Get Out the Vote Campaign Successfully Concludes

Pristina. October 12. A coalition of more than 30 NGOs and civic groups ran a “Get Out the Vote” (GOTV) campaign in Kosovo. Its reach was extensive not only due to the involvement of the mass media, but also thanks to the 2,200 volunteers that participated. This was one of the most significant volunteer efforts of this magnitude since before the 1999 conflict in Kosovo.

The GOTV central coordinating committee was comprised of the Advocacy Training and Resource Center, the National Democratic Institute and the Kosova Women’s Network. They, in turn, involved 30 local NGO coordinators.

GOTV was organized through a collaborative effort, in which each GOTV partner organization contributed according to its means: U.S. and European organizations provided funding for direct expenses; Kosovar NGOs provided in-kind services that include recruiting volunteers as well as distributing leaflets, T-shirts and posters; and the Kosovar media provided free airtime for GOTV commercials. The coalition united under the GOTV campaign slogan “Don’t Hesitate, Vote”.

As far as achieving its organizational goals, this campaign was a success. First, the campaign demonstrated that large-scale volunteer campaigns are possible. Second, the campaign provided a model for future volunteer efforts, both in Kosovo and elsewhere.

NGOs Present Research Findings on March Events

Pristina. October 13. Four research groups promulgated their analyses of the March events at a public discussion held at ATRC. The presenters included: the Kosovar Research and Documentation Institute (KODI), the Institute for Social and Policy Studies (Sfera), the Ron Brown Group of the American Universities Alumnae Association and the Informal Group of Researchers. The presentation, attended by more than 50 representatives of local and international organizations, drew extensive media coverage from TV channels and newspapers.

KODI’s presentation focused on decentralization and its impact on ethnicity and governance. They argued that although decentralization can have a significant impact in raising the level of security for both minorities and majorities, it will be unsuccessful if Serbs maintain parallel structures. They recommended cooperation between all parties interested in decentralization as the sole way of finding a solution.
Kosovo Ready for Elections

Less than two weeks before key parliamentary elections in Kosovo, a campaign kicked off Tuesday (12 October), encouraging voters to go to the polls. The 23 October vote, the fourth since 1999, is viewed as a major test for the international community’s efforts to build multiethnic democracy in the province.

A pool of international organizations and NGOs launched the “Get Out the Vote” campaign amid indications of low voter interest in the upcoming poll and calls for a Serbian Kosovo boycott of the vote.

Quoting one of the organizers, Kreshnik Berisha, the AP reported that 2,800 volunteers are taking part in the initiative, which includes television spots, posters, leaflets, T-shirts and a door-to-door effort.

A survey conducted by the Kosovo Institute for Ethnic Relations has indicated that about 25 per cent of the province’s registered voters, mostly Albanian Kosovars, may stay away from the polls due to continuing economic problems and disappointment with political parties.

Italicized items have been edited.

Interview with Violeta Zeka, Co-coordinator of GOTV

Q: What gave you the most pleasure in this campaign?
A: It certainly was the work with our volunteers, especially their enthusiasm in reaching voters. It was a pleasure to see so many young people interested in doing something for their future.

Q: Which of our campaign activities seemed to be the most successful to you?
A: Organizing the “door to door” canvassing was really interesting since it hadn’t been done before. Previously, we had not seen people’s reactions to volunteers knocking on their doors. Their reaction was quite positive.

Q: What do you think were the failures of this campaign?
A: Retrospectively, I wish we had more time to organize an even more efficient door to door campaign. The volunteers should have been trained better as well. Our resources didn’t allow us to give maps and voters’ lists to the volunteers.

Q: Did the campaign influence voters’ behavior?
A: It is difficult to measure the extent of our influence on these elections, but when one considers that 53% of the population came out to vote, it must have had an impact. This is not to say that the other campaigns to mobilize voters, by political parties and other NGOs, were not successful. After the March events, many analysts expected a much lower turnout. Yet the results of the elections show that a sufficient number of voters participated. Although the turnout wasn’t as good as we hoped for, I am happy that so many citizens used their vote. In conclusion, I will say that we were not the sole influence, yet I believe that we had a positive impact.

Violeta canvasses with volunteers in the streets of Pristina.
Elita Pushes through Public Participation Legislation

The regulation for public participation in decision-making in Viti municipality was approved by the municipal committee on November 1. This comes after NGO Elita’s advocacy campaign in which they conducted public debates with citizens and political parties, gained support from municipal councilors and cooperated with the Committee for Politics and Finances. This project was realized with financial and technical support from the USAID-supported East West Management Institute (EWMI)/Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP) as well as its partners the Kosovar Institute for NGO Law (IKDO), the International Center for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL) and the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI).

FDI Changes Location and Telephone

The Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI) is now located at:

Rr. Marlin Barleti nr. 46/II
Gjakove

Tel: 039 027 573

In the near future, FDI will have a branch office in Pristina at ATRC.

Get Out The Vote Campaign, Cont’d

achievable in Kosovo. Second, there was no significant drop in voter turnout for the first election after the March riots, even though low turnout had been predicted.

Participation from the mass media was vital for the campaign’s success. All three major Kosovar TV channels carried campaign TV spots and offered free air time. Free air time was supplemented with prime-time slots for campaign ads. Local media stations cooperated with GOTV local coordinators and the Kosova Women’s Network to broadcast spots and host local debates. The campaign also received coverage from the Kosovar print media as well as the international media.

In an effort to reach out to all communities in Kosovo, the GOTV coalition included NGOs representing all ethnicities, and campaign materials were printed in Serbian as well as Albanian. The volunteers’ direct contact with voters has provided NGOs with a better understanding of the electorate, including how to individually approach all members of Kosovar society.

This campaign’s success is a significant lesson to all NGOs that are interested in spearheading innovative campaigns in Kosovo. All steps for planning the campaign, including lessons learned, are available in the ATRC library.

International NGOs learn about ATRC’s Initiatives

Pristina, October 28. In a meeting at ATRC, members of NGOs from Poland, Macedonia, Sweden and Kosovo met to share experiences. ATRC Director Kreshnik Berisha represented ATRC in this meeting and gave an overview of the organization’s achievements since its conception.

Berisha focused his presentation on the attempts, successful and otherwise, to shape the political environment in Kosovo. His presentation of the situation in Kosovo was supported by the presentations of three other Kosovar NGOs: Koni, Care and Nansen Dialogue Center (NDC). Koni focuses on youth and interethnics.

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Presentation of Studies on March Events, Cont’d
to the problem. However, they noted that all parties in Kosovo are incapable of cooperating to reach a consensus.

Sfera’s study examined the role that the mass media had in inflaming the populace into rioting. The detailed study of the media didn’t find a bias significant enough to have increased participation in the riots. In fact, the level of unbalanced reporting was almost the same in February as it was in March. According to Sfera, this is a clear sign that there wasn’t a significant change in reporting - at least not significant enough to lead to rioting. Sfera’s study noted that the recommendations given to TV stations had not been followed as they should have been. RTK had best implemented the recommendations, but the other two national channels were lagging behind. Sfera warned that due to the pressures the media is facing it could fall into a pattern of self-censorship.

The Ron Brown group analyzed reports from the Prime Minister’s office, International Crisis Group, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. They concluded that the economic situation had a great impact on the March events. They also argued that the legal system needs to be unified, rather than running parallel structures. They recommended a structure that would deal with human rights abuses in an impartial manner. Other recommendations of the group dealt with the need for economic development that would lower ethnic tensions.

The Informal group of Researchers argued that the status issue must be solved as soon as possible. According to them, one of the most critical issues was the fact that the population was frustrated while the local political elite was isolated from the most important decision-making. According to Profesor Anton Berisha, the process of transferring power and competencies is instrumental to raising the tolerance of a population that has been waiting for too long to govern itself. “The transfer of the competencies to locals means more responsibility for a more tolerant Kosovo,” he said.

All four researchers’ work was made possible through a grant from the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (FDI) as part of the East West Management Institute’s (EWMI) Kosovo NGO Advocacy Project (KNAP). This project is supported by the American people through USAID.

International NGOs Learn about ATRC’s Initiatives, Cont’d
CARE is a well known international organization. These three NGOs reported on their activities in Kosovo, before a frank and genuine discussion on ethnicity and politics took place.

The discussion focused on the situation in the divided city of Mitrovica and the social costs of this division along ethnic lines. Neither Serbs nor Albanians are capable of moving freely in what once was their common city. Younger generations are even more separated by the language barrier. Others have lost more than just friends or opportunities to live in a more diverse world. In the words of a participant “Since the war, I lost my house. Although now the war is over, and my house is still there, I cannot return. I feel like I will always be internally displaced.”

Members of foreign NGOs paid close attention to the presentations and asked many questions on the nature of the problems Kosovars are facing. They left with a promise to come back and follow up on the situation in Kosovo.