

## Serbs in Kosovo's Institutions

### Introduction

The Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) organized on February 21, 2012 in Pristina a roundtable for Kosovo political party and government representatives and civil society members to discuss the work of the Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo's institutions. Participants included members of Democratic Party of Kosovo, Democratic League of Kosovo, Self-Determination Movement, Independent Liberal Party, United Serb List, Serb Democratic Party of Kosovo and Metohija, and a number of media representatives and analysts.

The roundtable was part of a project on the future of the Serb community in Kosovo funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The meeting consisted of two sessions. The first session, devoted to the relations between Serb and Albanian members of the Kosovo institutions, included the following questions: What is the perception of the work of the Serb members in the Kosovo Parliament and Government since the last parliamentary election? Are the Serb representatives satisfied with being able to implement the goals of their engagement? Are they satisfied with the level of cooperation of their colleagues in the institutions? What is needed to improve the impact of the Serb engagement in Kosovo's institutions? The second session, devoted to the laws related to the Serb community, included the following questions: What pending laws are of special interest to the Serb members of parliament? What is the opinion of the Serb representatives about the proposed changes in the Kosovo election law? How would these proposals affect their representation in the future? What are their proposals in connection with the reform of the elections legislation?

The following is a summary of the roundtable discussions. To encourage frank discussions, remarks have not been attributed to specific discussants and CIG asks for the understanding of those whose remarks have not been fully captured in this brief report. The participants took part in the roundtable in their personal capacities and their positions do not necessarily reflect those of organizations they represent. The participants have not reviewed the report, and CIG takes the responsibility for its content.

### Relations between Albanian and Serb Members in Kosovo's Parliament

The Kosovo Serbs in the south have been active in Kosovo's institutions since the last local and parliamentary elections in Kosovo. They have 13 of 120 seats in Kosovo's parliament. 10 of those 13 seats are guaranteed. A participant said that the Serb parliamentary parties have worked in improving the lives of the Kosovo Serbs specifically and are increasingly involved also in activities that improve the lives of all citizens of Kosovo. "Serb representatives are engaged in

building good partnerships at all levels, and they have received the support of the majority in Kosovo's parliament." He suggested that more Serbs should be engaged in the political process through political or non-political activities and recommended to deal less with the past and focus more on the future. He identified the crisis in the north of Kosovo as the major problem confronting not only the Kosovo Serbs but also the international community and Kosovo's government. He said that it wasn't easy when the Independent Liberal Party (SLS) decided to join Kosovo's institutions four years ago, when the majority of Serbs were against participation, but time has showed that it was a good decision.

Participants reported a number of challenges but also substantial progress. A Serb member of parliament noted that the relations between Serb and Albanian members of parliament are professional and friendly. "We discuss open issues constructively." He reported that the Self-Determination Movement (VV) has been "a bit hostile towards the Serbs," but other parties have been constructive. The main political disputes regard the laws on the Serb-related issues, such as the laws on the historic center of Prizren and on cultural heritage in Hoca e Madhe/Velika Hoca as well as the issue of establishing the Serbian-language public TV channel. "A lot of laws pass easily with little discussion but when we are to pass the Serb community-related laws, we debate for hours and have difficulties in adopting them." The speaker said that the parliament has adopted a number of laws but few get implemented swiftly and fully. "We adopt good laws but don't implement them fully."

The relations between Albanian and Serb members of parliament are good, an Albanian member of parliament confirmed. The speaker noted that VV is not harsh only with the Serb parties but also with the Albanian parties, including the opposition parties, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK). Many speakers said that it's better that VV joined the institutions because it will inevitably moderate its politics. Regarding the translation of parliamentary documents into Serbian, many said that Albanian-language translations are not very good either. The speaker raised the issues of the boycott of the institutions by the Serbs in the north, and urged SLS to try to establish communication with them and serve as a model of integration. Another Albanian speaker also confirmed that the atmosphere in the parliament is professional, that everyone can express their opinions freely and pursue their objectives. But he noted that they are not always frank in the parliament because "when we speak in the parliament, we have voters in mind. We may not always say what we think should be done but what voters like to hear."

Differing with the previous speakers, a Serb discussant said that the Serbs in the parliament are under strong pressure and that "their rights are abused." "If a Serb member uses the term Kosovo and Metohija, the speaker of parliament stops him or her." VV and some opposition parties have blocked adoption of some laws. "VV is not the only group that puts pressure on us, it's also PDK, LDK, and other parties. Members of these parties were also against some of the Serb-community related laws." He complained that the hiring process in the parliament was not transparent and added that some members of parliament, both Albanian and Serb, became "wealthy overnight and never explained how." The speaker said that if there is no substantial results and better treatment of the Serbs, he and his colleagues might decide not to take part in the next elections. "We entered the parliament hoping for the work to be transparent, the funds to be invested equally. For example, Strpce receives a lot more than other Serb areas. Such areas

where SLS, a party in power, won receive more funds.” The speaker said that the United Serb List (JSL), which received about 6,000 votes, should have been given a ministerial position in the Kosovo government.

The divisions within the Serb community were addressed by a number of speakers. Many suggested reaching a joint political position within the Serb community, but admitted that there is no unanimous position in any communities. Achieving unity among Serbs is impossible, a speaker said. He also blamed Belgrade for contributing to the division among the Serbs. “The unity could be created or prevented from Belgrade.” During the election campaign, unity is specifically difficult to achieve. Belgrade has no political capacity and consensus to bring the Kosovo Serbs closer. Belgrade has its own problems, the speaker added. He predicted that this situation will last until the end of this mandate of the Serbian government and that things may change afterwards.

“The Albanian community is much more divided than the Serb community,” said an Albanian speaker, adding that, “the aggressive rhetoric among Albanian parties has taken attention away from real problems such as the north. By raising ideological issues, perhaps political parties are trying to hide their inefficiency.” The speaker said that all communities in Kosovo have become self-centered. “Albanians think they have their world. Serbs think they have their own. And then everyone blames the third party, the international community.” Ethnic politics will not move away as long as Kosovo has ethnic-based political parties. He said that Serbia for the Serbs in Kosovo is not what Albania is for the Albanians in Kosovo. “For Kosovo Serbs, Serbia is their country, so I do understand their enormous attachment to Serbia. This is something we have to deal with.” He said that they needed to reach a point where they can have frank discussions with Belgrade. But the public discourse is hardening and making frank discussion of these issues difficult. “Serbs are a small community but have a lot of influence. Their relevance is bigger than the size of the population.” He suggested that the Serb community should cooperate more with Kosovo’s institutions and Kosovo’s society.

There are lots of misperception and prejudices about VV, a speaker stated. He said that VV stands for social equality, justice, and economic development. There should be equal opportunities for all citizens. VV opposed the law on the historic center Prizren not because the law is pro-Serb or anti-Albanian but because VV is against giving executive power to religious communities, the speaker said. “VV is not interested what your name is but rather whether you have a job and have good standards of living.” The speaker added that the citizens shouldn’t be defined on ethnic bases. Institutions should not be ethnic-based, such as having only Serb police in the north and only Albanian police in Pristina. “Kosovo’s problem is with Serbia which doesn’t recognize Kosovo’s independence, not with Kosovo Serbs.” He said that the concessions that have been made to Kosovo Serbs were not to improve the lives of Kosovo Serbs but to appease Belgrade. “That’s why VV is against these concessions.” The speaker predicted that these issues will deepen ethnic divisions even more, that Serbs will live in their own enclaves, completely separated from the Albanians. A Serb speaker questioned the explanations provided by the previous speaker about the principles of VV. He said that VV took the law on its hands by demolishing trucks and private cars.

## **Adoption and Implementation of Laws on the Serb Community**

A number of laws related to the Serb community have been going through a difficult process of adoption in Kosovo's parliament. These are the law on the Serbian-language TV channel within Kosovo's public broadcaster (RTK), the law on Velika Hoca and the law on the historic center of Prizren. Many said that the TV channel in Serbian creates an opportunity for Serb journalists to address not only the Serb related issues but also the Albanian ones, and make it possible for the communities to better understand each other's problems. A speaker said that there is a tendency to prevent the Serbs from having a say in the TV law, but if the channel is created through such a process, then Serbs will not watch the channel and the money will be wasted. Another speaker said that the law is good enough but that there is an effort from certain Serb political parties to control it. "The RTK debate is all about the director and money. The law should not allow for the new channel to be controlled by those who are in the government. We should think how to build an institution that is run by professionals and not by political parties."

A speaker said that the laws on Prizren and Velika Hoca are still under consideration and that they didn't pass by one vote. He pointed that none of the JSL members were not in the parliament when the voting took place. "If they were there the laws would have passed, both on Velika Hoca and Prizren."

Another speaker said that he agrees with the previous speakers that the relations between Serbs and Albanian members of parliament are professional and civil, but that more cooperation should take place in adopting and implementing the laws. He complained that the rules of procedure in the parliament are not good enough. "We have only two minutes for the initial presentation and some laws such as the one on the TV channel require more time." He said that it is becoming increasingly difficult to adopt laws that are foreseen in the Ahtisaari Plan and that the problems are caused by both the Albanian governing and opposition parties. He concluded that since SLS is in the governing coalition, it should put more pressure on its PDK partner to adopt these laws.

Serbs in the government are not doing enough but the Albanians are also blocking the work, a Serb speaker contended. He said that Serbs were not united even when they were together in the coalition Povratak a decade ago. He suggested that SLS should cooperate more with the Serbs who were part of Povratak since they have the political experience in adopting and implementing laws. He reported that there was an agreement among Serb members of the Kosovo parliament to meet every two weeks but it never happened even though SLS did initiate the invitation twice.

An Albanian speaker said that many laws that have passed because of the international pressure are not good. "We should have open debates, consider laws without pressure, in a democratic way, and only then adopt them. The parliament has turned into a voting machine." He said that as long as Kosovo communities don't align along ideological lines, but on ethnic ones, there won't be much progress.

We can't decide what to implement but we can provide good ideas, send them to the people in charge, and so we would be doing our job, a speaker said. He added that Serbs are not trying to get their rights; they refuse many things. "In every country we have single public TV broadcasters and within the public broadcaster there are autonomous channels that target certain

communities or issues. The channel in Serbian will be autonomous, fully funded, and will have independent editorial policy.” He said that the director of TV channel in the Serbian language would be Serb. He said that the channel couldn’t be independent from RTK. “Having two completely independent TVs would only create divisions.”

Another speaker said that the Serbs should begin to deal with issues not as Serbs but as citizens. They should talk about mismanagement of funds on education, which damages both communities. For instance, Serb representatives could organize a press conference on this topic and will get the attention of the Albanian media. “It is taxpayers’ money and they are all interested in it.” Serbs would get the attention of the public and use media and public to put pressure on the government and other institutions. The Serb representatives in the parliament should be more active and engage in other sectors of society, the speaker suggested. “All Serbs have responsibility for the laws on the Serb community, not only those that are part of the government.” The speaker said that on these issues Serbs have to be unified. Otherwise, they can’t complain if the law on Velika Hoca or Prizren didn’t pass since they were not there to vote.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

- There was broad agreement among the participants that the relations between Albanian and Serbs members of Kosovo’s parliament have improved substantially.
- Some of the major recommendations were that the Kosovo Serbs should engage on issues that are not related only with the Serb community, such as the laws on Velika Hoca and Prizren, but also on other issues of public interest, such as mismanagement of funds in certain ministries, on debates about the budget, election law, and on issues of fighting corruption and organized crime.
- The participants recommended that the law on the TV channel in Serbian language should be adopted and the TV channel should become operational as soon as possible. It was agreed that Kosovo Serbs have little information on what’s going on in Kosovo. According to many speakers, Kosovo Serbs know more about what is going on in Serbia than in Kosovo. Many said that the TV channel in Serbian also creates an opportunity for Serb professional journalists to address not only the Serb related issues but also the Albanian ones and provide an opportunity for the communities to better understand each other’s problems.
- The laws on Velika Hoca and Prizren were considered important. Their adoption would show that the Kosovo government is committed to implementing the Ahtisaari Plan in full and would guarantee the preservation of the Serbian cultural heritage in these areas. In this regard, more active involvement of Kosovo Serb parties was suggested. It was reported that some members of JSL were not in the session in which it was voted for these laws.
- The participation of Kosovo Serbs in Kosovo’s institutions is surrounded by a number of challenges, but participants also reported a lot of progress. Public investment in Serb-majority municipalities has increased and the good relations between Serbs and Albanians in the institutions are also reflected in the relations between the Serb and Albanian populations in Kosovo.

## List of Participants

*English Language Alphabetical Order*

**Shpend Ahmeti**, Self-Determination Movement  
**Agron Bajrami**, Daily Newspaper *Koha Ditore*  
**Sasa Djokic**, Serb Democratic Party of Kosovo and Metohija  
**Sadri Ferati**, Democratic League of Kosovo  
**Dukagjin Gorani**, Government of Kosovo  
**Dragisa Krstovic**, Liberal Democratic Party  
**Petar Miletic**, Independent Liberal Party  
**Randjel Nojkic**, Serbian Renewal Movement  
**Slobodan Petrovic**, Independent Liberal Party  
**Nenad Radosavljevic**, Radio/TV Mir  
**Teuta Sahatqija**, Democratic League of Kosovo  
**Vesimir Savic**, United Serb List  
**Momcilo Trajkovic**, Serbian Resistance Movement  
**Shpetim Gashi**, Council for Inclusive Governance  
**Alex Grigorev**, Council for Inclusive Governance  
**Krystyna Marty Lang**, Embassy of Switzerland in Kosovo  
**Norbert Ruetsche**, Embassy of Switzerland in Kosovo  
**Ivana Stanojev**, Council for Inclusive Governance