NGOs Discuss Decentralization and the Pilot Project

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 decentrallization 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.
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 Kaufmann - 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 Kosovo 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.

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.
International Donors Learn about Local NGOs

Pristina, 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.

Igabile 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, 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

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 related 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

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

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.

St. Agim Ramadani Nr. 15 (former Ramiz Sadiku)
2nd Floor Pristina, Kosovo
Phone: +381 38 244 810
Fax: +381 38 244 810

Director
KRESHNIK BERISHA
keka@advocacy-center.org

General Manager
KIMETE KLENJA
kimete@advocacy-center.org

Training Manager
NATYRA ZHJEQI
natyra@advocacy-center.org

Information and Outreach Officer
NICOLE FARNSWORTH
nicole@advocacy-center.org

Information and Outreach Coordinator
OERD IMAMI
oerd@advocacy-center.org

FOI program coordinator
EMINE VALA
emine@advocacy-center.org

Office Administrator
GANI ASLLANI
gani@advocacy-center.org

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