

Project 'Local Politics in Multiethnic Municipalities'

Project is supported by Kosovo Foundation for Open Society and LGI (Local Government Initiative) from Budapest. Implementing partners are Center for Regionalism, Mother Theresa Society, as well as KIPRED from Pristina. This is a two years project which aims to analyse and evaluate local regulations as well as practice in the field of minority rights and inter-ethnic relations. Also, the aim of the project is to build capacity of local governments in multiethnic communities. Furthermore, the objectives of the project are:

- Contribution to the development of a systematically sustainable and ethno-culturally just model of managing multi-ethnic local communities;
- Establishment and development of new policies in the local communities in order to promote the management of multi-ethnic local communities and thus contribute to the enhancement of the social cohesion on the local level;
- Increase of inter-cultural capacities of the public authorities and affirmation of the principle of multi-culturality in multi-ethnic local communities;
- Promotion and more qualitative articulation of interests and meeting of needs of all the citizens of the local community via the local authorities in a sustainable and institutional manner, with special emphasis on the interests of minority communities on the local level;
- Establishment and development of systematic solutions for problems that are vital for the members of minority communities, above all in the areas of their participation in the decision-making and managerial processes on the local level, as well as in the implementation of the rights to: education, information, preservation of cultural heritage and official use of languages in the local community.

All the above mentioned objectives have not been achieved since they have to be the final result of the implementation of the project, and so far only one part of the project has been implemented. However, even in the first phase of implementation it can be seen that the objectives have been set in a realistic manner. Above all, this can be concluded from the readiness shown so far by the representatives of the municipalities, in which the project is being implemented, to fully participate in its implementation and the subsequent implementation of its results deriving from the project. In favor of this is also the readiness of the other central government bodies – Ministry for Local Self-Government, Office of the Prime Minister, as well as the Association of Kosovo Cities and Municipalities not only to support this project but also to participate in its implementation. Based on the experience gathered during the implementation of the pilot project in Vojvodina it may be concluded that such readiness is vital for the achievement of the project's final goals.

The following activities have been implemented so far:

The conference held from 4 - 6 July 2008 in Brezovica with the aim to present the project to the representatives of the municipalities, line ministries, associations of cities and municipalities, experts, representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations and other stakeholders and to obtain the support for its implementation. It can be said that the conference was successful, in terms of the response of the invited participants, as well as in terms of the discussion and undivided support given to the implementation of the project. Especially important is that the project was supported by the representatives of the central and local authorities, as well as by the Association of cities and municipalities of Kosovo.

The conference was used for the education of the members of the project's council. This education was conducted by Tomislav Zigmanov, Gordana Francuski and Irina Burka Parcetic from the team who lead the project in Vojvodina, as well as by Aleksandar Popov and Zef Shala who will be responsible for the implementation of the project in Kosovo.

Bearing in mind the complexity of the project and the need for conducting the survey, as the starting point of the project, in a comprehensive manner, the training for the survey team and members of the focus group was organized at the beginning of October. This training was held by Vladimir Ilic and Snezana Iliz from the Center for Civil Society Development from Zrenjanin, which conducted the survey during the implementation of the pilot project in Vojvodina. Also participating in the training was Tomislav Zigmanov who was the project coordinator on behalf of the Fund for the Open Society of Serbia. This training was important for the application of the same survey methodology in Kosovo as in Vojvodina, which of course would be adapted to the specific conditions of Kosovo. During the months of October, November and December KIPRED has conducted the survey in the

municipalities of Obilic, Prizren and Gnjilane, and during January 2009 the results of the survey were summed up and the recommendations drawn.

Research (Municipality of Obilic)

The first research (carried out by KIPRED) concerning current situation of minority communities and all other vulnerable groups, as well as the status of ethnic communities in general was done at the territory of Obilic municipality, at the month of January. The municipality's representatives and the highest bearers of the authority demonstrated their interest in the issue and willingness to cooperate through the information they provided and answers they gave at the interviews. This is a very interesting municipality, which is shown in the census data, prior to the war Serbs made 60% of the total population, while nowadays they make 25%, and they are concentrated in one part of the town and 4 villages that are within the municipality. There is also a significant number of particularly vulnerable social/ethnic Roma and Egyptian groups. Employment represents a special issue since once huge economic giant is in a state of collapse, and the employment process is performed based on ethnic preference and the influence of Pristina which has used its proximity to the municipality to make an influence to some of its decisions.

Even though it is well known that there is an issue with participation of Serbs in local and central government authorities, the response of Serbs was not in accordance with their democratic legitimacy that is guaranteed and may have carried a significant capacity. There are two reasons for this:

1. The influence of Belgrade and central levels that still dominate policies and opinions of Serbian population
2. Local community issues, neither Serbs nor others have any influence on, whilst they are the once mostly affected by it.

Although great efforts were made towards increase of security and continuous cooperation with KFOR and Serbian community, Albanian majority makes concessions through great social privileges, especially to Serbian population. Priority is given to building of houses, flats, schools and infrastructure, whereas employment and economic aspects remain the main problems. Creation of spirit of trust is still an ideal, where respect is considered to be the biggest step towards it, and above all establishment of democratic procedures. This can be achieved, and it is one of the conclusions made by all participants at the round table where the outcomes of the research were presented: minimum consent on the issues and initiation of a dialogue.

The appendix contains the first research draft, which will be amended following the round table in municipality Obilic and new inputs received from all relevant subjects, in order to be objective, realistic and acceptable to all. What is most important is that the document provides the actual picture of the situation, based on which further steps shall be made towards analysis of needs, issues and hidden signs of injustice and latent and open discrimination. At the same time local policies will be defined, as well as method of work in all areas of importance for the establishment of inter ethnic equality and minority rights.

The research will amend the following:

- Legal framework, the most important provisions
- Information on potential ratification of international documents
- List of all institutions at the local and central level that are in charge of minority issues and exercise of rights
- Amount of local taxes collected, and the percentage allocated to minority communities
- Security/particularly the part pertaining to participation of Serbs in police forces/ particularly the one under the municipal competences
- Property of Serbs and their sustainable repatriation
- Particular issues of Roma population

Obilic – Round Table, 20 February 2009

Upon the implementation of the research, the plan envisaged the promotion of the project and the outcomes of the research. This was performed within the municipality of Obilic in cooperation with Mother Theresa and KFOS. Another huge step forward was made at the meeting for there came the most important actors of the municipal structure including the Mayor, the Vice presidents and representatives of minority communities and municipal departments in charge of municipal affairs. Sixty participants led an open discussion and presented useful arguments and facts. It is of great importance that local authorities from other 4 municipalities in Kosovo, where the Local Policies project has been implemented, participated at the meeting.

The following are the key issues identified as essential for the establishment of mutual understanding, cooperation, and stabilisation of relations:

- Security and movement
- Unemployment
- Collapsed Economy
- Urbanisation
- Parallel government institutions – political issue
- Restored houses that are demolished again
- Noticeable absence of policeman – Serbs
- Private entrepreneurs– there are Albanian ones, but not Serbian, Serbs are significantly denied any development
- It is required from the Government of Kosovo to assist with the realisation of the strategy
- Social map (only for minorities)
- Ratio of employed staff in the minority office
- Cadastre and departments for education-all communities must be equally represented
- Serbs act in compliance with law, and use some of the privileges, especially if they receive a positive response of the local authorities that are willing to cooperate (i.e. Obilic is entitled to 19 % of the community budget)
- The established committee for communities (how many of them are there in Kosovo?) has 9 members



As regards the committee for communities, it is determined that it has similar characteristics to Inter ethnic Relations Councils in Serbia and Macedonia, 3 issues are identified as the most important:

- The council is not operational
- Serbs and other ethnic groups do not participate in the creation of the strategy
- Local office?

There are two segments that indicate how much the majority community invested in the minority one:

- Repatriation strategy (objective sustainable repatriation – there must be a fund, otherwise it does not make sense)
- Allocation of financial assets (there was a fair share law, now it is abolished and finances are allocated by percentage, i.e. in Obilic 19 % is allocated to the minorities, that is Serbs)

A Study Visit to Vojvodina Municipalities, 26-28 February 2009

Grasping the significance of psychological linkage and establishment of contacts at the inter-personal level as a significant aspect of confidence building and learning about each other, it was agreed to organise a study visit for representatives from Kosovo municipalities to Vojvodina, where a project on local policy in multiethnic milieus has been implemented.

The programme included a visit to Novi Sad city, the capital of the Province, the seat of multiculturalism and the bearer of the initiative and to the Zrenjanin municipality, where interethnic relations have attained the highest level and where harmonisation and tolerance between persons belonging to minority communities and people belonging to majority nation have been achieved. Several significant things, which may be interesting for the guests from Kosovo and which may be significant for their work and activities in their respective milieus, have been learnt.

The thing that was important for the municipality representatives from Vojvodina was that for the first time all representatives of the Albanian, Serbian, Roma and Bosniak communities, who had come together from Kosovo, participated in joint debates and discussions, talked openly about the problems they had and made an effort to overcome all the problems they have faced.

The thing that was important, too, was that directly from the field they could conceive the scale and profoundness of the problem the citizens from all communities from Kosovo faced, they could hear all the troubles they had first hand and understand that those problems represent problems for all of them, not only for certain vulnerable groups.

It was a high level visit, equal to the level of the municipality representatives, which means that their hosts were the representatives of the Assembly of Municipalities, representatives of the Interethnic Relations Councils and Municipal Councils that deal with human and minority rights.

Several things were learnt, applicable as an experience in their milieus and they were agreed to be initial inputs, whereas the following visit could significantly improve certain things:

- In Novi Sad - tolerance is practised- there is a need to have considerable understanding for the needs of all citizens, particularly for other ethnic groups and to responsibly stand by legitimate demands.
- It has also been agreed that Novi Sad shall participate in the development of the local economic resources, to assist in overcoming all difficulties they face as well as to appeal to the Government of Serbia for giving over the faith of Serbs to their hands
- Zrenjanin has a great experience in attracting foreign investments
- Pieces of advice-experience of Novi Sad and Zrenjanin are significant
- Ombudsman-the local ombudsman is the first of such kind, it was founded in Zrenjanin and has had considerable practice
- A link between local investments and harmonised ethnic relations – it has been highly appreciated both by foreign and domestic investors and has been considered as the greatest resource and a possibility to have a stable area and guaranteed valorised efforts
- Cooperation with Temisoara – there is a suggestion to establish such a mode of communication – interethnic relations, economy development, etc. and all the rest which contribute to the development of both sides
- Education – in Zrenjanin schools are common and all pupils belonging to different communities attend them at the same time, but they are in separate classes. It was noticed that such concept of education is applicable and there is no segregation based on ethnic principle, but leads to fostering the identity and cultural differences.

Training, 25 February 2009

In accordance with the project in this phase it has been agreed to organise a training meant for representatives of local authorities. Considering the fact that for the first time and at one place the representatives of municipalities from Kosovo who belong to Albanian and Serbian communities as well as to Roma and Bosniak gathered together , and since there was a particular stress on the bearers of authority, it has been decided to implement two trainings for participants from Kosovo. Participation in the study visit to Vojvodina was an excellent occasion to attend interactive discussion, regional conference dedicated to counselling on international relations as a key institution to exercise rights at the local level and where Serbia and Macedonia presented their experiences. Presence at the conference was significant because at one place a profound and realistic picture about this institution could be learnt, presented from the most relevant experts, conclusions could be drawn and lessons learnt, knowing that a similar body exists in Kosovo, too, but it has been in process of development.

The training, consisting of two parts, was conceived to cover all the most important areas from minority rights and quality management of multiethnic milieus. One training was presence at the regional conference dedicated to experiences and practice of local self-governments from Serbia and Macedonia in the area of counselling on inter ethnic relations, and a separate training was dedicated to:

- Minority rights
- mediation (it was agreed to do a small research on the situation of the Mediation Committee, purpose and practice in Kosovo and to hold a panel on exchange of experiences with the Central Asia having the same topic, regarding which Kyrgyzstan has an enormous experiences)
- official use of languages of minority groups

The second part of the training was implemented by the experts from the Executive Council and an NGO from Novi Sad

Round table in Gnjilane municipality, April 28th 2009

Round table held on April 28th 2009 in Gnjilane, which served as a presentation of results of the research on the subject Local policies in multiethnic communities in this particular community, was a turning point for the whole project. First, this round table announced positive experiences of the project realized in Kosovo, just like those of the pilot project realized in Vojvodina 2005 – 2008. Namely, capacity for development and upgrading of this project was proved during the course of realization in this community as well. This was confirmed through several important points identified during this round table discussion:

- Study tour, during which representatives of local authorities and non-government organizations from three municipalities had the opportunity to spend three days in Vojvodina in November 2008, helped the creation of a compact team made of these project participants that have the capacity to contribute to the further development of this project and to the realization of expected results. Instead of usual bickering, often nationalistic, as it was in the case of round table in Obilic, they managed to maintain a very constructive discussion in Gnjilane, which went on through many polemic points but all along the lines of elementary civility.
- In contrast to the round table in Obilic, where president of the municipality criticized this research and certain collectives with harsh language and diverted the course of discussion from its main subject, vice-president of the municipality Gnjilane, Islam Zuzaku expressed full support for project realization and readiness for immediate action, not only discussion, against all issues identified through this research. This constructive approach helped the creation of an atmosphere favorable for talks about research results very critical on the issue of relations between local authorities and minority collectives,
- Thanks to experiences from Obilic, many identified shortcomings of this research were solved, which helped Gnjilane to secure all essential components for a quality round table discussion and production of concrete recommendations for central and local levels.
- Project Board, constituted after this project was launched on July 4th 2008 on Brezovica, became a fully competent body that gives directions for further project improvements through analysis of previous experiences.



Main tone of this round table discussion was created by introductory words from Vera Pula (KFOS), Aleksandar Popov (Center for Regionalism) and Genz Krasniqi (KIPRED), who expressed their remarks on behalf of their organizations, distributed earlier to the participants together with research papers. This was an adequate foundation for the discussion that followed. Introduction of the project and its phases of realization, as well as presentation of experiences learned through realization of this project in Vojvodina, were very important to the round table participants. Explanation of the research presented by the representative of KIPRED was an especially contributive impulse for the discussion. Some of the mentioned key points were:

- In regard of laws about protection of minorities and interethnic relations, there are big discrepancies, which strongly influence enforcement of those laws in practice (similarly to the situation in Serbia, as it was identified during the realization of this project in Vojvodina),

- There are some solutions within the Law on local self government, crucial law in this field, which are retrograde in comparison to earlier UNMIK's regulations. For example, existence of local community offices became facultative and municipalities took over making decisions about keeping or closing those offices,
- Discrepancy between laws, unclear or bad solutions are copied through municipal statutes and decisions related to this subject,
- Concrete problems in Gnjilane municipality, just like in the majority of other municipalities in Kosovo, are un-integrated Serbian communities and existence of parallel institutions,
- Decentralization in Gnjilane municipality is going to be difficult because of the resistance coming from the great part of Albanian community and because of similar resistance of Serbian community against proposed solutions,
- In spite of formal introduction of Turkish language in official language of Gnjilane municipality, very little was achieved in putting it in practice.

Discussion lead by the majority of around forty participants present at this round table has produced enough elements for the proposition of recommendations in conclusion of this meeting. Beside emphasized problems mentioned earlier, participants reflected on other issues related with interethnic relations in this municipality as well. For example, issue of communication between the community office in this municipality and its ethnic communities was also raised, as well as the question of its contribution to the improvement of their position. Representative of the Ministry for local self government criticized some inaccurate and wrong formulations in this report, especially those related to enforcement of certain laws and local regulations. He also expressed his support for the idea of exchange of experiences with Vojvodina through organization of visits of local officials and expert meetings focused on this subject.

During this round table discussion, need for a faster solution of problems related with practical introduction of Turkish language in official language of this municipality was emphasized, as well as a need to cancel the municipal decision to tax (20EUR) the correction of official documents in keeping with Turkish orthography. Better cooperation with non-government organizations and mentioning positive experiences of project realization in this municipality together with critical remarks within in this report was also emphasized during this round table discussion.



In conclusion of this round table, Gordana Francuski, expert of the Center for Regionalism, proposed following recommendations based on the discussion:

- Cooperation and exchange of experiences between municipalities is necessary
- Examples of positive practice must be mentioned in this report
- Mechanisms of protection of minorities (existence or non-existence of community offices, their operation, financing, decision-making process) should also be included in this research
- Harmonization of translations of documents/regulations

On a meeting held immediately after the round table, Board came to a conclusion that progress was evidently made in the quality of research and in the discussion itself where participants actively presented concrete examples, propositions and questions.

In continuation of this project, there will be another research in municipality of Prizren. It was agreed that final deadline for the conclusion of this research should be on May 15th. Round table in Prizren should be held on May 25th.

Comparative analysis of all three municipalities should be finished by June 15th, together with the analysis of legal regulations and propositions for central and local levels, which will be included in a publication that is going to be printed and presented on the final round table in Pristina, planned for late June.

There were several other decisions about further work on this project:

- KIPRED should prepare legal acts and documents in all three languages, as well as legal regulations in force in these three municipalities. These documents will be added to the brochure.

- Proposition on methods of introduction of new official language in the municipality should be included in final recommendations, as in the case of Turkish language in Gnjilane.
- Explanation of community offices in municipalities, as well community committees, their mandates, memberships, financing, operation and roles should also be added.
- In the analysis of various laws and harmonization of those laws, Law on local self government, Law on municipal financing, Law on official use of languages and writing systems and Law on communities should be taken in consideration.

The next phase of the project – comments and conclusions

Apart from the guaranteed minority rights, which are right to education, culture, official use of language and script, right to be informed, right to equal participation in authority which is proportional to the number of persons belonging to a certain community etc. the project focuses on technical concept, on operational, working and advisory defined institutions at the local level which may have an important role in establishing quality relations within particular ethnic communities, but can also be of great assistance to a municipality, in management and work in all areas necessary for functional and efficient administration. The inherited problem and a difficult social-economic situation, too, threaten to endanger all processes of democratisation and transformation of new Kosovo society, which are in accordance with European and world standards, and additionally complicate the already difficult situation in the society. Confidence building has been implemented with difficulties, but despite all there is a great will and wish to solve the problems at the local level

The local policy project has been conceived as a strategic long-term initiation of KFOS, Mother Therese, LGI OSI and the Centre for Regionalism, with the tendency to generate and deeply and analytically solve areas and questions of vital significance for minority communities, but, too, for the Kosovo society on the whole. The following comments were noticed and they represent open questions to the project:

- realisation of the research in the Prizren municipality (end of April)
- new areas of interest, which will be analyzed and work more in depth, who are a integrative part, more or less linked to our project and has impact on results attained
- extending the project to new municipalities in Kosovo (in cooperation with KFOS and OSCE Mission to Kosovo)
- Human rights units – a body with whom it can be cooperated and which represents a good foundation for successful implementation of different activities
- To ensure that certified civil servants work in Committees for Communities, Committees and Mediations
- To follow legislative process/there is a lack of laws – the unharmonised have been adopted, and there is a lack for some of them
- Local offices – there is a will, the legitimate interests are followed, and the democracy in procedures and work has been assessed to be at high level
- Rights of the displaced – deprived from the possibility to obtain papers and certificates
- Media and information dissemination – licences issued by UNMIK – there are inconsistencies – in Serbian milieus media are not multiethnic – in Albanian, those ones who objectively inform on situations, including the problems of Serbs and other communities, are threatened
- Statistics/to ensure quality work and update all information/ quantification of all data, for instance displaced persons, etc.
- By cooperating with all to strategically conceive a sustainable repatriation
- Local taxes
- Budget for new institutions at local and central level
- Roma – parish registers, harmonised language, preschool education

- Local communities – work at this level
- Social aspects of most vulnerable groups (Roma, Serbs, Ashkalies etc)-lack of social security, lack of rights and problems to receive social rights
- Training for participants in the project Local Policies in Multiethnic Communities in Kosovo, MMCP trainers
- MMCP training for municipal civil servants in 5 new pilot municipalities
- Additional funding