

CIG

Council
for Inclusive
Governance

Inclusion of Kosovo Serbs in Political Processes

Activity Report

Pristina, Belgrade, July 2011

Council for Inclusive Governance

New York, 2011

Introduction

The Council for Inclusive Governance organized in July 2011 a series of activities for Kosovo Serb representatives and officials of Serbia's institutions. The activities included a roundtable in Pristina for Kosovo Serb local and central level officials and civic activists, one roundtable in Belgrade for a number of Kosovo Serb politicians and Serbian government officials and parliamentarians, and a meeting between Kosovo Serb political representatives and the speaker of Serbia's parliament. CIG held individual meetings with Kosovo government and party officials, including the speaker of parliament, and Serbian government and party officials. Participants included Serb members of Kosovo's parliament, Serb mayors of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, officials from the Serbian Ministry for Kosovo, members of Serbia's parliament, representatives of Serbia's Democratic Party, G17 Plus Party, Socialist Party of Serbia, Liberal Democratic Party, and members of civil society from Serbia and Kosovo.

Issues addressed in the activities included the role of Kosovo Serbs in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, the establishment of cooperation between Belgrade and Kosovo Serb representatives in Kosovo's institutions, and the issue of institutional 'dualism' in Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. Participants recommended bigger involvement of Kosovo Serb representatives in the dialogue, the resolution of institutional 'dualism' in Serb-majority municipalities, and the establishment of official communication and cooperation between Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo's institutions.

The activities were part of an initiative on the future of the Serb community in Kosovo funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

To encourage frank discussions, CIG does not attribute remarks to specific discussants and asks for the understanding of those whose remarks have not been fully captured in this brief report. The participants took part in the events in their personal capacities and their positions do not necessarily reflect those of organizations they represent.

Inclusion of Kosovo Serb political leaders in Belgrade-Pristina dialogue

In the roundtable in Pristina for Kosovo Serb political and civil society representatives, the participants recommended to include Kosovo Serb leaders in the dialogue process, either directly, by appointing a Serb representative in Pristina's negotiation team, or indirectly, by holding regular consultations between Serb representatives and officials of Pristina's team. Similar consultations were also suggested between Kosovo Serbs and representatives of Belgrade's negotiation team. Analysis and feedback of the Kosovo Serbs could contribute to the reaching and implementation of agreements. Serb politicians who are not in Kosovo's institutions and civil society representatives should also be included in this process. The participants, however, agreed that the dialogue is primarily focused on resolving the outstanding disputes between Belgrade and Pristina rather than on the position of the Serb community in Kosovo. As such, they had not expected a strong Kosovo Serb participation in the process, but had neither expected their complete exclusion. "The dialogue is above all about sovereignty issues," a participant assessed. It directly affects the sovereignty and integrity of Serbia. Therefore, any progress will be slow and accompanied by many difficulties.

The participants supported the continuation of the dialogue, assessing that Belgrade and Pristina need to resolve a number of outstanding disputes to move closer to fulfilling their aspirations of European integration. “The status-related disputes are stumbling blocks for both Belgrade and Pristina,” a speaker noted. The majority of participants were not satisfied with the three agreements—travel documents, school diplomas, and car registration plates—achieved in June, but welcomed them as temporary solutions which will, if implemented, considerably ease the tensions between Serbs and Albanians and prepare the ground for addressing more sensitive issues, such as customs stamps. The agreements do not resolve the problems the way many Serbs in Kosovo expected. “The car registration plates will indicate who is Serb and who is Albanian: cars with KS plates indicate you are Serb; cars with Serbian temporary plates in Serbia indicate you are Albanian.” The recognition of Kosovo’s ID cards would only resolve the movement of people but not of goods, and Kosovo’s ID cards would not be recognized as valid documents to, for instance, open a business in Serbia. It was also not clear whether diplomas of the Serb-run University of Mitrovica would be recognized. A participant reported that Kosovo officials familiar with the agreements had told him that the agreement does not foresee the recognition of these diplomas. The participants feared that the application of the reciprocity measures against Serbia—not yet applied when the meeting took place—would mostly harm the Kosovo Serbs. Among others, Kosovo Serbs may not be able to use Belgrade-issued car registration plates anymore or import Serbian goods. They suggested that the government officials in Belgrade and Pristina, particularly the ministries of internal affairs, should conduct information campaigns to explain to the people the details of the agreements and the procedures they need to follow.

Many participants suggested that relations and cooperation among Kosovo Serb parliamentary parties during the dialogue process should be improved. It was agreed that political leaders should have monthly meetings to coordinate their actions and address urgent issues. There was overall agreement that the representatives of the largest Serb parliamentary party should take the lead in organizing such events. A speaker criticized the Serbs in the institutions for not doing enough regarding the dialogue: “The three Serb ministers had never convened any discussions with the dialogue team members to provide their input and advice on how to resolve the problems of their constituencies.”

Although they welcomed the three agreements, the participants expressed doubts about the implementation, given the past experience of cooperation between Belgrade and Pristina and the internal objections in Serbia and Kosovo to the dialogue. The implementation of the agreements should begin in November but no completion deadline is foreseen, leaving room for skeptics to believe that the implementation could drag on for years. The participants also complained about the lack of transparency of the negotiations: “We can only discuss what we have read in the papers; there is no public document from the dialogue teams.” A number of participants took part in a roundtable discussion with the head of Kosovo dialogue team, Edita Tahiri, but “she did not offer any information we had already not read in the papers.”

The issue of establishing a forum that would include representatives of the entire Serb political spectrum as well as Serb civil society representatives was brought up again. Although the participants supported the idea in principle, few expected that the Kosovo Serbs would be able to overcome the divisions and form such a body. A few questioned the need for it. They said that

the Serb interests should be represented and protected by the elected representatives who “are paid to do so.” Forming a body that includes all the Serbs is difficult not only because the Serbs in the south are divided but also because the Serbs in the north will likely not join, a number of discussants concluded. A speaker suggested closer cooperation among Serb-majority municipalities.

Meeting in two separate working groups the participants worked on identifying issues that they believe should receive priority treatment within the official Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Such issues include issues connected with the fate of missing persons, personal documents, property issues, telecommunications especially mobile telephone, and energy. Some participants said that a meeting between Kosovo Serb leaders and the Kosovo Minister of Interior would be very helpful in clarifying the functioning of the Kosovo police and exchanging opinions of the police’s functioning in Serb-majority areas.

The message of the participants was that the Serb representatives in the institutions should find models to influence government policies more and search for ways to include the advice, feedback, and suggestions of Kosovo Serbs in the dialogue discussions. They also called for the dialogue to be more transparent and for the Kosovo dialogue team to invite them for consultations on issues that directly affect the Serb community.

Resolving institutional ‘dualism’

CIG organized a roundtable in Belgrade for Kosovo Serb representatives, including members of Kosovo’s parliament and mayors of Serb-majority municipalities, and Belgrade government and political party officials, including representatives of the Serbian Ministry for Kosovo, members of Serbia’s parliament, representatives of Serbia’s Democratic Party, G17 Plus Party, Socialist Party of Serbia, Liberal Democratic Party, and representatives of civil society. The objective of the roundtable was to discuss the issue of institutional ‘dualism,’ also known as ‘parallelism,’ in Serb-majority municipalities.

The meeting coincided with the Kosovo police intervention in the north and the discussion of some more general topics was inevitable. This meeting was also held after Kosovo’s government applied ‘reciprocity’ measures, banning Serbian exports to Kosovo. Participants welcomed the reaction of the Independent Liberal Party (SLS), boycotting parliament’s session, to Kosovo’s reciprocity measures. Some participants, however, said that the Serb members in Kosovo’s government and parliament should do more and react faster to certain policies that harm the interests of the Serb community. In response, SLS representatives noted that their power to prevent Kosovo’s government from the execution of certain policies, such as the ‘reciprocity,’ is limited and this should be understood by all Serb political actors.

SLS representatives affirmed that they support peaceful resolution of disputes and hold accountable both Belgrade and Pristina for the unrest in the Serb-dominated north municipalities: Belgrade for its decision to ‘withdraw’ from the dialogue and Pristina for applying reciprocity measures abruptly and for sending police units in the north. Had Belgrade taken part in the Brussels meeting in July, the reciprocity measures and the police intervention in the north perhaps could have been avoided. A speaker noted that four actors are crucial for finding a long-

term solution for the north: Belgrade, Pristina, international community, and local authorities. SLS ministers did not attend the government session where the decision to ban Serbian products was taken. SLS reacted by contacting internationals, the government, and its members in the parliament did not take part in the next parliament session, an SLS representative reported.

Participants briefly discussed the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. A discussant blamed Belgrade for the interruption of the dialogue, specifically the decision of Belgrade's dialogue head to cancel his participation in the last minute to a session in Brussels where a few more agreements, including one on customs stamps, were supposed to be reached. He also blamed the European internal disagreements and the bureaucratic process for the lack of progress. The speaker predicted that the Kosovo police intervention in the north would "destroy" the process. Many noted that the Kosovo police intervention in the north was not an unexpected development because various European and United States officials had warned that if parties fail to make progress on customs stamps, they will back Kosovo's decision to apply reciprocity measures on trade.

The participants support the continuation of dialogue and said that the achievement of the first three agreements showed that it is a productive process, but Pristina's reciprocity measures and the police intervention in the north may jeopardize it, they concluded. Belgrade and Pristina should be able to overcome the pressure from the opposition parties and take the right decisions. Another speaker said that for the dialogue to be successful, the agreements should be implemented swiftly. He explained that SLS and the United Serb List had acted jointly in response to Pristina's reciprocity measures: "We did all we can, talked to internationals, to Kosovo's highest officials and were told that the measures would not last long." The speaker stated that Kosovo Serbs are not a *décor* in Kosovo's institutions, and that they use all available means to influence policy, but their power is limited and the critics need to understand it. "We are only 13 in a 120-member parliament."

In the second roundtable session, participants focused on the issue of institutional 'dualism' in Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo. A mayor reported that he has communicated with Serbian local institutions in Kosovo, also known as parallel institutions, and asked them to work together until a solution to the institutional 'dualism' is found. He said that at the beginning the Serbian institutions had no willingness to cooperate but that now communication has been established. He suggested that the Serbian government should have a similar approach, to encourage the institutions that work for the interests of the Serb community to work together. He said that coordination and cooperation could be useful especially in building or renovating schools, hospitals, cultural centers, and in improving the overall system of education.

Another speaker also supported the idea of coordinating activities between the two sets of institutions until a solution between Belgrade and Pristina is found. The discussant said that an assessment of the current situation should be conducted to see what areas could be improved. "We have to see how our services function. There are 250 people working in the clinic in Gracanica; we need to see how it functions, who is how much paying for it." A resolution to the 'dualism' is impossible without Belgrade. Therefore, a genuine dialogue with Belgrade is indispensable. A number of participants criticized Belgrade's dialogue team head for meeting, for instance, with a Belgrade-appointed head of district that never ran in elections but ignored the

Serb elected local officials during his visit to Kosovo in June. A participant suggested the opening of a university in Gracanica. “This would be accountable politics, have our students study in Gracanica instead of going all over Serbia and never coming back.”

Nobody should have the monopoly to speak in the name of all Serbs in Kosovo, but those representatives who received the votes of the people should have a bigger voice than the ‘appointed’ ones. Kosovo Serbs are in crossfire between Belgrade and Pristina. Health and education are the biggest problems and Serbs need to improve these areas together with Belgrade and Pristina and these should be topics for discussions between Belgrade and Pristina.

The Belgrade-funded local institutions in Kosovo have not produced many results given the amount of money they have received from Belgrade since they were created in 2008. “I am not against providing funds for health and education service for Kosovo Serbs, they are needed, but I don’t support the establishment of institutions that can’t function,” a speaker said.

Addressing the issue of whether Belgrade should organize another local election in Kosovo next year, a speaker said that it would be very difficult for Belgrade not to. Another speaker said that it is also difficult for Serbia to organize local elections in Kosovo: it will cause a conflict with the international community especially now that Serbia has intensified its efforts to join the EU. The speaker assessed that organizing local elections in 2008 in Kosovo produced some unintended consequences: it brought hardliners to power. “The resolution of institutional ‘dualism’ should be part of a package that includes an appropriate decision about elections and the return to the system. It should also resolve the bureaucracy; we can’t have hundreds of people employed in clinics and local institutions receiving salaries without doing any work.”

In conclusion, participants agreed that institutional ‘dualism’ could not be resolved without cooperation between Belgrade and Kosovo Serbs. Meetings between Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade should be open and frequent; they should be normal events. A Serbian member of parliament also suggested that meetings between Serbian and Kosovo parliamentarians should take place. Some discussants expressed their willingness to travel to Pristina to meet with their counterparts. A senior Serbian parliamentarian offered technical expertise and advice to the Serb members in the Kosovo parliament in their legislative work suggesting regular joint coordination. It was suggested to use the experience of cooperation between Serbia and Serbs in Croatia and Hungary and Hungarians outside of Hungary in this regard. In the meantime, Serb local institutions and Belgrade-funded institutions should try to cooperate in areas where it is possible, but the final decision regarding ‘dualism’ rests with Belgrade.

Cooperation between Kosovo Serb political representatives and Belgrade

CIG organized a meeting between a number of Kosovo Serb representatives and the speaker of Serbia’s parliament. The Kosovo Serb participants representing various political parties active in the Kosovo institutions, from both the government and the opposition, came to the meeting united in their desire to request greater cooperation with and support from the institutions of Serbia.

The overall joint conclusion of this meeting was that it is important for relevant officials in Belgrade to establish standing dialogue and cooperation with the Serbs working in the Kosovo institutions. Talking to Serb officials in the Kosovo institutions cannot and should not be a violation of the Serb state policy on Kosovo, the participants agreed.

When issuing its opinion on the Serb participation in the Kosovo December 2010 elections the Serbian government did not forbid the Serbs to take part and said they were free to make their own mind about participation adding that those taking part should not be penalized for their decision. About 26,000 Serb voters took part in the poll electing 13 members of parliament.

At the meeting it was agreed that these elected officials are legitimate representatives of those who have voted for them and deserve recognition and cooperation from the politicians in Belgrade. It was stressed several times during the discussion that unity among Serbs in Kosovo and between them and Belgrade is a crucial factor in improving the situation of the Kosovo Serbs.

Serb members of the Kosovo parliament requested assistance and advice in their parliamentary work, including holding of consultations on draft laws that are being considered by the Kosovo parliament. Such cooperation should be institutionalized and become a regular daily business. Another part of this cooperation should be drafting of a joint strategy on Kosovo. Such a proposal came from both participants from Kosovo and those from Belgrade. Such a strategy must reflect the opinion of the Kosovo Serbs. It was noted that CIG's work creates an excellent basis and a good team for creation of such a strategy.

Kosovo Serb politicians said that Belgrade's support is needed in strengthening the role and influence of the Serbs in Kosovo's politics. They reminded that this is most likely for the last time that the Serbs in Kosovo were able to achieve a 13-member strong parliamentary representation. In the future parliaments they do not expect their representation to go above the guaranteed 10 seats.

Kosovo Serb local officials informed the speaker of the Parliament about many practical results from their engagement in improving the daily lives of the Serb inhabitants of Kosovo. The speaker of the Parliament was asked to use her authority to convince other responsible officials in Belgrade to establish contact and cooperation with the Serb representatives in Kosovo's institutions.

Following the meeting, the participants gave statements to the Serbian print and electronic media and had a meeting with the parliamentary group of the Liberal Democratic Party.

Participants

English Alphabetical Order

Sasa Djokic, Serb Democratic Party of Kosovo and Metohija
Slavica Djukic Dejanovic, Parliament of Serbia
Oliver Ivanovic, Serbian Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija
Dusan Janjic, Forum for Ethnic Relations
Dalibor Jevtic, Independent Liberal Party
Vesna Jovanovic, Independent Liberal Party
Biljana Jovic, Center for Migration Studies
Nebojsa Kenic, United Serb List
Dragisa Krstovic, Liberal Democratic Party
Gradimir Mikic, Serbian Renewal Movement
Vesna Mikic, United Serb List
Petar Miletic, Independent Liberal Party
Bratislav Nikolic, Independent Liberal Party
Dragan Nikolic, Radio Kompas
Randjel Nojkic, Serbian Renewal Movement
Veljko Odalovic, Socialist Party of Serbia
Zoran Ostojic, Liberal Democratic Party
Stojanka Petkovic, G17 Plus Party
Dusica Petrovic, Parliament of Serbia
Dejan Radenkovic, Socialist Party of Serbia
Nenad Radosavljevic, RTV Mir
Branko Ruzic, Socialist Party of Serbia
Vesimir Savic, United Serb List
Nebojsa Simic, Municipality of Kamenica
Predrag Simic, University of Belgrade
Bojan Stojanovic, Independent Liberal Party
Momcilo Trajkovic, Serbian Resistance Movement
Rada Trajkovic, United Serb List
Jelena Trivan, Democratic Party
Lukas Beglinger, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Shpetim Gashi, Council for Inclusive Governance
Alex Grigorev, Council for Inclusive Governance
Arber Kuci, Council for Inclusive Governance
Norbert Ruetsche, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs