ATRC community roundtables

Experts Give Explanations to Kosovo Citizens over Ahtisaari’s Package

International and local experts on Ahtisaari’s proposal called citizens to maintain peace and stability at the time when status for the future of Kosovo is in its final phase.

Representatives of local and central government, NGO, media and business sector in 25 towns of Kosovo had the opportunity to gather information, make their concerns heard, and ask questions about the content of the Kosovo settlement proposal, through 26 community roundtables organized by ATRC in March.

These roundtables were held in Pristina, Mitrovicë/a, Prizren, Gjakova/Djakovica, Peja/Pec, Ferizaj/Urosevac, Novobërd/o, Kaçanik, Obiliç/c, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Shtime/Stimlje, Klinë/a, Kamenicë/a, Graçanica/Gracanica, Podujevë/o, Lipjan/Lipljan, Shtërpce/Sterpce, Istog/k, Suhareka/Suvareka, Rahovec/Orahovac, Viti/Vitina, Skenderaj/Srbica, Mali- shevë/o, Partesh/s, and Zveçan/Zvecan, in an attempt to inform civil society organizations and citizens about the proposal of Martti Ahtisaari, UN Secretary General Envoy in Charge of the Negotiations on the future status of Kosovo.

"Ahtisaari’s package consists of general principles that set the pace towards independent state of Kosovo", Blerim Shala, coordinator of Kosovo negotiation team said on Mar. 7 at the roundtable in Pristina. "The package preserves our borders and enables Kosovo to become a success story."

The Head of British Office in Kosovo, David Blunt, stated that Ahtisaari’s package is the result of compromise and divergent views. According to Blunt, the package represents the views of majority and the need for protection of minorities. "Decentralization in Kosovo is a process same as it is in the entire Europe" he said.

Decentralization process was one of the issues of concern raised mostly by participants.

Seven regional town hall meetings scheduled for April will follow the community roundtable meetings to further and widely inform the opinion about the content of Ahtisaari’s package.

UN Secretary General Envoy unveiled his package proposal on February 2, after a year of negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade in Vienna, Austria.

For the full status proposal, visit www.unosek.org
ATRC Trains Municipal Officials and NGOs on Social Conflict Resolution

ATRC trainers conducted six training workshops on conflict management in Prishtina, Gjilan and Peja regions during March. “Multilevel Social Conflict Resolution” training workshops, attended by municipal officials and NGOs, aim to assist local government and civil society in fostering and strengthening their relationships in order to foresee and better respond to the needs of their communities through conflict resolution tools and techniques.

ATRC believes that building and strengthening the relationships between these two sectors would also act as a supportive base for other projects linked to democracy and peace preservation in Kosovo. This is being implemented through training workshops on conflict resolution to local government and NGO representatives.

“Multilevel Social Conflict Resolution” training workshops include sessions on understanding and working with conflict, communication, social conflict, change and democracy, development cooperation, etc.

This initiative is supported by Olof Palme International Center.

Introducing a local NGO

"Partners Kosova" Serves as a Center for Conflict Management

"Partners-Kosova Center for Conflict Management" is a local non-government organization committed to advance civil society, culture of change and conflict management.

"Partners-Kosova" was founded in 2001 to foster a culture of peaceful conflict resolution in Kosovo. Since then, this center has worked with Kosovo citizens of all ethnicities to facilitate the resolution of disputes and build consensus on neighborhood, business, majority-minority, and citizen-government issues. The center provides services ranging from mediation to training courses in anti-discrimination and ethnic integration. It has helped expand the acceptance of alternative and peaceful conflict resolution in the community.

Partners-Kosova’s main areas of work are: mediation, local government reform, ethnic integration & conflict resolution. Its main programs include mediation service; local government program; and youth and woman leadership program.

For more information, visit: www.partnerskosova.org
NGOs Unify Activities in Vitia to Advocate on Behalf of Citizens

NGOs in the Municipality of Vitia, an eastern town of Kosovo, believe that problems of citizens can be solved through extensive advocacy campaigns. They are aware that in order for civil society to have its impact in the decision making process, NGOs need to speak with one voice. Therefore, on March 7 NGOs of Vitia unified their activities under a coalition through which they aim to advocate on behalf of citizens.

NGO "Elita" initiated the building of this coalition, supported by ATRC and IREX under Kosovo Civil Society Program. Emrush Azemi from Elita stated that this coalition will advocate for the solution of "many problems in Vitia/Vitina that need to be solved by local governing institutions".

"Different types of NGOs in Vitia have identified many problems that could be solved, if willingness would exist among institutions. We (NGOs) believe that an intensive advocacy campaign would pressure municipal officials towards solution of these problems," Azemi said.

Implementation of the regulation of Municipality Assembly about traffic; implementation of the law on gender equality; function of law office of Municipality Assembly; a more active participation of youth in decision making process; improvement of hygiene conditions in the two high schools of the town; are the issues that the NGO coalition will advocate for, according to Azem.

Melihate Osmani, coordinator of the women's association "Legjenda" noted that civil society was actively engaged in advocacy issues in Vitia/Vitina "but results were limited because these activities were not unified within civil society organizations. The new coalition is a big step ahead."

For more information, visit www.elita-viti.org

Young Eastern Europeans Discuss Volunteer Innovations at an Athens Seminar

Fifty representatives of civil society organizations and volunteering movement from 26 countries in the Balkan and the broader area of Eastern Europe (including Kosovo representatives from ATRC and Avonet) gathered at Athens, Greece, to share the knowledge and practicing of the latest developments on volunteerism.

Participants met from 1 to 3 March at a seminar organized by Citizen in Deed, the state organization of Greece for volunteerism.

They had the opportunity to attend a series of lectures, exchange ideas, experiences, and participate in workshops and role plays under the direction of academics and field experts. The seminar focused on state initiatives for the third sector; international relations: Eastern Europe and the third sector; history and theory of civil society; NGO management; voluntary work; etc.

"If you don't have partners, you simply do not exist", professor Pantelis Sklias from Democritus University of Thrace said, referring to the importance of effective partnerships among civil society organizations.

For more information, visit www.citizenindeed.org
Organization of disabled people of Kosovo "Handikos" organized a seminar in the town of Suhareka/Suvareka on March 6 entitled "Public awareness for hiring disabled persons within municipalities of Kosovo". The seminar also aimed to discuss possibilities of coalitions and networks building in order to increase activities in supporting disabled people.

Organizers stressed the importance of organizing training workshops for disabled persons in order to advance them professionally, and also to build networks and coalitions among this layer of society for a better representation and demand of their rights. Participants urged local government institutions to be committed in improving environment for free movement of disabled people, in hiring and advancing them professionally. Handikos center in Suhareka/Suvareka has 520 members. The seminar was supported by ATRC and IREX.

Disabled People Urge Local Governments to employ them

"Nation-building Processes in Southeastern Europe" is a research project that examines four specific nation-building processes in Southeastern Europe after 1945: the Bosnian, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Moldovan cases. The research focuses on popular perceptions of nation-building. How did 'ordinary' people in these four countries face with communist and post-communist nation-building efforts; were rejected or modified official notions of (new) national identity? By what means was achieved identification with the new nation, such as nationalization of cultural practices, as well as symbols? By providing historical and anthropological perspectives, this comparative study of recent nation-building processes intends to break new scientific ground.

Nation-building in Southeastern Europe

What is Civil Society?

In simple terms, civil society is an intermediate space between the citizen and the state, which is formed by voluntary organizations, clubs, professional unions, cultural establishments and religious bodies. It acts, thus, as a counterweight to political society. Civil society is a measure of cultural development and aptitude to democratic ways in any society: the greater the development of civil society, the better democracy functions. The modern concept of civil society was formed with the transition from traditional to modern society. It is therefore, intrinsically connected with the notion of modernity… ATRC would like to publish readers' views on this question, therefore your opinions are welcomed (please e-mail info@advocacy-center.org)