile, and ask PER to reconvene the group.

We, women members of parliaments and governments from the Western Balkans, stand committed to continuing this discussion and to furthering a vision that is shared by women throughout the region—the promotion of interethnic dialogue and rejection of violence as a primary means to solve conflict. We believe that women bring a unique perspective and should play an important role in the prevention and resolution of vital questions of peace and security in the Balkans. The political culture in the region will most certainly improve with a greater balance in the participation of men and women in decision-making processes.

We believe that only by promoting democracy, respecting the rule of law, upholding human and minority rights, and creating equal standards for minorities throughout the region can we work to resolve issues important to all women and to our societies. By establishing a regional network, we aim to foster the process of Euro-Atlantic integration and to build multicultural societies instead of ethnocentric ones."

Left to right: Ksenija Milivojevic, Emilija Krstic, Liljana Ivanovska, Gordana Comic, Rada Trajkovic and Emilija Kostadinova.

Flora Brovina.

Arta Dade and Valentina Leskaj.

Lilijana Nestorovic.

PART TWO: BLED, SLOVENIA

INTRODUCTION

Following upon the success of the Tirana meeting, on July 10-11, the Project on Ethnic Relations organized a follow-up regional dialogue on Women in Governance and Interethnic Relations in Bled, Slovenia. Unlike the April meeting, which brought together more than thirty participants from the Western Balkans and the international community, participation in the July gathering was deliberately restricted in an effort to maximize the limited time available, build trust and enhance the likelihood of formulating practical solutions to the region's most difficult issues. Five senior women policy makers, a mix of opposition and government politicians, from Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristina, Skopje, and Tirana—all vocal participants at the Tirana meeting—took part in the weekend's discussions, which were organized around the following themes:

- Interethnic relations in Serbia and Montenegro
- Interethnic relations in Kosovo
- Interethnic accommodation in the Balkans and Euro-Atlantic integration: the role of Albania
- Fostering interethnic accommodation through interethnic coalition building: the Macedonian experience

In preparation for the meeting, each of the participants prepared a policy essay relating to the aforementioned topics. (Excerpts of these articles are included at the conclusion of this report. To receive a copy of the full text of the essays, please contact the Project on Ethnic Relations.) The subject of heated debate and analysis, the articles provoked a rich discussion of the region's most contentious and important issues, including Kosovo's final status, especially as it relates to the question of Albanians and their neighbors; Euro-Atlantic integration; decentralization; the fight against organized crime; corruption; human trafficking; the principle of self-determination and its likely consequences for the region; and the proper role of history in interethnic relations.

Like the Tirana roundtable, the discussions in Bled were deeply influenced by recent events in the region, including PER's annual roundtable on Albanians and Their Neighbors, held in Lucerne, Switzerland in May 2004, which led, in June 2004, to the first formal discussions (moderated by PER) between representatives of Kosovo's Serb and Albanian communities to take place in the wake of the bloody events of mid-March. The participants' analysis of Macedonia's interethnic coalition government was also colored by reports of growing tensions among ethnic Albanian and Macedonian members of the coalition vis-à-vis decentralization. This issue was the primary point of contention between participants at PER's third major roundtable of Macedonia's coalition and opposition government, held in June 2004 in Mavrovo. (For reports of the Lucerne and Mavrovo series, please visit www.per-usa.org)

In addition to debating the aforementioned issues, the participants also put forth a number of concrete recommendations for improving regional cooperation and interethnic relations. As part of a larger effort to build an interethnic network of women politicians, participants called for greater cooperation at the parliamentary level, including more frequent contact between women parliamentarians of the Western Balkans. In addition, the participants stressed the need to work toward Euro-Atlantic integration in a coordinated fashion, sharing lessons learned and partnering with recent entrants to the EU and/or NATO, such as Slovenia, Hungary, and Romania. Countries in the region, they advised, must also work together on such critical problems as human trafficking, organized crime, poverty, and economic stagnation.

Accounts of these exchanges are contained herein.

WOMEN AND INTERETHNIC CONFLICT

The chair opened the meeting, noting the importance of elevating women's voices to the highest levels of decision-making. Quoting UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, she noted that "women, who know the price of conflict so well, are also often better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it. For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls."

Women, who know the price of conflict so well, are also often better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it.

This participant stressed the Project on Ethnic Relations' unswerving commitment to bringing women into the region's interethnic dialogue,

noting that two of the participants from the Tirana meeting were active contributors at PER's annual "Albanians and Their Neighbors" conference, held one month prior in Lucerne, Switzerland. Moreover, she expressed her hope that the meetings in Tirana and Bled would lead to the establishment of a regional interethnic network of senior women policy makers.

DEBATING HISTORY'S ROLE

Participants differed sharply on the role of history in promoting the future of the region. For some, history is something that was created "in the past" and should be left there, while for others, "setting the record straight" is critical to moving forward. "We have a lot of tragic events in our past," conceded one participant, yet it is time to say "enough is enough," declare "a starting point" and "take responsibility for everything going forward." "Every ethnic community in the Balkans has its side of the story," she continued. "There is no way to force another ethnic community to interpret things your way."

There are too many victims in the Balkans. The key to better interethnic relations is to look forward.

"There are too many victims in the Balkans," agreed one participant, adding that every ethnic community sees itself as a victim of injustice. The key to better interethnic relations, she noted, is to look forward. "You can't change the past," she counseled, "but you *can* change the future."

This view, however, was not shared by another participant, who argued that "unfinished business" is itself a source of instability and tension among ethnic groups. "It's not possible to talk about nice things," she charged, until "you address the big issues"—such as Kosovo's final status, "a roadmap for Bosnia's departure from protectorate," and Montenegro's "right to freely define its future."

"History is burdened with fear, injustice, and hatred," she cautioned. "We can't ignore history if we want a safe departure to the future." There are "policies that need to be punished," she said, citing above all "responsibility" for the atrocities committed in the Balkan wars of the 1990s. "We have to address open issues and not create the illusion that everything is okay."

Conceding that such a public accounting could in fact "promote reconciliation," a different participant argued that such a "dialogue" is politically unfeasible. "The only people who will put dialogue in the way you speak are people who will never be in power," she argued. "You will never have anyone in power who is willing to talk about these things," she said.

ENHANCING REGIONAL COOPERATION

Several of the participants called for increased cooperation among policy makers in the region, advocating the creation of a contact group of women parliamentarians in the Western Balkans charged with discussing and providing recommendations on a series of common challenges. A long list of problems unites the region, commented one participant—they include, among others, "low standards [of living], organized crime, poor infrastructure, nationalism, etc." All too often, she said, "we list our problems and then we enlist the international community's help in solving them." It makes more sense, she said, for countries to "address their neighbors" instead.

At the same time, cautioned another participant, "we need always to have some international representative" present—particularly where long-time antagonists such as Kosovo Albanians and Belgrade Serbs are concerned. Without this element, she argued, it is often politically unfeasible for participants to take part in such meetings.

Euro-Atlantic Integration

An additional area for cross-country cooperation concerns Euro-Atlantic integration, as countries in the region prepare their applications for NATO and EU accession. While all participants agreed that this path presents the best way forward for the region, several speakers urged their colleagues to adopt a more collaborative approach. "Croatia would like to accede earlier," said one participant, adding that "the Macedonians are trying to do the same." "If we are together," rationalized another speaker, "they will give us better treatment. They will see that we are mature and ready for them." Only by "bringing together a common voice to the European Commission," said the prior speaker, "can we shorten this process."

This participant advised greater cooperation not only among applicant countries but also with those countries, such as Slovenia, Hungary, Cyprus, Romania, and Bulgaria, that have recently acceded to the

European Union and/or NATO. "My impression is that the new countries would be quite pleased to serve as mentors," added one participant. "They could inform you of what was helpful for them and teach you better approaches."

MINORITY RIGHTS IN MONTENEGRO: A MODEL FOR THE REGION?

Despite encouraging statements made at PER's Lucerne meeting by the President of Montenegro and ethnic Albanian politicians regarding the republic's progress on minority rights issues, a less favorable picture of the government's work was offered in Bled by an opposition leader. Whereas discussions in Lucerne focused on the country's progress in implementing the 2004 PER-brokered Ulcinj Agreement, a pact authorizing the construction of a new maternity hospital, Albanian language faculty and the addition of new border crossings, the assessment offered by one participant in Bled was far less complimentary.

"When we have 80 percent unemployment, organized crime at the top of society, and poverty in every family," she argued, "minorities in Montenegro are fully equal with the majority in that poverty and humiliation. Montenegro suffers from "a lack of democracy," alleged this speaker, citing a series of minority rights measures proposed by the government that she said have yet to be truly implemented. These include both the new law on ethnic minorities, that has yet to be adopted, as well as the creation of a ministry for protection of rights of persons belonging to national and ethnic communities.

KOSOVO'S FUTURE AND RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE REGION

As at the Tirana meeting, the question of Kosovo's status loomed large over the discussions in Bled, with some participants arguing for independence as a means to promote regional stability, while others worried about the external ramifications of such an action.

"The time has come to start discussions that will lead to a final solution for Kosovo," declared one participant, adding that "the natural path toward self-governance and stability is in the interest of all of us." Indeed, said a different speaker, "once Kosova becomes a player with full

competencies, it can be held responsible for what it is doing." Moreover, she added, as "one of eight federal units" in the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, like its counterparts, is entitled to exercise the principle of "self-determination."

Yet it was this point that was the greatest cause for concern among participants. "If Kosovo becomes independent," asked one participant, "what will happen to Macedonia, Bosnia, and the Republika Srpska?" In short, will this step encourage ethnic minorities elsewhere to push for secession or independence?

The question is irrelevant as far as the Republika Srpska is concerned, argued one advocate of Kosovo's independence. "A product of [Yugoslavia's] disintegration," this ethnic Serb entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina "did not exist before 1990," she noted, thus distinguishing it from "the original eight federal units of the former Yugoslavia," which included both Kosovo and Vojvodina—a region that the speaker added is similarly entitled to statehood.

With respect to Macedonia and Bosnia, this participant argued that such a step would make these countries more secure. "If Kosova were an independent state," she suggested, "it would have to respect the integrity of neighboring countries" and would likely enter into "charters" with all of its neighbors.

This argument failed to persuade at least one participant, however, who expressed her concern that independence will "set a precedent for the changing of borders"—that "Albanians in the neighboring countries will call for self-determination." The speaker pointed to controversial statements made in 2003 by an ethnic Albanian opposition leader in Macedonia, who "called for the federalization of Macedonia as a first step, and then self-determination for those parts where Albanians constitute a majority." This is "analogous to what happened in Kosovo," she argued. If we "speak about the right of self-determination," she continued, "then we'll have to expect Vojvodina to secede from Serbia" followed by ethnic minorities in other areas. "Where will it end?" she asked. And is this part of a plan, as many Macedonians, Serbs, and Roma fear, to build a "Greater Albania?"

The notion of a "Greater Albania" was fiercely rejected by one speaker who said she was "sorry to hear about such fears," arguing that Albania harbors no extraterritorial ambitions, but is intently focused on its accession

to the European Union. As for the statements of the ethnic Albanian opposition leader, another participant reminded her colleagues that such comments are typical of "opposition parties" who "play the nationalistic card" to gain political benefit, and thus should not be used as "guidance in future proceedings." Indeed, she added, similar comments were also attributed to former Macedonian Prime Minister Ljubcho Georgievski, then a leader of the ethnic Macedonian opposition, who similarly called for a partition of the country along ethnic lines.

INTERETHNIC COALITION-BUILDING: THE MACEDONIAN CASE

As a means to understand the strengths and difficulties of interethnic coalition-building, participants analyzed the Macedonian case, whereby a power-sharing interethnic governing coalition, comprised of ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, has for the past two years attempted to bring stability, peace, and economic prosperity to this post-conflict nation. (Together with the Embassy of Switzerland in Skopje, PER is the major convener of official discussions between Macedonia's coalition and opposition government regarding the implementation of the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement, an internationally brokered truce credited with ending the country's bloody interethnic conflict. Reports of these meetings are available at www.per-usa.org.)

Pragmatism Before Politics

An important lesson to be drawn from the Macedonian case, according to one participant, has been the coalition's willingness to forego ethnic politics in favor of pragmatism. Formed in the aftermath of Macedonia's bloody interethnic conflict, she noted that the coalition includes former adversaries on both the Macedonian and Albanian side. "It was not easy to explain to [the public] that we would work together with people who were on a different side of the conflict," said this speaker. From a practical standpoint, however, she acknowledged that the major ethnic Macedonian party in the coalition (SDSM—the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) had little choice. "We chose DUI (Democratic Union for Integration) because it received the greatest support among Albanians in the country. We thought this was the best way to contribute to the stabilization of Macedonia."

Identifying Common Goals

The speaker noted that, upon joining together, members of the coalition issued a common statement, pledging their commitment to promote "safety and stability," "combat corruption" and poverty, support the implementation of the Framework Agreement, and respect all state symbols of Macedonia. Moreover, they agreed to concentrate on their common future without debating misgivings from the past. "We usually don't speak about the past when we don't have to," said this participant.

Building Upon a Tradition of Interethnic Governance

While the present government is unprecedented with respect to the sheer amount of decision-making power held by ethnic Albanians, she noted, it is built upon a tradition of multiethnic governance that can be traced to the country's independence from Yugoslavia. "Since independence," said this participant, "Albanians have been present as ministers of the government—we wanted to do this because we thought it fair, logical, and natural."

Highlighting the coalition's progress, this participant pointed to recent polling results suggesting a positive "change in attitude" among ethnic Macedonians and other "non-Albanians" toward the Framework Agreement. "Most people," she said, "now accept the Framework Agreement as a good tool for improving the situation of the country." Moreover, she continued, the poll indicated an increasingly "positive attitude of a large majority of [ethnic] Albanians regarding the conditions in the country," indicating that "the government is meeting the needs of most Albanians." This speaker also noted the tragic death, in March 2004, of former President Boris Trajkovski as an exemplary display of interethnic unity. Trajkovski's death, she said "was a tragedy for all citizens, but it made us more unified than ever before." It was "a unification of the people," she added. "Regardless of political, ethnic, or religious affiliation, all people were in deep sadness. We behaved like a mature nation." The event was "the moment when we could see how

> *We are no longer an interethnic coalition—we are a political coalition of people who believe in the same goals for the same country.*

close we were together—that we needed each other." Indeed, added another participant, members of the coalition are beginning to see beyond ethnicity. This speaker quoted a senior member of the Albanian leadership in Macedonia and regular participant in PER's Mavrovo meetings as saying in May 2004: "We are no longer an interethnic coalition—we are a political coalition of people who believe in the same goals for the same country."

Decentralization: A Test of the Coalition's Resilience?

Nevertheless, participants acknowledged important differences among members of the coalition vis-à-vis the country's decentralization and territorial division—tensions which could test the resilience of the ethnic Albanian and Macedonian partnership. At issue is the delineation of borders for three multiethnic municipalities—Struga, Kichevo, and the city of Skopje—and designating the capital as bilingual, decisions with enormous political ramifications. According to one participant, reports of the current rift in the coalition have stoked ethnic Macedonians' fear that decentralization is the first step toward eventual territorial division on the part of ethnic Albanians. Unless policy makers can reach a compromise, she cautioned, the controversy "may cause a radicalization among the people." "Building the people's confidence is a long process," she added. "I'm afraid of losing everything if we push too hard…We could lose the elections."

ALBANIA'S ROLE IN PROMOTING INTERETHNIC ACCOMMODATION

Participants from all sides of the discussion praised Albania for the constructive role it continues to play in mediating interethnic conflicts and encouraging moderation in the region. Several speakers singled out the country's role in the Kosovo crisis of 1999. In the words of one participant, "Albania's role during the war in Kosovo was remarkable…[Their] clear, constructive role was not easy, and they should be credited for that." Participants also acknowledged the country's steps toward building partnerships with neighboring countries in the region and the international community, including the

Albania itself did not get caught up in the infamous syndrome of Balkan nationalism.

signing of the Adriatic Charter, furthering ties between Macedonia, Albania, Croatia, and the United States as the first three strive to join NATO.

According to one speaker, Albania's policies of "moderation," good will and "cooperation" are a natural outgrowth of the country's history. "Although located in a region where interethnic conflicts constituted the basis of relations between the peoples of the region for centuries," she said, "Albania itself did not get caught up in the infamous syndrome of Balkan nationalism." On the contrary, continued this participant—"inter-religious and interethnic coexistence has been an obvious trait of Albanian history." As such, she said, "Albania has tried, through its foreign policy…to protect the stability, security and democratic values of the region." In this regard, the speaker cited several issues in which the Albanian government has played a constructive role, including "supporting the UN Security Council's resolution for Kosovo as well as UNMIK's (the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo) and the Kosovo government's attempts at democratization of everyday life and economic progress"; and by backing the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement credited with averting a full-scale civil war in Macedonia. "We think the continuation of this process will result in economic progress and improvement of everyday life in Macedonia," she stated.

POLICY ESSAYS

The following section contains brief summaries of the policy essays submitted by participants at the Bled meeting as well as excerpts from their texts. (To receive a complete copy of the articles, please contact the Project on Ethnic Relations.)

Gordana Comic: "Interethnic Relations: Fighting for Principles"

In her article, Gordana Comic, Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee of the National Assembly of Serbia, identifies a series of systemic and political challenges plaguing the region, including: a stagnant economy, low standard of living, lack of infrastructure, rising internal as well as external debt, nationalism and a tendency to embrace political extremes, absence of the rule of law, organized crime, and politicians' failure to sufficiently address such issues as minority rights

and local decision-making. To combat these challenges, Comic calls on politicians throughout the region to put an end to "business as usual" by embracing a model of governance based on the following three pillars: 1) respect for principles such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights; 2) a commitment to honoring "modern political ideas of the twenty-first century"; and 3) an insistence that "leaders be held to higher standards of accountability" while working in cooperation with the international community. The following are excerpts from her essay:

- **On rejecting the 'Balkan' status quo:** *"It is easy to show that 'the Balkan ways' are permanent and that the economic situation, poverty, quality of everyday life, lack of tolerance and level of democracy are all fixed…Change is inevitable, but will happen only with a strong and clear vision and it is up to the people living in the region and the willingness of their political leaders to listen…It is not business as usual in the Balkans anymore.*

- **On regional cooperation:** *"Needed is a single permanent parliamentary body in the region fully committed to…working together, and with the international community, to raise issues, help in processes of reconciliation, push governments to follow principles and act as a contact group not for managing crises but preventing them…Though parliamentarians have a tendency to take their issues to the international community, a more effective way to address challenges is to take them to their neighbors in the region with whom they share those problems."*

- **On joining Europe:** *"Developing democracy means respecting one's past and leaving it there…The region must jump over a century-and-a-half, a time that other European countries spent building nation-states, democracy, surviving ethnic conflicts, civil wars, religious collisions, nationalism and the political ideas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries…Many politicians fear losing elections if they begin a process of reconciliation, but those who have the courage to do so will be winners."*

- **On borders:** *"In the nineties, the use of the word 'borders' was frequently associated with phrases like 'self-determination' or 'ethnic cleansing' or 'drawing maps' and it is time for people in the region to say no to such outmoded phrases."*

ERMELINDA MEKSI: "Albania's Role in the Region's Interethnic Relations"

As Albania's Minister of European Integration, Ermelinda Meksi writes not only of Albania's constructive role vis-à-vis its neighbors in the Balkan region, but also of its coordinated efforts to speed regional accession to Euro-Atlantic structures. More than a decade after emerging from isolation, writes Meksi, Albania has "tried to overcome its historical backwardness…whilst aiming for a better future." Her article provides a brief sketch of the country's history, particularly its long tradition of interethnic tolerance, an anomaly in the region. Meksi outlines the rationale for Albania's constructive foreign policy, evidenced above all by its role as a mediator during the Kosovo crisis. The country is working aggressively toward Euro-Atlantic integration, she writes, citing close cooperation with several countries in the region and internationally, including Macedonia, Croatia, and the United States, all signatories, together with Albania, to the Adriatic Charter.

The following are excerpts from her article:

- **On Albania's foreign policy:** *"Through its foreign policy—which itself is a concrete demonstration of the Albanian people's peace-loving spirit—Albania has tried to give its contribution so as to protect the stability, security and democratic values in the region…Because Albania is one of the relevant factors in regional developments, we are conscious of the role we play…Our position has been both constructive and one of a moderator in resolving problems which have concerned the Albanian population living outside Albania's borders."*

- **On minority rights:** *"Far from having paternalistic attitudes, we believe that the existence of minorities must serve as a bridge of friendship and cooperation. There can be no peace, political stability or economic prosperity in the region if there is no respect for the rights of minorities, be these cultural or national ones."*

- **On Albania's role in promoting regional integration:** *"Albania's notion of regional integration consists of strengthening and institutionalizing peaceful and good neighboring relations in the region, cooperating in the construction and improvement of good faith measures and security mechanisms…developing democratic values, and fully respecting human rights, including*

those of minorities…Our regional integration is, in other words, the process of getting closer to the required Euro-Atlantic integration standards."

- **On Euro-Atlantic integration:** *"We believe in a multiethnic model for the Balkans, as the only possible solution to leave behind a heavy burden which we have inherited from our distant and more recent past. The European Union project is the one all of our countries have started walking toward. We walk toward a Europe which, despite numerous conflicts and ethnic wars, was able to build a common home, which cultivates the high values of human solidarity and coexistence amongst the people it comprises."*

VESNA PEROVIC: "Ethnic Minorities in Montenegro"

President of the opposition Liberal Alliance of Montenegro Vesna Perovic's article consists of a strong critique of the ruling government of Montenegro. Perovic rejects the notion that Montenegro should be seen in the region as a model of multiethnic understanding. While she concedes that the country has consistently maintained a tradition of tolerance, Perovic gives little credit to the government for this achievement. On the contrary, she accuses the government of manipulating ethnic minorities for political gain while failing to provide them with ample legal protections. The government has made many promises to these communities, in terms of legislation and/or other protective mechanisms, argues Perovic, yet few of these items have come to fruition. She argues that the only way forward for Montenegro is to further the development of democracy and uphold the rule of law.

The following are excerpts from Perovic's article:

- **On corruption and ethnic minorities:** *"Montenegro is recognized as a country of developed smuggling, organized crime…and corruption—all of which make the ambience absolutely inadequate for providing and protecting human rights in general—meaning even less adequate for the protection of ethnic minorities' rights.*

- **On minority rights in Montenegro:** *"The [present] regime literally absorbed the minorities by giving them—at the formal and verbal level—all the rights they wanted, while at the same time—the true protection and realization of their rights never occurred…One can easily see that these provisions are merely of a*

declarative character when…there are no laws, institutions or other documents and decisions providing the realization of these rights…"

- **On economic inequality:** *"When we know that the percentage of the unemployed [in Montenegro] has surpassed 30 percent, the average salary is some 183 Euros, the average pension some 117 Euros, and that some 52 percent of citizens live under the poverty line…it is clear that ethnic minorities cannot expect any better economic nor social status."*

- **On Montenegro as an example of multiethnic tolerance:** *"The development of democracy, the creation of institutions of the free, civil society and the rule of law is what Montenegro needs right now…When such a society is called 'an example in the region' by the regime, it is high time to look at the regime's true nature, and to help the people—both the majority and minority— to reach their freedom."*

LILJANA POPOVSKA: "Interethnic Coalition-Building in Macedonia"

As Vice President of the Macedonian parliament, Liljana Popovska provides in her article a window into the inner workings of the governing interethnic coalition that came to power shortly after the country's short but bloody interethnic conflict. While making reference to the country's tradition of interethnic governance, Popovska outlines the way in which this coalition is different from those predating Macedonia's independence. Her essay details the government's successes, namely its implementation of various aspects of the Ohrid Framework Agreement—an internationally brokered truce credited with ending the conflict in 2001. Popovska writes of the political risks entailed in joining forces with former adversaries while noting the public's increasing satisfaction with the government's performance. She concludes her essay by citing examples of successful networking and coalition-building efforts, including the Macedonian Women's Lobby, among others. The following are excerpts from her article:

- **On Macedonia's tradition of interethnic governance:** *"There is a tradition of interethnic governance in the Republic of Macedonia. Since independence, the Albanians were present as ministers in all the governments (usually the number was comparable or higher than the percentage of Albanians in society). Nobody ever made a fuss about it—it was done as a fair, logical, and natural thing."*

- **On forming a post-conflict coalition between Albanians and Macedonians:** *"It was not easy to explain to most of the people that people on different sides of the conflict would work together. Some were defending state institutions while others were shooting at them. During the work of this coalition…we usually don't speak about the past when we don't have to. We speak about our future plans. You can't change the past but you can change the future."*

- **On Euro-Atlantic integration:** *"After a good sign from NATO in Istanbul, we are very optimistic and so are the citizens. The support for NATO is increasing all the time…Recently we submitted a formal application to the EU. Every signal from the EU is positive for the situation in the country. It makes the people feel calm…and safe."*

- **On Macedonia's future:** *"The country is on the right track and getting more and more stable. We passed two serious 'tests': the Kosovo crisis in March and the death of President Trajkovski…This tragedy pulled us closer together; it was a moment in which we could see how close we were…and that we need each other in good times and bad."*

- **On the power of civil society and coalition building:** *Coalitions are a necessity; they are our natural and logical linkage as human beings. They are many times the only way to reach the needs and problems of each group in society and solve them."*

EDITA TAHIRI: "Challenges of Interethnic Relations"

A member of the Assembly of Kosovo, and recent founder of Democratic Alternative of Kosova, Edita Tahiri writes of a series of open questions in the Balkans whose resolution, she maintains, is key to the region's stability. The international community's failure to define the future of Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bosnia is keeping the region on "glass legs," she argues, while citing four additional "challenges" that will complicate the future of the Balkans: a "democratic deficit"; lingering fear and hatred; a lack of legal protection for minorities; economic stagnation; as well as the region's painful and tragic history. To address these challenges, Tahiri provides the following policy prescriptions: 1) resolution of the region's major open political issues; 2) independence for Kosovo; 3) the creation of an economic strategy for the region similar to the Marshall Plan; 4)

the adoption of minority rights' frameworks; 5) increased accountability for the perpetrators of war crimes; 6) the promotion of interethnic dialogue; and 7) building a culture of tolerance. The following are excerpts from Tahiri's article:

- **On the region's "unfinished business":** *The major challenge is the open political issues—the undefined status of Kosova, the future of Montenegro, and…ending the protectorate in Bosnia… It is the process of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia that has remained unfinished, thus becoming an obstacle for development of normal relations among nations of the region…This situation will continue to keep the region on 'glass legs,' lacking the real chance for progress."*

- **On Kosovo's final status:** *"The independence of Kosova should be seen as a key contribution to stability in the region…The current policy of 'standards before status' places Kosova in a vicious circle—as some of the standards directly depend on final status. The way out consists of a policy of "independence and standards together…"*

- **On minority rights:** *"Minorities must be considered the bridges among nation-states…It is also important that each state… implement the unique standards for minorities at national and cross-border level…Some states are not ready to implement at home what they ask for their minority compatriots in the neighborhood."*

- **On the role of history in interethnic relations:** *"We, the people of the Balkans, often hear others saying that we are obsessed with the past…But without understanding and correcting the injustices of the past, we cannot have a safe journey to the future."*

- **On U.S. leadership in the Balkans:** *"Though today the U.S. is busy with other important security issues, it should not divert its focus from this fragile region. Any ideas that suggest withdrawal of U.S. troops from the region and particularly from Kosova might lead to a re-igniting of war that would undermine all the investments made thus far."*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
(English alphabetical order)

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Rima Koyler, Political Officer, Embassy in Albania

Eleanor Nagy, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy in Macedonia

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Observers

Harilaos Harissis, Head of Office of MEP Anna Karamanou

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(*) participants in both Tirana and Bled meetings

Left to right: Teuta Arifi and Eleanor Nagy.

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