Upcoming Events

- FDI Grants Due...Mar. 15.
- “Miss Kosova” - An Ugly Activity
- Meet the Donors: FDI
- How to Write a Winning Project?
- CSS Advocates for a Better Public Transportation
- FDI - Call for Proposals
- Transparency International presents anticorruption manual in Serbia
- Guest Article: Achievements and Failures of International Administration

At the New York Times, Abrahams has worked in the region since 1992. He is best known for his reporting on human rights abuses in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia. Now, he is completing a book on post-communist Albania, a detailed account of the political actors and events from 1990-present.

Human Rights Watch Questions UN Accountability

Fred Abrahams, a writer and a former researcher in the Balkans recently visited Pristhina to write a strategy paper on the degree to which the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is fulfilling its obligations to protect the human rights of Kosovo citizens.

Human Rights Watch believes that compared to international standards, human rights abuses related to the judiciary, minorities, transparency, accountability and missing persons exist in Kosovo. Human Rights Watch is especially concerned that UNMIK has a lot of power but not enough transparency, responsibility or accountability. "Ruling structures in Kosovo are like a Byzantine maze with doors in Pristhina, UN Headquarters and even Belgrade. It is easy to lose the way in this labyrinth and blame one another," he said. Abrahams suggested citizens demand accountability by changing laws and regulations.

NGOs can play a vital role in pressuring Kosovo authorities and UNMIK, according to Abrahams. He suggested that NGOs collect facts and information in a professional way and understand laws and regulations. There are two types of advocacy to bring about change, according to Abrahams: quiet advocacy and public advocacy. "Quiet advocacy" is not necessarily secret; it includes drafting laws, consulting with authorities and working in cooperation with governing structures. "Public Advocacy" is public criticism, what Abrahams refers to as "Name and shame" style. Here NGOs use the press, conferences and newsletters to point out individuals’ or institutions' corrupt practices.

Abrahams suggested that local and international NGOs cooperate in their advocacy efforts. Local NGOs have good information, contacts and context; they understand the politics and culture. International structures have contacts in the US government, UN, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Internationals also understand the international context and have powerful reputations. "For example, our final report can go to the New York Times and the impact is automatically greater," he said.

ATRC Promotes Free Access to Information in the Region

Led by Article 19 and supported by the European Commission, NGOs from Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro started a joint regional project on Freedom of Information (FOI) in January. Article 19, a leading European organization that works to promote free access to information worldwide, has gathered successful South-eastern European organizations to promote citizens' rights to access information held by their governments. ATRC is responsible for implementing the Freedom of Information project in Kosovo.

The “Law on Access to Official Documents” as it is called in Kosovo was adopted by the Assembly and signed by the UN Administrator in November 2003. The law allows for all citizens to request official documents from the authorities. It also requires authorities to disclose the requested information. Only sensitive documents are exempt according to the law. ATRC’s project will aim to encourage the law's implementation by building NGO and public awareness on how to effectively use the law.

"The law is crucial for the creation of a transparent, democratic and non-secretive government," Kreshnik Berisha, ATRC Director said. "However, according to the law, the UN Mission in Kosovo [UNMIK], Kosovo’s ultimate governing authority, retains unlimited power to disclose or not disclose the documents it holds. This is against transparency principles promoted by the [FOI] law around the world," he added.
Ministry Representatives Explain Kosovo Budget

ATRC hosted a budget training for NGOs provided by the Kosovo Government's Ministry of Finance and Economy. The training provided basic information about the Kosovo budget process; compared the Kosovo budget process with international models; and assisted NGOs in understanding the budget process. Through the training, ATRC hoped to build NGOs' capacity to educate citizens as to what funds the budget contains and entry points for influencing it. Training participants also had the opportunity to discuss budget issues with Ministry representatives.

"The budget process in Kosovo is totally different from other states; it is exclusively executive," which means the Parliament is not involved in the process, Steven Leeds from the Ministry of Finance and Economy explained. While the Ministry starts drafting next year's budget in April, changes occur as more money becomes available. Therefore, after reexamining the budget, the Ministry of Finance and Economy asks the municipalities and other ministries to propose additional projects. During this mid-year review, NGOs can influence the ministries and municipalities' budget priorities.

"Can NGOs have any impact on the law for public financial budget management and accountability?" Fron Nazi, Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP) Chief of Party asked. Two types of budget laws exist, Leeds said. First, the base law regulates the budget planning process every year; the base law does not change. Second, the annual law sets the yearly budget allocations for each budget organization; the annual law changes each year. Since the Parliament drafts and adopts the annual law, NGOs can influence it.

"How open is the process before the budget is disclosed? How can I see how my taxes are spent?" Kimete Klenja from ATRC questioned. An existing law states how funds should be allocated and resulting fines if it is not allocated properly. Structures such as auditing also exist, but have not been implemented, Leeds answered.

Other participants questioned the media's publication of a 330 million euro budget surplus that later fell to 75 million euros. Estimation for the surplus was according to the money left in the bank; much of this is earmarked projects delayed for 2004, Agim Krasiqi said.

Citizens Demand Ministry Publicize "Miss Kosova" Spending

Ministry of Culture representatives who have used public funds to support local businesses in organizing "Miss Kosova" were not present at an ATRC debate called "Woman Figure and Beauty Contest in Kosovo" on February 11. Debate participants accused the Ministry of failing to distribute promised gifts, not disclosing potential financial gains and other financial irregularities related to the competition. They requested that the Ministry make public the amount of money spent and any other financial benefits gained from "Miss Kosova".

"The presentation of beauty among us is done through a very ugly activity," Professor Kadri Metaj from Prishtina University's Philosophy Faculty said. The other speakers invited to the discussion included Luljeta Krasiqi, a linguist and women rights activist who recently published a paper on the issue and Adem Gashi from the Ministry of Culture who did not come.

Krasiqi discussed the competition's weaknesses and the women's role in it. She questioned the absence of age requirements for "Miss Kosova" participants, which allow for minors to compete, the ability of young participants to make educated decisions regarding their participation in the event and their naked appearances that are somehow considered representative of their "beauty".

"In this contest 'woman' has become an object of ridicule. She has no [name and no] identity, only a number tag around her neck" Luljeta Krasiqi said. Rather than presenting values, the opposite occurs at this "spectacle organized under the patronage of the highest institution dealing with cultural issues," she said. Discussion participants expressed concerns regarding the organized of "Miss Kosovo", the presentation of "values" in relation to women and the role of the Ministry of Culture in this activity. Another important issue discussed by participants was the relation between the adult public viewers and the young age of contest participants.
FDI Announces Grant Competition

The Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI) invites Kosovo NGOs to apply for Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP) grants. KNAP is a cooperative agreement between USAID and East-West Management Institute, Inc. (EWMI). Projects submitted jointly by advocacy and think tank/policy NGOs will be given priority. FDI strongly encourages applicants to propose innovative approaches to working with the media to increase the impact of proposed activities. Grants ranging from €4,000 to €40,000 are available for anti-corruption, policy analysis and advocacy activities. Applications are due by March 15. For further information and grant applications please contact:

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How to Write a Winning Project for FDI Approval

Amy Horton from the International Center for Not for Profit Law (ICNL) and Gjyljeta Mushkolaj from the Kosovo Institute for NGO Law (IKDO) led a workshop for NGOs interested in applying to the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI) for funds. The workshop gave guidelines on how to write a project proposal for implementing a public participation regulation for the municipal assembly.

"Why should you [NGOs] be interested in this? Some of you might think that maybe the project was successful in some of municipalities but it won't be in yours," Horton addressed some of the NGO representatives’ fears. "However, FDI wants to fund such a project if you prove to them that you will have success," she said.

ICNL and IKDO have already worked with local NGOs to design models that led to the adoption of public participation regulations in other cities. During the workshop NGOs discussed how this project could be adapted to their municipalities' individual circumstances. Horton stressed that the NGOs should tailor their projects to their municipality's individual needs. She also encouraged NGOs to include their own creative, unique ideas.

"You as an NGO can have the best project in the world but no clear objectives […]. The donor will not risk in this case. Present yourself as a professional and make an impression" Horton said.

During the workshop Horton and Mushkolaj tried to elicit from participants the important components of a proposal. They illustrated in detail the subtle distinction between an overall goal, objectives and activities because many NGOs confuse these components: the goal is the final result or success of the project, suggested that the project was successful in some of municipalities but it won't be in yours,” Horton addressed

Citizens Advocate for a Better Public Transportation System in Prizren

The Center for Civil Society (CSS) provided a briefing on their new project “Community and Decision-making” at a roundtable discussion on February 12 at Prizren’s Municipal Assembly. Legal, economic and communication experts explained to NGOs, citizens and local government representatives the significance of public participation in decision-making. "Genuine democratic processes cannot be imagined without citizen participation," Xhevdet Mekani from CSS said.

CSS has already held a press conference, surveyed over 140 citizens, published fliers and met with citizen groups, influential persons and NGOs. This resulted in 14 local NGOs signing a memorandum of understanding. Through this project, CSS hopes to draft a regulation or amend existing regulations to allow for a new mini-bus route in Prizren's public transportation network. They aim to solve problems such as traffic jams, parking shortages, narrow roads, pollution, sidewalks blocked by vehicles and high transportation costs.

According to the draft regulation, the service fee would be 0.30 Euros per trip and the route would go throughout the city. "Citizens will benefit financially from this project since other services like taxis or personal vehicles have higher prices" said Anton Çetta, an economic expert. While a legal and a communication expert confirmed their participation in the discussion, they did not attend.

The Director of Communication and Links in Prizren Municipality questioned the mini-buses' security, especially for disabled people and children. He suggested a six month pilot project to test the proposed transportation system's efficiency.

Teuta Luzha from the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI), the organization sponsoring CSS's project, suggested that the municipality include funds for expanding Prizren's roads in the 2004 budget. Road expansion would enable a more functional transport system, she said.
Belgrade, 4 February 2003 - A manual on practical steps that can be taken in each sector of society to fight corruption was published on February 4 in Serbian at a special event in the capital Belgrade.

The publication, TI Source Book 2000: Confronting Corruption: The Elements of a National Integrity System, introduces the concept of a National Integrity System. This approach anti-corruption not only from an angle of suppression but also of prevention and education.

The Serbian version of the manual was prepared by the Serbian Chapter of the non-governmental organization, Transparency International, in cooperation with Beta News Agency and the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro.

The system also defines a multi-level framework with 11 pillars on which the fight against corruption rests. These include the executive and legislative powers, the judiciary, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the police, public services, the Auditor General, anti-corruption agencies (commissions), the Ombudsman, the media and civil society.

The anti-corruption manual also contains best practice documentation and practical tools that can be used in order to fight against corrupt practices.

The main speakers at the presentation of the manual were: Ambassador Maurizio Massari, the Head of the OSCE Mission; Professor Vladimir Goati, President of Transparency Serbia; Nemanja Nenadic, Project Manager of Transparency Serbia; and Zlatko Minic, Internet Editor of Beta News Agency.

**Achievements and Failures of the International Administration**

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The situation in Kosovo can only change through the initiative of politicians and local institutions. So far, there is no indication that such initiatives are possible.

(Committee)