

Diaspora Discusses Future Role in Kosovo

May 29. Prishtina.

For the first time, a conference on the role of diaspora communities in democratic development was held in Kosovo to discuss future diaspora-homeland relations. Conference participants discussed the lack of organization related to the diaspora's involvement in Kosovo and called for the establishment of a more structured system of giving, through which the diaspora, civil society and the government could work towards Kosovo's development.

The conference was part of the Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP), a cooperative agreement between East-West Management Institute, Inc. (EWMI)

and USAID and implemented by EWMI's two local partners, the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI) and the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC). The purpose of the seminar was threefold: i) to discuss strategies of diaspora communities worldwide to provide assistance to their

homelands; ii) to discuss programs and incentives for greater cooperation between Kosovar organizations and diaspora communities, and iii) to learn lessons from the region - examples of programs that link diaspora communities to their homeland.

Kosovar government, which is currently working on programs that provide incentives for greater diaspora engagement in Kosovo; and Kosovar NGOs and citizens attended the conference.

The conference allowed participants to identify and prioritize issues and programs that would lead to an increase in cooperation between

Kosovar organizations and diaspora communities and that would directly contribute to the overall development of Kosovo, including the economy, education and good governance.

"The principal reason that diaspora communities are reluctant to support more sustainable projects in political, economic and diplomatic aspects of development is the lack of government consolidation at the institutional level through which a transparent process can be established, increasing competence and feasibility of realization of projects and therefore participation," Martin Vulaj, Executive Director of the National Al-



The closing panel (left to right) Martin Vulaj (NAAC), Howie Katz (AJWS), Bashkim Rrahmani (FDI), Gabriel Sheffer PhD (professor, Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Delina Fico (Star Network), David Moore (ICNL), and Argjentina Grazhdani (USAID) discussed future recommendations.

"The Diaspora's activities and decisions can give Kosovo and its people a brighter future. Diaspora inaction [will] contribute to despair and hopelessness," Marcie Ries, Chief of Mission at the United States Office in Prishtina said during the opening speech at the conference.



Conference Recommendations

For the Government in relation to the diaspora:

- improve communication
- enhance transparency
- move from personal to institutional level of communication
- build a give-and-take relationship (the government should have concrete policies)
- show results

What Civil society can do for the diaspora:

- improve communication (internet)
- show accountability and transparency
- have sound fiscal policies
- advocate for domestic laws that provide an incentive for diaspora donations and investments
- show results

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UPCOMING EVENTS

FDI Grants Due.....**June 7**

ATRC Training: "Writing Project Proposals" with the National Democratic Institute (NDI).....
.....**June 28-29**

Conference: Diaspora Communities in Development

Meet the Donors:

Rockefeller Brothers Fund

May 10 - The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, represented by Grant Garrison, were guests at the ATRC "Meet the Donors" program this month, where they presented their grant-giving programs to NGO participants. The Fund pursues four program interests - Democratic Practice, Sustainable Development, Peace and Security, and Human Advancement - in a variety of geographic contexts. In addition, the Fund has identified several specific locations on which to concentrate its cross-programmatic grant-making.

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund has been engaged in grant-making in the Balkans, especially Serbia and Montenegro, since the spring of 2001 when the board of trustees identified the region as a "Special Concern". The Fund's work here draws on more than 20 years of grant-making experience in Central and Eastern Europe, which will conclude in 2003.

The Fund is currently planning to expand their projects to Kosovo, especially in the field of public policy and sustainable democracy. One of the potential sub-donors in the region is the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives in Gjakova, which could distribute funds for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in the future. The Fund aims to:

- Support the capacities and performance of governmental institutions.
- Promote a deeper understanding of the role of nongovernmental organizations in democratic society.
- Create conditions for effective relationships between government and civil society institutions.

For more information about the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, go to their website:

www.rbf.org

banian American Council (NAAC) said. "Among other things needed is the establishment of mechanism of communication whereby needs and opportunities are communicated; certainly conferences like this one offer the cross-pollination of the NGO sector in Kosovo and the U.S.," he added.

David Moore from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) provided examples of fiscal incentives at the national and international level that would encourage donors. He also suggested that Kosovar NGOs and government representatives work to educate individual donors in the diaspora regarding the benefits they can receive from giving do-



Conference participants ask the speakers questions.

Kreshnik Berisha (ATRC Director), Bashkim Rrahmani (FDI Executive Director), Fron Nazi (EWM/KNAP Chief of Party), and Natyra Zhjeqi (ATRC Training Officer) (left to right) provide concluding remarks.



nations (corporate or individual). Kosovars should raise the diaspora's awareness regarding other diaspora projects as well as Kosovo initiatives, he said.

Igballe Rogova, Executive Director of the Kosova Women's Network presented an example of citizens and community-based NGOs visiting diaspora communities in Europe to show local programs and to reach out diaspora communities from their particular region.

Zef Shalla from

the Mother Theresa humanitarian organization and Kristin Griffith from Mercy Corps provided examples of prior diaspora involvement, mainly pertaining to humanitarian aid in Kosovo. Lufti Haziri, Mayor of Gjilan Municipality and a representative from the Ministry of Education spoke about the Kosovar government's activities in relation to the diaspora community thus far.

Howie Katz from the American Jewish World Service recommended that NGOs seeking diaspora involvement in the future should stay true to their mission; coordinate with donors; and involve women who often give more funds directly back to improving the situation. ■

Wanted: Greater Diaspora Involvement in Kosovo

In the past decade, diaspora communities have become significant sources of funding and human resources in the area of international development. As "insiders" living abroad, members of diaspora communities have been able to bypass the international aid community and deal directly with indigenous organizations. Consequently, the diaspora's contributions are often unidentifiable to most international organizations. According to UN studies on the role of the diaspora community in international development, most people

would agree that both diaspora communities and international donors have failed to fully utilize each other's resources so as to provide the best possible support to the local population.

There have been successful examples of international aid organizations coordinating their efforts with diaspora communities. In Kosovo, the majority of such successful joint programs have been humanitarian.

International development organizations and the diaspora community should harness each other's strengths and work together

to develop programs that support pro-active issue-driven non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as the capacity of locals to address economic development, education, culture and good governance. After five years, international aid, as expected, is rapidly decreasing while the capacity and efficiency of local organizations is increasing. But with the exodus of the traditional international donor community, the Kosovar diaspora must step in so that Kosovar NGOs and various programs do not disappear. ■

Work Group Discusses Code of Conduct

May 18 - The new NGO Code of Conduct work group met at ATRC to discuss the importance of drafting a Code of Conduct for civil society and to brainstorm future activities. The work group agreed to review proposed Code of Conduct materials provided by the Kosovar Institute for Not-for-profit Law (IKDO) at the next work group meeting.

The work group, established following a discussion at ATRC last month, includes Kreshnik Berisha - ATRC, Teuta Luzha - Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI), Veton Mujaj - Syri i Vizionit, Gjyljeta Mushkolaj - IKDO, and Igballe Rogova - Kosova Women's Network.

After proposals for the NGO Code of Conduct are reviewed, work group members will seek recommendations from other NGOs through a questionnaire, which will be widely distributed to all NGOs who wish to follow the Code of Conduct. The work group proposed two versions of the questionnaire: one with tight standards and another with softer standards.

"Drafting a Code of Conduct is a process. It takes a long time to write a code that you can commit to," Mushkolaj said.

A Code of Conduct is similar to a statute and it incorporates clearly defined conflict of interests policies by which members should abide.

It is a regulation not issued by the government in which an umbrella of NGOs follows set standards and regulates itself to gain trust from governmental institutions and the people.

The work group will meet every month to discuss sample codes of conducts and to write a Code of Conduct applicable to Kosovo's circumstances. If you want more information or want to be involved, contact ATRC. ■

Gabriel Sheffer, Diaspora Specialist Speaks from Experience

May 29 - Gabriel Sheffer, Ph.D., professor of political science at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, spoke about diaspora-homeland (country of origin) relations at the Diaspora Conference. He made a distinction between the relations of stateless and state-linked diasporas and their homelands. Among other things, Sheffer argued that between diasporas and people in their homelands tensions are created regarding

Sheffer's 7 Pieces of Advice for Working with Diaspora Communities

- 1 Allow diaspora autonomy
- 2 Exchange Information
- 3 Be interested in and support the diaspora
- 4 Invest in the Internet
- 5 Show your difficulties; present the reality
- 6 Encourage ear-marked donations; be accountable and transparent
- 7 Invest in young people's relation to their homeland

various possible types of support (political, diplomatic and economic) that diasporas can and wish to extend to their homeland.

Sheffer believes that as diaspora communities increase in number due to immigration, they will play an increasingly important role in their homeland, host country and internationally in regards to politics, economics, etc.

"The melting pot idea is dead," Sheffer said, describing many immigrant communities' tendency to maintain their traditional culture rather than assimilate. He suggested that more be done to improve communication among members of diaspora communities, their host country and their homeland, especially through cultural means such as literature and film.

While Sheffer's interests



began with the Jewish diaspora's role in Israeli foreign policy, he has since broadened his research to include diaspora communities throughout the world. He is recognized as a leading scholar on diasporas and has published numerous articles and books on this issue. The most recent is *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, which is probably the first book to focus on the political aspects of these issues. An earlier edited volume: *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* is widely regarded as the first systematic volume dealing with the diaspora phenomenon. ■

NGOs Must Abide by New Money Laundering Regulation

May 19 - Even after the establishment of the Kosovar assembly, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) continues to issue regulations without public consultation. The latest example is the new UNMIK regulation on money laundering, adopted in February and signed by the Special Representative to the Secretary General to take effect in July. Characteristically, adoption of the regulation, which largely affects society, did not draw media coverage except for some short reports in daily newspapers.

"This regulation's goal is to prevent corrupt practices that deprive funds from Kosovo's consolidated budget," Naser Gjinovci, an independent lawyer said.

To increase public knowledge of the new regulation, ATRC held a discussion, which was attended by 20 NGOs and widely covered

by the media. The discussion concentrated on NGOs' financial obligations under the regulation:

- Unless an NGO goes through the relevant institutional procedures, the NGO may not receive a donation over €1000 from one source at one time.

- An NGO may not spend more than €5000 from its budget on the same day.

- If an NGO receives more than €10,000 a year, it must provide information on the source and the reason for receiving the funds.

The institution responsible for implementing this regulation is the Centre for Financial Information within Pillar I - Police and Justice. This center can issue permission, conditioned permission or no permission for financial transactions. Entities have no right to appeal.

Therefore, whether NGOs have beneficiary status or



The media interviews Director Kreshnik Berisha about the new money laundering regulation.

not, they must maintain a precise list of income and expenditures.

"This regulation is a great obstacle for corruption and organized crime. It establishes a mechanism for the effective implementation of the rule of law," Gjyljeta Mushkolaj, law expert from the Kosovar Institute for Not-for-profit Law (IKDO) said. The obligations under the regulation will also improve Kosovo's financial health, she said. ■ **Read More:** www.unmikonline.org

Freedom of Information Advocates Discuss FOI Monitoring, Implementation

May 14 - Representatives from more than 30 countries gathered in Sofia, Bulgaria to exchange experiences on how to advocate for Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) legislation implementation in their countries. Representatives from the Council of Europe, non-governmental organizations from Southeastern European countries and international NGOs engaged in the FOIA project discussed their present activities and future goals.

ATRC attended the confer-

ence and Kreshnik Berisha, ATRC Director gave a creative power point presentation of the FOIA adoption process in Kosovo, which showed the navigational path through Kosovo's complex governing structures.

According to the latest report by the Access to Information Program in Bulgaria, 50 countries have passed FOI legislation and 30 others have pending efforts. At the



Kreshnik Berisha, ATRC Director, explained Kosovo's FOI act adoption process as "complicated".

conference, participants stressed the need to go beyond ratification to implementation. "Although a quality law is imperative, it has no magic power unless it is monitored," Ioana Avadani from the Center for Independent Journalism in Romania stressed.

"Monitoring is obviously not just about producing evidence of noncompliance with which to pressure the government, but it is also an important tool in raising public awareness," Sarah Buchanan from Article 19 added. ■

The Freedom of Information Advocacy Network (FOIA)

The FOIA Network, established on September 28, 2002 in Sofia, consists of 334 members that represent countries in Europe, South America, Asia, Africa and North America. The FOIA Network's main activities are:

- to promote and develop international standards on access to information, advocating for this right both nationally and internationally;
- to share information about activities and experiences; and
- to promote before international bodies and amongst civil society organizations the International "Right to Know" Day on September 28.

Currently some European members of the FOIA Network, including ATRC, are carrying out the Freedom of Information Act project, which is sponsored by Article 19 from the United Kingdom. The project aims to encourage individual and public demand for government-held information; to facilitate the exercise of the right to access public information; and to work towards transparency.

FDI, ATRC, KODI Join Forces

May 2004 - The Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI), the Kosovar Research and Documentation Institute (KODI) and the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) have joined efforts to influence policy-making in Kosovo by creating the Independent Policy Group (IPG). This comes after three years of successful advocacy work together.

During the past five years many actions were undertaken by various NGOs, but they have had limited influence over decision-making processes. At the same time, while international think tanks have produced excellent policy papers, they have often lacked local perspective.

Within the new IPG, the three organizations will have the following responsibilities:

- FDI, a certified fiscally sound grant-giving and grant-tracking institution, will be responsible for grant-making and financial management of IPG projects;
- KODI, a leading institute for public policy analysis, will research and produce policy papers that will guide IPG implementation activities; and
- ATRC, specialized in advocacy, information and training, will conduct the monitoring and lobbying at the policymaking level to adopt the recommendations.

This year IPG will focus its

activities in two main fields:

1. Agenda for the New Institutions of Kosovo

IPG will draft a four-year agenda, independent of the political parties, but in cooperation with them and other institutions. The agenda will be drafted during the next six months and will be presented to the new government and the public in November 2004.

2. Knowing the Minorities

IPG will join actions to produce profiles for Kosovar minorities. The profiles will include background information on the minorities, their current state as well as recommendations on how best they can be integrated into the Kosovar society. ■

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