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■ UPCOMING EVENTS

Upcoming events at ATRC:

Tuesday, May 3.

A public debate on security concerns relating to the latest developments will be held at ATRC (see pg.3).

Wednesday, May 4.

A public debate on the Zitkovac camp lead poisoning issue will be held at ATRC's hall (see pg.2).

AvoKo Members Visit Mjajt!

Tirana, April 13-17.

Representatives from five AvoKo member NGOs traveled to Tirana for a three-day study visit during which they met with Mjajt! and their partners. The purpose of the trip was for AvoKo and Mjajt! members to discuss the possibility of cooperating on a common advocacy campaign. During the study visit, AvoKo members met with advisors to Mjajt! as well as with Edi Rama, Mayor of Tirana.

This study visit followed a two-day advocacy campaign training led by Mjajt! in Prishtina last month.

Shqipe Pantina, the recently hired AvoKo Coordinator, led the Kosovar delegation, which included members of local NGOs Aquila, Vision for the Future, New Era, Our Future and Euro-Ecologists. These advocacy NGOs focus on different issues, such as rural development, environmental problems and participation in local



"AvoKo members learning about Mjajt! campaigns"

decision-making. They are part of the Kosovo NGO Advocacy Network (AvoKo), a network of advocacy NGOs across Kosovo that works to increase citizen participation in decisionmaking by increasing the capacity of advocacy organizations, information exchange, engaging the public in monitoring decision-makers, and responding as a group to crisis events.

During the study visit, AvoKo members learned about Mjajt!'s organizational structure and advocacy campaigns. The meetings were tailored to the AvoKo members' needs and included talks about potential advocacy campaigns with specialists on the environment, education, development and judicial issues.

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NGOs Discuss Decentralization and the Pilot Project



Mr. Haziri, Minister of Decentralization, explaining the pilot plan

Pristina, April 8. As part of our information and outreach program, ATRC organized a public discussion on "Decentralization and the Pilot Project" to inform NGOs and the public about the latest developments in this highly controversial plan. This was the first public debate to deal with this controversial plan, and more than thirty members of local, foreign and international non-governmental organizations attended. Local media such as the Pristina daily "Lajm" and "Koha Ditore" covered the debate. Decentralization in itself is not a controversial issue, actually

it is the norm for countries in transition from highly centralized communist systems, but the current proposals for pilot projects of a decentralization on ethnic lines have led to serious friction between the position and opposition. While the Democratic Party of Kosovo (DPK) has demanded that the parliament debate this issue, its requests have been ignored so far. This has soured relations between parliamentary groups and even led to threats of stopping the parliament's work.

Representing governmental institutions' perspective,

Lutfi Haziri, Minister of Local Governance, explained the provisions of the current plan. Members of the parliamentary groups of opposition parties were also present. Enver Hoxhaj Ph.D. represented the Democratic Party of Kosovo and Nazim Jashari represented the civic movement ORA.

Haziri explained the details of the present decentralization plans for pilot projects initiated by the previous administration. Hoxha and Jashari blamed the current administration for implementing the plans prior to consultations and parliamentary debates. They also criticized the governmental officials for initiating the pilot projects prior to delineating a clear governmental structure and legal framework that would regulate the correlation between the local and central level as well as decentralization of power. Participants were pleased with the information they received. Politicians expressed their satisfaction for having the opportunity to meet and discuss this controversial topic, which has yet to be debated in the Kosovo Assembly.

AvoKo Members Visit Mjajt!



Elida Reçi, offered a review of participatory budgeting in Albania

(continued from pg.1)

One such discussion focused on education and the recent Mjajt! campaign, which increased the education budget in Albania. Stavri Llambari, a specialist on education issues, explained that by cooperating with Mjajt! and a network of NGOs working on education related topics, they were able to influence the Albanian governmental budget for primary and secondary education. According to Llambari, the campaign's success would not have been possible without the high visibility of Mjajt! and the expertise from NGOs specializing on the issue. After the government

changed the budget and the Ministry of Education needed help with allocating the funds properly, the education related NGOs' experience was especially important.

Xhemal Mato, a journalist who has covered environmental issues in Albania for more than 20 years and runs the NGO "Mass Media and the Environment", briefed the delegation on environmental issues. Albania has many problems with environmental pollution and degradation. Yet, there is a lack of political will or social awareness that would curb pollution and mend past mistakes. In response to the current situation, Mato's NGO has

joined 17 other NGOs to advocate for change and raise social awareness about pollution and the threat it presents for everyone. This umbrella organization is currently cooperating with Mjajt! to prevent the building of a potential pollution source, a power plant, in the beautiful seaside city of Vlora.

Klodita Ferhati explained some of the problems that Albanian NGOs face when dealing with governmental institutions. She complained of the social pervasiveness of a centralizing mentality that does not allow NGOs to play their role in society. She also explained how she assisted Mjajt! on different campaigns. This included everything from dealing with police permits for nonviolent protests to more complicated legal issues relating to governmental decision-making and responsibilities.

Other meetings included a conversation with Elida Reçi, Director of the Institute for Public and Private Finances in Tirana, who discussed participatory budgeting in Albania and the influence that Mjajt! has had on budget drafts and participatory budgeting.

The cooperation between Mjajt! and AvoKo is expected to continue in the future. Early in May, members from Mjajt! will visit AvoKo members to conclude the planning of a common campaign. ■

How Does the Ministry of Finance and Economy Work?

Pristina, April 26. ATRC organized an informative workshop on "How the Ministry of Finance and Economy and the Kosovo Budget Work." The workshop was part of the "How the Government Works" series. More than twenty participants from local NGOs as well as media outlets such as RTV21 attended the workshop.

The purpose of the workshop was to inform participants about the structure of the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), the overall condition of the economy and the budget. Panelists included Chris Kauffmann - Consultant at MEF, Agim Krasniqi - Head of the budget office at the MEF and Elmaze Pireva - Deputy-head of

the Kosovo Revenue Authority.

Agim Krasniqi explained the structure of MEF as well as the work of the Ministry. According to him, MEF administration has approximately 900 employees, including 600 employees who collect taxes. Krasniqi also explained the eight stages of drafting the budget.

Chris Kaufmann discussed the state of the Kosovo economy. He focused on the trade imbalance, which results from massive imports and nearly non-existent exports. He also explained why state pension funds are invested in international portfolios and how local products can benefit from lower taxes.

According to Elmaze Pireva, revenues supporting the Kosovar government have doubled since 1999. She offered a detailed review of how taxes are collected and tax requirements for NGOs. In response to questions from the audience, she explained the municipal budgeting process and ensured the participants that there was no danger of a budget crisis in the municipalities.

The participants expressed their satisfaction for the opportunity to learn more about how the budget works and economic issues of interest to NGOs especially, but also to Kosovar society in general. ■

Guest Article from IWPR

Time to End Destructive Kosovo Clan Warfare

By Jeta Xharra

When I first saw the map of the Dukagjini region of western Kosovo in a primary school atlas, the book described it as Kosovo's most fertile, pretty and tourist-friendly landscape.

But when I visited Dukagjini on April 17, rather than fertility, the atmosphere was one of death and self-destruction.

That was the mood that had gripped the 80,000 mourners who had gathered under dark and rainy skies for the funeral of 24-year-old Enver Haradinaj.

Enver, brother of Ramush Haradinaj, Kosovo's former prime minister who is now in The Hague awaiting trial for war crimes, was shot dead in a drive-by shooting on April 15.

His murder was another chapter in the series of mysterious murders and attempted murders that has rocked the region over the last six years.

As the local and international police have failed to resolve most of them, discussion of the subject necessarily involves a degree of assumption.

But from all the information one can obtain, it appears that all or most of the killings stem from the ongoing feud between the Musaj and Haradinaj families, the two most powerful clans in Dukagjini.

It would be welcome news if the police did their job and actually caught the perpetrators. But in the meantime, society needs to do something to stop further violence in Dukagjini.

The Advocate: Jeta Xharra is the IWPR Country Director as well as ATRC's Board Chairperson. Here at ATRC we are planning to hold a discussion on the security issues related to the latest developments.

Guest Article from IHT

Kosovo: Poisoned camps for the Gypsies

PRISTINA, Kosovo In its rush to proclaim its assignment a success, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo is ignoring - or covering up - a medical tragedy there for which it is directly responsible.

At three camps built by the UN High Commission for Refugees, some 60 Gypsy children under the age of 6 have been exposed to such high levels of lead that they are highly likely either to die soon or to suffer irreversible brain damage.

This number represents every child born in the camps since they were built five and a half years ago - children whose undeveloped immune systems make them particularly vulnerable.

Rokho Kim, an expert on lead poisoning and a medical doctor for the World Health Organization's European Center for the Environment and Health in Bonn, who visited the camps in February, said he had never heard of such high lead levels in children's blood.

He said that toxicity levels around the camps were three to four times higher than those at Tar Creek, Oklahoma, America's most dangerous hazardous waste site.

Today, many children in these squalid camps show obvious symptoms of lead poisoning: loss of memory, loss of coordination, vomiting and convulsions.

Over the past five years, 27 people have died in the camps, many of them very likely from the effects of heavy-metal poisoning, though autopsies are never performed. Two of the dead have been children, and more are expected to die in the next few months.

The Advocate: ATRC plans to hold a public discussion on this issue on May 4 at our office in Pristina.

International Donors Learn about Local NGOs

Prishtina, April 21.

Representatives of the Rockefeller Brother's Fund and Mott Foundation met with members of local NGOs to learn more about their activities. Representatives from local NGOs presented their projects and most successful campaigns at the meeting, which was held at ATRC.

Igballe Rogova, Director of Kosovo Women's Network (KWN), gave one such presentation. She described KWN's work and the campaign for reforming the electoral law in 2004, which was a cooperative effort with ATRC and a coalition of more than 250 other organizations throughout Kosovo. KWN is a network of 77 local NGOs that advocates for gender equality and women's rights.

Smaller NGOs from regions throughout Kosovo also described their advocacy efforts to the potential donors. Their campaigns dealt with a variety of issues, including environmental advocacy, participation in decision-making,



KNAP chief of Party, Ms. Delina Fico and Mr. Stephen B. Heintz, President of the Rockefeller Foundation

women's education and agricultural development.

ATRC presented information about the Get Out the Vote Campaign, which we coordinated together with KWN and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The campaign focused on increasing voter turnout for the October 2004 parliamentary elections.

The visitors asked specific questions and expressed their overall satisfaction with the presentations. They also explained the purpose of their visit: to cooperate with local NGOs in Kosovo. In the future, further cooperation with these two foundations is expected.

AvoKo Debates Standards for Kosovo



Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Salihaj thanked AvokKo for the support given to fulfillmet of the Standards

Pristina, April 29. AvoKo organized a public debate on standards for Kosovo at ATRC. This debate was one in a series of debates that AvoKo held in 15 municipalities throughout Kosovo for the KNAP-funded campaign "Standards: why are they important for me?" At the debate, Deputy Prime Minister Adem Salihaj and Deputy Mayor of Pristina Shefki Gashi presented the governmental institutions' perspective. Florina Duli from the

Republican Club represented the NGO perspective. Various NGO representatives participated in this debate, which was followed by daily newspaper Koha Ditore and RTV21.

Florina Duli explained that "Standards for Kosovo" were established in late 2003. In an earlier attempt, the international community had pushed for "Standards before Status," a set of standards and requirements the UN designed without consulting

local people. The failure of "Standards before Status" led to a second, more inclusive drafting of the "Standards" in which Kosovar institutions participated.

Adem Salihaj expressed his satisfaction with the current efforts to fulfill standards, which he perceived as being a democratic choice of the people and within their interest. He offered a review of some of the work done by the government. He also warmly thanked AvoKo "for its support and excellent work in educating the public on the government's three priority standards: return and integration of minorities, freedom of movement and property issues."

Participants asked questions on various issues relating to the standards. They questioned the need for standards and asked about technical issues related to the proper fulfillment of standards. AvoKo's "Standards, why are they important for me?" campaign will continue raising public awareness about standards until mid-May. ■

Debating Transitional Justice in Kosovo



Mark Freeman from the International Center for Transitional Justice offered a short lecture on Truth commissions

Pristina, April 4-5. A two-day conference on "Transitional Justice in Kosovo" was co-organized by the Kosovar Institute for Research and Documentation (KODI) and ATRC. More than 50 representatives of local and international NGOs as well as politicians and other decisionmakers participated in the conference, which was

held at the Grand Hotel Pristina. Several media organizations covered the conference.

Conference panelists included Florina Duli from the Republican Club, Dardan Velia from KODI, Kreshnik Berisha from ATRC and Mark Freeman from the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ).

The conference dealt with some of the hottest topics related to ethnic conflict and the resulting injustice. The participants noted that the legacy of conflict still poisons intergovernmental relations, especially in judicial institutions.

Mark Freeman, a specialist on transitional justice, gave several short lectures. He discussed truth commissions and inquired about the possibility of setting up such a commission in Kosovo. He suggested creating such commissions outside Serbia because prior ICTJ efforts to set up such a commission in Belgrade had failed.

The audience not only learned about transitional justice from Freeman, who is an indisputable authority on the topic, but also had a chance to debate the current conditions facing Kosovo's justice system and other transitional issues.

The results of the conference will be published in May, and another conference will be held in Pristina on June 24-25. ■

Avoko Meets the Mayor of Tirana



Consulting on cooperation between local government and NGOs

Tirana April 15. Members of the Kosovo NGO Advocacy Network (AvoKo) delegation met with Edi Rama, Mayor of Tirana. Mayor Rama recently won a UN award for best mayor of the year in 2004.

This meeting allowed AvoKo representatives to learn more about the cooperation between civil society and the City Hall in Albania. The meeting received

coverage from public television channel Kosovo RTK. In this meeting, AvoKo members learned about cooperation between the mayor's office and civil society. Mayor Rama explained that in order to rebuild Tirana into a modern capital, citizens' input has been crucial. NGOs have served as a bridge between citizens and elected officials. Citizens' needs

were represented by seven civil commissions that dealt with various aspects of development.

These commissions have influenced decision-making through their work. One example is the building of the sidewalks. Originally, officials understood "rebuilding city infrastructure" mainly as building roads; they ignored the need for sidewalk reconstruction. Thanks to the influence of these civic commissions and periodical opinion polls, officials learned that most citizens considered rebuilding sidewalks more important than building roads. According to Mayor Rama, the impact of opinion polls and civic commissions has led to budgets that are more responsive to the needs of the community.

For many members of the delegation, meeting with Mayor Rama was the highlight of their trip to Tirana. As they left Mayor Rama's office, the AvoKo members said that they were pleased to have the opportunity to speak with one of the most influential and popular Albanian politicians. ■

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