

Policy Roundtable of Kosovo Serb Women

The roundtable of Serb women from Kosovo organized by the Council for Inclusive Governance on November 30, 2012 in Belgrade was part of a larger CIG project devoted to the future of the Serb community in Kosovo. The project is supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. At earlier meetings within the project, the participants were predominantly men. Recently a few of them recommended to CIG to organize a session for Serb women from Kosovo who could offer a different perspective on the issues of concern to the Serbs in Kosovo.

The roundtable was opened by a participant from Kosovo's north, who addressed the problem of lack of rule of law. Judiciary, police, and other institutions exist, however, she said, they are inefficient and function under pressure from several influential local individuals. Thus, laws are not respected, and those who express opinions that differ from those of the powerful few are subject to harassment. Even children are outside of the institutional control—serious violent juvenile gangs operate in Mitrovica and in Zvecan. She said that in the past ten years, generations grew up in abnormal surroundings without rule of law, and people in the north will feel devastating consequences of this situation in the coming years. The participant shared her opinion that there has to be a joint approach towards this issue through an agreement among Belgrade, Pristina, and the international community. In case such an agreement is not possible at the moment, she suggested the application of the legal framework of one of the EU member states as an intermediate solution. Other participants agreed that establishing rule of law in the north should be a priority for everyone involved, adding that there will be no progress without prosecuting those who are “the overlords of life and death in the north of Kosovo.”

A participant from the eastern part of Kosovo noted that the society in Kosovo remains patriarchal, that women are discriminated against even though the legal framework provides for equal rights. Forty percent of the overall population is unemployed, out of which seventy percent are women. The other side of the coin is that women are the major labor force in households and to some degree in agriculture; they are overburdened with responsibilities and work for which they are not paid. The participant underlined that women's education is poor. Healthcare is also a problem since there are no basic prophylactic tools, such as ultrasound. In public life, women can achieve little without men's support. The women who are in politics are selected mainly because of their obedience to their party leaders.

A number of participants noted that due to the support of the international community, the Kosovo Albanian women are included in the public life at a significantly higher level than the Serb women. A participant from Kosovo's north agreed that the participation of Albanian women has increased, however, he said, they do not have any significant influence. She also noted that the main problem for all communities is the functioning of the society as a whole based on tribal principles—everything is connected with the few powerful individuals and it is hard to implement universal values in such an environment. It is not clear whether EULEX, Kosovo police, and the Serbian security institutions have instruments or political will to prosecute these people.

The same participant pointed out that there was never a change of generation of politicians in the Kosovo Serb community, and that the same people are making all important decisions for more than twenty years. “Only in the last two years we can see some minor signs of progress.” Politicians want to control the institutions and influence all political and economic processes. Democratization of the Serb society has stalled because the young people stay out of politics, mostly because they are not willing to participate in a profession they view as inherently corrupt.

The official quotas for inclusion of women in Kosovo institutions are fulfilled. However, the elected Serb women in Kosovo's institutions have not shown initiative aimed at improving the situation of Serb women in Kosovo. A speaker illustrated the work of women in Kosovo's Parliament with a story: in the last two sessions, the Serb women members of parliament were not present though the topic was acquiring of mammographic equipment. According to this participant, the Serb women MPs are not active, their voice is not heard, and they do not cooperate as much with the women MPs of the other Kosovo communities. Regarding the general position of women in Kosovo, she noted those women are still treated as second rate citizens in public life. Not a single mayor is a woman, women's issues are not present in the media as much, and women rarely have senior positions in Kosovo's media outlets. There is also an inequality in income between men and women employed in Kosovo's public and private companies.

The education system in the north is catastrophic. More than 55 percent of students have experienced bullying and nobody reacted. Reports from schools to the ministry of education are identical but the ministry officials do not react. They do not require responsibility from school directors, who are mostly being elected exclusively because of their political affiliation. There are no inspections. School committees are being staffed with parents who are acceptable to the school directors, resulting in a complete lack of supervision of the school management. “It is possible to buy drugs literary everywhere.”

There are funds, offices, and equipment for the projects devoted to the improvement of the position of women and children. However, funds are not being properly used, offices are being

overtaken by individuals, and projects have limited outreach. A participant blamed local politicians and their negative influence for the current state of affairs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The participants reached a number of recommendations and conclusions.

- **Improvement of rule of law in Kosovo's north.** In Kosovo's north, the legal system of Kosovo is not implemented and the legal system of Serbia is not properly respected, thus creating a legal vacuum. A working legal system is needed to be in place. For example, regarding different crimes, the police state that they have evidence, but that local courts have no capacity and will to prosecute them. Since there is no real solution for processing crimes with the current capacities, there is a need for coordination among all existing institutions with authority that would be established based on a compromise through the dialogue conducted in Brussels. In case Belgrade and Pristina cannot find a solution over whose legal framework should be implemented in the north, an intermediate solution should be searched for.
- **Inclusion of young and new people in the political process.** It is necessary to create more opportunities for the inclusion of young and new Serbs in the political process in Kosovo to promote new approaches to outstanding issues. Many avoid political engagement because they view politics as a corrupt profession dominated by certain groups rather than as a tool to enhance public interest. An effort should be made to motivate these currently passive people to consider political engagement as an opportunity to improve the present conditions in which the Serb population in Kosovo lives.
- **Inclusion of women in public life.** There is a need to create more opportunities for the inclusion of Serb women in the political process, including leaderships of political parties, media, and public and private institutions. The priority should be to promote better representation of women in the institutions that would increase their influence in the public life in Kosovo. Affirmative action at all levels of government and public enterprises and agencies is recommended. But it would be just a first step since women should also be supported to fulfill their tasks on these positions, thus to have a proactive approach to both the obligations and questions of importance for community.
- **Demonopolisation of public debate.** A suitable atmosphere should be created for public to debate the different positions and standpoints on political and non-political issues facing the Serbs living in Kosovo's north. Currently, a small group of people dominates the debate on the political processes in Kosovo's north. People currently can hear those supporting radical positions much more than those supporting more realistic positions and solutions.
- **Strengthening of Serb media.** Media are one of the most efficient instruments for the promotion of policies, values, and informing of people about events, especially in times when certain incidents are politicized even before the basic evidence is clear. Media could contribute to the overall improvement of the situation in which Serbs live in Kosovo, above all through more professional reporting.
- **Improvement of the climate for equal opportunities for women.** There should be educational programs and trainings, especially in business, economy, health, information technology etc., with the goal of better preparing women for the increasingly competitive job

market. To improve the equality of opportunity, more projects should be organized based on education and trainings for acquiring of practical skills. International donors should increase funds for such projects.

- **The question of education of men and women about gender equality and children's rights.** Local governing structures should establish and fund programs for protection of children and youth. There should be access to improvement of knowledge and consciousness about rights and position of women and children in all aspects of life (employment, gender rights, education, health, family relations, etc.).
- **Organize meetings of Serb and Albanian women in Kosovo.** There is a need to organize meetings of women from Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo in order to improve cooperation in both private and public spheres, and with the aim of exchanging views about questions related to the position of women in society. This cooperation has to be also visible at the level of the Kosovo Parliament, which could stimulate similar processes in local communities. Women from other communities should also be included in the process. In addition, more meetings of young Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo should be organized. Currently, there are many meetings of young Albanians from Kosovo and Serbs from Serbia, but contacts between young Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo (especially from the north) are scarce, which is not contributing to the improvement of the mutual understanding.
- **Social and economic policies should reflect people's needs.** Serbia should overhaul its system of social contributions applied in Kosovo. It should make a diversification of these sources in order to boost economic activity in areas populated by Serbs with the goal of increasing the number of work places in the private sector. Both the Government of Serbia and Serbs participating in Kosovo institutions should create a job profile registry needed for further development of economy and society as a whole within the Serb communities in Kosovo. This registry should be used to direct better the system of education and the process of requalification of workers.

List of Participants

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