

The Political Situation in Kosovo in 2004 and the Challenges it Presents

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Introduction

A number of contradictory trends characterize political development in Kosovo in 2004. While there is potential for progress on issues that have been extraordinarily difficult to address in the past, there are also increasing tensions. The year was one of the most violent in terms of inter-ethnic relations, but at the same time there is a very solid sense of optimism. In regards to the international intervention, 2004 saw the two primary international actors – the UN and NATO – perform at their absolute worst in the moment of crisis. But following that failure, both agencies, but especially, and more surprisingly, the UN has engaged in serious efforts at reorganization. Regionally, the most dramatic tension is between the increasing divergence of the Serbian and Kosovan development paths, at the same time that it becomes ever more apparent that the two places are intractably intertwined.

Because of these contradictions, this paper does not make one definitive argument, but rather attempts to identify the dominant trends, and their context. The most important issues are the changing relationship between Kosovo and Serbia; the situation of displaced Serbian Kosovans; and the internal political dynamic of Kosovo. Within each of these issues there are both positive and negative developments. In almost no case is there definitive movement toward any given resolution, or outcome. Each issue, however, challenges the international NGO community to evaluate and its adjust its current

programming and practices in order to optimize their effectiveness.

Kosovo and Serbia

The political dynamics of Kosovo and Serbia are becoming increasingly differentiated, while at the same time the lives of those on the ground in Kosovo and Serbia are as intertwined as ever. Despite the fact that the two entities share political, social and economic ties, the specifics of each are so different as to render a common analysis impractical. Most importantly the political dynamic in Kosovo and Serbia reflects different realities. In Kosovo, state capacity and authority is under-developed and unclear. There are high levels of confusion regarding the roles of specific institutions, representation and constituencies, and, of course, political status.¹ Serbia also suffers from institutional confusion, but the level of state capacity is dramatically higher, if often unrealized. These differences are not new, nor are they the result of the international intervention. Economic and political underdevelopment in Kosovo has a long history that predates the violence of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the current international administration.²

The process of development under international tutelage in Kosovo affects the relationship between the province and Serbia itself. Within Serbia, Kosovo has had a very

¹UNDP Kosovo, *Human Development Report 2003*, (UNDP: Pristine, 2003)

²The economic situation in Kosovo is well documented in numerous sources including John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, (Columbia University Press: New York 2000), p. 83 – 84; Particularities of Kosovo's political development are documented in Susan L Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: the Political Economy of Yugoslavia 1945 – 1990*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1995), p. 342; Shkelzen Maliqi, *Kosova: Separate Worlds*, (Dukagjini Publishing House: Prishtina, 1998), p. 16 – 43;

distinct place. Serbian political discourse has long featured what came to be called “the Kosovo Question”. Namely, how can Serbia reconcile its development as a nation-state with the reality that a historically significant territory of the state no longer reflected the national identity? Would democratization of the state and its institutions take precedence over the consolidation of the national identity? Throughout the 1990s the question was mostly resolved with concerns of Serbian nationalism taking the upper hand. Yugoslav and Serbian debates about the fate of Kosovo, and the implicit nationalist decisions that were made became the blueprints for Serbian interaction with the variety of national and ethnic dilemmas that it faced throughout the disintegrating federal Yugoslavia.³ With UNMIK in control of the province, the “Kosovo Question” continues to reappear in Serbian politics, but it is now embedded in an international context. Resolution of the issue is now as closely intertwined with Serbian integration into Europe as it had been with internal democratization. Previously resolving the Serbian relationship with Kosovo had been central to the question of how to democratize Serbia, now the resolution is central to the question of how to integrate Serbia into Europe. Belgrade's positions in relation to political issues of the province are increasingly viewed through the prism of Serbian – EU relations. This alignment of the “Kosovo Question” with the integration of Serbia into the European system creates a new incentive structure for dealing with the unresolved issues of the province.

Regardless of the differences of the situations in two entities, Serbia and Kosovo are

and Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, (Pluto Press, Sterling, VA, 2000), p. 37 – 38

intractably connected. Whatever political settlement regarding Kosovo's status is arrived at, the people of the region, on both sides of the boundary, are connected through the facts of their lives. This connection is more acute on the Serbian side of the equation because of the physical dislocation of the Kosovan Serb IDPs. However, with the presence of the Albanian communities of the Presevo Valley, as well as the regional draw of Belgrade as the most significant urban area in the region, the relationship is not entirely one-sided. Fluidity of movement across the Kosovo boundary is a fact of life in the region. In interviewing IDPs from Kosovo who have relocated to Serbia-proper, one of the most striking feature is not so much whether or not there is a desire to return so much as a desire to be able to move freely to and from either place.

These two trends – the increasing differentiation of Serbia and Kosovo, and the increasing pressure for fluid borders – taken in combination, are positive developments. Regardless of the eventual decision on Kosovo's political status, recognition of the province's distinct differences from Serbia-proper is a core component of any resolution. Similarly, fluid borders between Kosovo and Serbia is an important goal in its own right. Such defined, but open borders are central to the European Union's political model. International involvement, at the NGO as well as at the diplomatic level, needs to recognize that promoting fluidity of movement between the two entities is as important as political developments for the ultimate resolution of the Kosovo issues.

³Jasna Dragovic-Soso, *'Saviours of the Nation'*, (Hurst and Company: London, 2002), p. 115-116

Serbian IDPs, Returnees and Demographics

In human terms, the intractability of the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia takes its most pressing form in the fate of Kosovan Serbs, both those who are IDPs and those who remain in the province. Returning Serb IDPs to Kosovo is the most prominent policy preference at the moment. It is publicly embraced by most of the major international organizations working in the region and is an important part of Mercy Corps programming. There are varying levels of commitment to IDP returns expressed by the local populations on both sides of the border as well as by the different international organizations involved. Within Serbia, returns are not popularly supported – Serbs whom I interviewed viewed promoting returns to Kosovo as foolhardy, and unlikely to succeed. This perception surprisingly permeates even the NGOs which are implementing returns and their funders. Privately, both internationals and locals express pessimism over the return process, especially within Serbia. In Kosovo, among both Kosovan Albanians and, notably returned Serbs, there is somewhat more optimism. The pessimism amongst NGO staff maybe a reflection of the fact that the funding for IDP returns to Kosovo is in flux – the United States Government provided funding through its Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM). This support was to be reduced in the near future with the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) expected to step up as the new major funder. EAR funding requires shifts in the implementing partners because the European agency has criteria that prevents some current NGO partners from receiving funds.

International involvement in returns involves large donor agencies which provide

financing, and operational international NGOs that complete the actual groundwork for the return process. Minority returns are extremely labor intensive. The first step is to identify potential returnees through outreach including advertisements, visits to collective centers and through social assistance referrals. Once an IDP expresses interest in returning, the international NGO through which they intend to return investigates their target destination to determine if the potential returnee will be welcome, and if so, what kind of assistance will be necessary once they have returned. Since there is a perception that there is a potential for tension if a returnee is greeted with disproportionate external assistance, aid agencies, including Mercy Corps, establish 'balancing projects' that benefit immediate neighbors and sometimes even other nearby communities. Among the funding agencies the US BPRM is currently the largest, however, as noted, it will soon be replaced by EAR. Surprisingly, BPRM and USAID in Kosovo and Serbia do not actively coordinate their strategy regarding IDPs and reintegration. The BPRM support for returns appears halfhearted and more a reiteration of a stated policy of promoting a “multi-ethnic and stable Kosovo” than an actual strategy. USAID in Serbia is not supporting returns, or any refugee specific programming. The agency did make an exception to this policy in supporting Mercy Corps' 2003 Community Rehabilitation through Democratic Action (CRDA).

The border between Kosovo and Serbia-proper is porous – movement back and forth from southern Serbia to Kosovo is a persistent feature of the region. This movement over the border effects the prospects for returns in a number of ways. Often a return will

entail only a 'representative family member' who will hold the place until the rest of the family can or will relocate, other returns involve only particular family members – grandparents for example – who occupy a house that is then used by the rest of the family intermittently. These part-time residences meet a variety of needs, from vacation house, to a home for the elderly in the family, or even as a source of fresh food, or occasionally a cash supplement through small farming. The international community deeply resists these 'partial' returns. Donors find it difficult to justify financial support for partial returns. Expatriate internationals on the ground are suspicious that returnees are either keeping one foot in and one foot out, or they are taking advantage of the aid system. As one Kosovo based international from UNMIK put it, “We can't be expected to pay for summer cottages.” Partial returns do not provide consistent, verifiable quantitative proof of program impact. It is difficult to count partial and intermittent returnees. For funders and implementers, this leads to problems of accountability and program evaluation.

This logic, although practical, ignores the reality of the fluidity of border life. The international community's current focus on 'permanent returns' forces potential returnees to artificially decide which side they want to be on. Protecting the right to move back and forth from Serbia proper after a final settlement is as, or even more important as the right for permanent returns because it recognizes that the situation on the ground at the Kosovo-Serbia border, like any other, is ambiguous.

Returns that have happened have been limited. The numbers of returnees have been small, and have diminished since the March violence. From 2000 to 2004 the total minority

returns have been less than 10,000. Serb returns during that period was less than 5,000.⁴ Those that have returned have been mostly rural poor who have been unable to establish livelihoods in Serbia proper. The dominant dynamic is the economic push from Serbia. There is a minor pull from Kosovo which is mainly a draw on rural Serbs who are attracted to the prospect of returning to a piece of productive land. Educated Serbs which had been drawn to urban centers in Kosovo in search of 'white collar' jobs in the state bureaucracy before the conflict are in a particularly difficult position because their former jobs are either non-existent or inaccessible and their employment prospects in Serbia are low. They experience a push out of Serbia-proper, but there is very little to pull them toward Kosovo. For many that choose not to return, the social services agencies in Serbia are recognizing the citizenship rights of IDPs from Kosovo and regarding them as legitimate clients. This is unsurprising since Kosovo legally remains part of Serbia. Social cases are identified and integrated into service structures or are targeted with specific assistance. Refugees from Bosnia or Croatia, despite having once held Yugoslav citizenship, are not afforded these rights, but are treated as classic refugees. Although these social services provide an improvement for the living conditions for IDPs, they also undermine the push out of Serbia and toward returning to Kosovo.

The demographic reality of Kosovo has been unclear for over a decade. During the 1990s population numbers in the province were highly contested, with Serbian nationalists

⁴United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Minority Returns to Kosovo", 31 January 2004; available at <http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/94C34C4084558E23>

making exaggerated claims over both the rate of increase among Albanians as well as the declining numbers of Serbs. Dramatic drops in Serbian population in Kosovo was pointed to as evidence of an on-going 'genocide'. The exceptional increases in the Albanian population was considered to be part of a collective plan to overwhelm the province.⁵ Even today, popular wisdom amongst many Serbs maintains that the high birthrate of Albanian Kosovans is a part of a national 'strategy'. The European Stability Initiative (ESI) released a report in June 2004 that provides a new set of numbers for the Kosovo Serb population, both IDP and remainee, that are significant for two reasons. First, the numbers are dramatically different from the previous estimates that had become widely accepted. Secondly, these numbers are methodologically supported by ESI's research. ESI argues that there were approximately 195,000 Serbs in Kosovo in 1999 when NATO and the UN entered the province. They also estimate that there are approximately 130,000 Kosovo Serbs remaining, either in their original homes, or displaced within the province. These leaves about 65,000 Kosovo Serb IDPs in Serbia proper; significantly less than the 100,000 to 150,000 which had previously been estimated. Further, of the 130,000 Serbs that ESI estimates to still be in Kosovo, they argue that two-thirds are actually living south of the Ibar River, mostly dispersed in rural villages in majority Albanian municipalities.⁶ These new numbers should be incorporated into prioritizing programming choices promoting multi-ethnic tolerance in Kosovo. A reduced emphasis on pushing returns and an increase

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⁵Dragovic-Soso, p 130

⁶European Stability Initiative, Lessons Learned Unit, *The Lausanne Principle: Multiethnicity, Territory, and*

in facilitating incorporation with minority populations that are in the province will almost certainly bear better results for promoting multi-ethnic democracy.

As important as the new numbers, however, is the ESI analysis of the dichotomy of the Serbian communities in Kosovo. ESI identifies two groups of Kosovo Serbs – urban and rural. Urban Kosovo Serbs form the core of the displaced population. Rural Kosovo Serbs are mostly still in Kosovo, and mostly dispersed in their home villages. The report argues that these communities are, at the moment, self-sufficient and likely to continue to be viable, if precarious.⁷ In the long-term, however these rural villages will face a nearly inevitable drain of their population toward more urban areas. If the opportunities are not present in Kosovo's urban areas, the vast majority will probably emigrate to locations in Serbia, or even other parts of Europe. Considering the rural – urban divide amongst Serbs in Kosovo, as well as the reduced numbers of IDPs, programming should focus less on facilitating returns and more on building models of integration in already existing communities.

The Situation within Kosovo

Internally, the contradictions that surround the local issues are even more pronounced. Mostly because of the violence of 17-18 March, this has been one of the most difficult of the five years of the international intervention. The March violence was

the Future of Kosovo's Serbs, (ESI, Brussels – Sarajevo – Berlin: 2004); available at www.esi.org

significant in scale and intensity. It highlighted serious failing in the key areas of maintaining order and security. The primary embodiment of the intervention, UNMIK, went through the summer in a state of suspended disarray and reorganization. Despite claims of poor health, the May resignation of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Harri Holkeri was clearly a consequence of UNMIK's poor performance in restoring order in the face of the riots. NATO's element of the intervention, KFOR, although still enjoying local support, has been sharply criticized. Although overall turnout in the October elections was not seriously depressed, the near complete boycott by Kosovo Serbs challenges the core of the international effort to promote multi-ethnic democracy.

In the face of these very negative factors, a number of positive aspects appear to be coalescing. Frustration with the pace of progress in Kosovo has finally reached enough of a head that it is forcing entrenched institutions and actors to rethink their positions and methods. The violence in March, and in particular the poor response of UNMIK and KFOR, has legitimated the frustration felt by many Kosovans, on both sides of the ethnic divide. UNMIK, the Contact Group, the Belgrade authorities and local political parties all seem to be finally making real efforts to begin substantive negotiations over status. The local political scene experienced a limited electoral shake-up from the provincial elections in October. Politically more significant will be the formation of a new government with a substantial parliamentary opposition.

⁷ESI, p. 8

The most dramatic problem that this report identifies within Kosovo is the lack of positive popular political action and mobilization. There is an extraordinary reluctance for Kosovans to engage the political process in a systemic and peaceful manner, with the goal of social or economic change. Even in areas that have seen noticeable positive developments, activity has been elite-driven. This reluctance is particularly acute in the NGO sector where operational goals have overshadowed explicit and critical commitments to social justice.

The progress that Kosovo has made since the international intervention was launched in 1999 is a mixed bag. It can be confidently said that Kosovo has improved significantly. The province is now relatively calm. Although water and electricity service is still occasionally inconsistent, they are more often working than not. Political institutions that did not even exist five years ago now clamor for more responsibility. Political parties remain underdeveloped, but a plural party system does exist. Elections, either provincial or municipal, were held in 2000, 2001, 2002, and in October 2004. Serbian and other minorities still suffer under insecurity, however until March 2004 there had been some intermittent progress toward re-integration. In summer 2003 there was a re-emergence of multi-ethnic activities in a number of municipalities. Prizren and Gjilan, two cities that suffered particularly in March, were both notably experiencing better ethnic relations in 2003. The riots of mid-March 2004, however, highlighted the risks that still exist, even in locations that appear to be making improvements.

Analysis of the March riots has mostly been completed, with the most important

reports having been released over in spring and summer of 2004.⁸ Throughout these reports, KFOR and UNMIK are receiving the lion's share of the blame. Among local actors, the media is receiving harsh, and just deserved criticism. Reporting both on the Albanian and Serbian side, was sensationalist. Throughout the crisis, both the Albanian and the Serbian media broadcast inflammatory and often unsubstantiated stories. Local Albanian politicians, with the notable exception of the Prime Minister, Bajram Rexhepi (PDK), have been criticized for their tepid responses that focused mostly on the damage done to the Albanian cause rather than the harm done to Serb Kosovans. The Serbian community itself, both based here in Kosovo and in Serbia proper has escaped much of the criticism. Despite the obvious fact that it was the Serbs of Kosovo who suffered the most in the March violence, Serbian leaders should not be spared criticism. Belgrade has spent most of the past five years undermining UNMIK authority in Serbian dominated parts of Kosovo. This has had an effect on UNMIK's, and eventually KFOR's ability to re-establish order in the face of large scale violence. Local Serbian political leaders have rarely publicly expressed a long-term commitment to work with their Albanian counterparts. The Kosovan Serbs are undoubtedly the victims of the struggle over Kosovo, both in terms of their manipulation by the Belgrade political establishment and their treatment by their fellow Kosovans – especially from the Albanian community. That being said, in order for the situation in Kosovo to improve, the Serbian community will have to be a responsible,

⁸International Crisis Group, *Collapse in Kosovo, April 22, 2004*; Amnesty International, *The March Violence: KFOR and UNMIK's failure to protect the rights of the minority communities, July 8, 2004*; Karl Eide (Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan), *The Situation in Kosovo: Report to the*

active and good-faith participant.

The harsh criticism of UNMIK and KFOR for their response to the March violence signifies an important change in the political discourse in Kosovo. Over the past years, in particular since the establishment of the Provisional Institutions for Self Government (PISG) in 2002, tension has been building between UNMIK and local institutions. In 2003 that tension was most noticeable amongst international expatriate staff who expressed tremendous frustration with their local counterparts. This frustration is generated by the very process of UNMIK led political development in Kosovo. Briefly put, the more the capacity of the local political institutions improved, the more tensions grew between the local actors and the international administrators.⁹ The frustration that was expressed by internationals at the time was certainly being felt by the locals as well, however, it was still somewhat difficult for public expressions of these feelings to find resonance. When they were expressed, the international community in Kosovo often reacted with varying degrees of indignation, dismissal or condescension. In the aftermath of the March violence, and what was clearly a dismal performance by the UNMIK and KFOR, frustration with the international presence has become legitimate. To its credit, UNMIK and the larger UN appears to be accepting this round of criticism as legitimate and healthy. Organizational and strategic changes seem to be in the offing for UNMIK.

On a strategic level, the most significant change is the effort to move beyond the

Secretary General of the United Nations, UN, July 15, 2004

⁹This dynamic is more expressly addressed in Fred Cocozzelli, "Kosovo at the Crossroads: Competing Solidarities, 2003", available at www.ssrc.org

“Standards before Status” platform.¹⁰ The essence of Standards before Status was that Kosovo would be expected to achieve certain “benchmarks” before the issues of political status could be discussed. There were eight areas that the Standards covered; (I) Functioning Democratic Institutions; (II) the Rule of Law; (III) Freedom of Movement; (IV) Sustainable Returns and the Rights of Communities and their Members; (V) Economy; (VI) Property Rights; (VII) Dialogue and (VIII) the Kosovo Protection Corps.¹¹ Within each of these areas there were some concrete tasks that were to be completed, and a number of more nebulous goals and intentions. Unfortunately, there are two core problems with the Standards approach. First, the very lack of political status stands in the way of fulfilling some of these standards. Second, the setting of benchmarks and goals implied that once they were achieved, there would be a reward. In effect, the Standards policy seemed to be promising independence for Kosovo. On one hand, this was fundamentally unrealistic as the final status will have to be politically negotiated. On the other, it offered no incentive for the Serbian Kosovan population to participate in achieving the Standards. By 2004, the policy was becoming an increasingly unrealistic proposition that had deteriorated into an empty slogan.

More important than the reaction at UNMIK and the UN Secretariat though, has been the local reaction to this new found ability to be openly critical of the institution that has been the dominant political actor in Kosovo since 1999. There were promising signs that this opportunity would be grasped in a constructive manner. The Albanian Kosovan

¹⁰The Eide Report, para. 28

political scene seemed poised to produce an electoral surprise in the October elections. This was only partly borne out. The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) did suffer an electoral set-back but remains the largest political party. Having won 47 seats in the Kosovo Assembly, the LDK was not in a position to form a government outright. Rather than return to a coalition of all the major parties, they join with the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), and the Albanian Christian Democratic Party (PSHDK). The leader of the AAK, Ramush Haradinaj was sworn in as Prime Minister, despite his recent interview with the Hague Tribunal prosecutor. Haradinaj may yet face an international indictment, but expectations were that it would be issued before the end of the year if it were to happen at all. The coalition will be augmented with smaller non-Serb minority parties. The second largest political party, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) will go into opposition. This will mark the first time that there has been a functioning, non-minority opposition in Kosovo.

The LDK will, in fact, face opposition on at least two fronts. An up-and-coming PDK has seen continued success in improvements in party cohesion, and general reputation. Their ability to function as a critical opposition party may end up to be more important in the process of party formation than had they won the election outright. As an opposition party, the PDK will have the opportunity to critique and challenge the performance of the LDK and the AAK, helping to define their own political position.¹² The PDK, in the person

¹¹UNMIK, *Standards for Kosovo*, 10 December 2003, UNMIK/PR/1078

¹²Shkelzen Maliqi makes a similar point in the Kosovan weekly *Java* from the week of November 18, 2004, as summarized in the UNMIK Media Monitoring, Media Analysis, November 18, 2004.

of the out-going Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi, has also increasingly moved toward a more constructive public discourse relative to majority – minority relations. The prominence of positive references to PM Rexhepi since the March violence was noticeable. Additionally, independent Veton Surroi also entered the electoral process for the first time this year. Although Surroi and his citizens' initiative ORA, only won slightly more than 6% of the vote, they did earn 7 seats in the Assembly. Without putting too much stock in the any particular individual, Surroi's entrance into the electoral arena has the potential to spark a new dynamic in the political debate. Surroi has built on the relative success of a number of local “citizens' initiatives” in the elections of 2002. Whether or not the Serbian Kosovan communities can mount any parliamentary opposition, or align themselves with the Albanian opposition is yet to be seen.

Finally, the election of Boris Tadic of the Democratic Party as President of Serbia, has a potential to positively impact the situation in Kosovo. Tadic and his party have their attention squarely fixed on furthering integration with the European Union, leading to an expectation of a more cooperative administration in Belgrade. Taken together, despite the tragedy of March, there may be an emerging political constellation with positive potential.

Popular Political Mobilization in Kosovo

If there is one aspect of Kosovo that is still very negative it is the lack of positive popular political mobilization. In Kosovo, politics has very negative connotations. Too

often interpreted either strictly along party or ethnic lines, political discourse is extremely weak. Politics in Kosovo is rarely interpreted in terms of ideological preferences and policy platforms. Instead parties maintain a backward focus, examining past injustices rather than addressing future challenges.¹³ The NGO community bears a certain responsibility for this very limited positive political mobilization.

The lack of positive political mobilization provides an opportunity for more negative mobilization, as seen in the March violence. Both Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group noted in their reports on the March riots, the three associations most closely related to the former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) provided, at the minimum, the “foundation” for the disturbances.¹⁴ The Human Rights Watch report further points out that the violence of March 17 and 18 was both “organized *and* spontaneous”. Many of the participants, particular young Albanian Kosovans, were not directly affiliated with any of the former KLA organizations, but “were frustrated” and “in the mood to demonstrate”.¹⁵ The model of mobilization most prevalent in Kosovo is confrontational and ethnically based. This model persists, in part because little is offered as a counter example. Few NGOs have included the promotion of non-violent political dissent as part of their programming.

International organizations, especially in the NGO community, often avoid

¹³For more analysis on difficulty of political parties in Kosovo to move beyond arguments over status and into ideological debates, see Fred Cocozzelli, “Political Parties in Kosovo, 2003”, GSC Quarterly, Winter 2003, at www.ssrc.org

¹⁴Human Rights Watch, *Failure to Protect: Anti-Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004*, July 2004. Vol. 16 No. 6 (D), p. 18

¹⁵Human Rights Watch, p. 27

expressing clear political or ideological positions for a variety of reason. International NGOs, however, are very often strongly infused with commitments to social and economic justice that can only be described as ideological. These commitments provide guidance for the NGOs in dealing with the powerful interests with whom they must interact, such as donor nations and International Organizations. In the international context, NGOs often form the leadership of broad social movements. In Kosovo, local NGOs need to adjust to a new role as active members of a critical civil society that is engaged in the political process. International NGOs, which have played such a significant role in the province over the past five years, need to provide assistance in taking on this new role. One of the clearest examples of the potential for international and local NGO interaction toward popular mobilization is the relationship between Mercy Corps and the Mother Teresa Society.

Mercy Corps International (MCI) – Kosovo and the Mother Teresa Society (MTS) have a long history together, starting their initial partnership in 1993. Although there are only limited records of the early MCI - MTS collaboration available here in Pristina, it appears that the two organizations were involved in agricultural assistance to communities in the Drenica region as far back as 1993 or 1994. Mother Teresa activists in Skenderaj recount MCI agricultural programs as having introduced the use of plastic greenhouses in the municipality in 1994. A Mercy Corps Kosovo website dated April 2003, touts MCI – Kosovo as having begun its collaboration with MTS in 1993 with work “in north-western

Kosovo, comprised of advocacy, economic assistance, and food distribution.”¹⁶

From the initial MCI – MTS partnership in agricultural assistance, a larger relationship was built. By 1998, when the violence in Kosovo was beginning to reach a head, the international community began to make large-scale humanitarian assistance. Both the World Food Programme and the U.S. Government began humanitarian relief operations, and MTS became involved in the bulk distribution of commodities. During the conflict, in 1998 and 1999, but before the NATO intervention, MTS was instrumental in making distributions of humanitarian relief to Albanian IDPs within Kosovo. When the international community pulled out of the province immediately before the NATO air-strikes in the spring and summer of 1999, the international NGOs discontinued working directly with MTS, and shifted their focus to managing refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia. MTS was not a presence in the refugee camps in either country. At the conclusion of the NATO-led air strikes in June 1999, the international relief NGOs resumed operations in the province. At this time there was an effort to diversify local partners, in part due to concern over the potential for MTS and its political allies to capitalize on their control over food relief. This effort largely failed because of the dominance of MTS within Albanian civil society. There were few other organizations with the organizational resources to be useful partners to the international NGOs. By the summer of 1999 the international community was responsible for food aid distributions to the majority of Kosovans. MCI was a major implementing partner in this operation, jointly

¹⁶<http://www.mercycorps.org/kosovo/e-news/>

managing the US AID Food for Peace pipeline with CRS and holding responsibility for all food distributions in the Peja region. MTS was by far the largest local distribution partner in Kosovo. It worked with all of the major food agencies, and was most often responsible for final distribution in Albanian communities. Local ad hoc Community Emergency Councils did operate in some localities. These were most common in Serbian communities where they were often affiliated with the Orthodox Church. The Yugoslav Red Cross and the Red Cross of Kosova were also served as local partners in a very limited number of communities, but never together and never in cooperation.

The Mother Teresa Society was the primary Albanian civil society organization in Kosovo during the most active period of opposition. It was a major component of the Albanian parallel institutions. Having begun operations at the same time as the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), MTS has traditionally “cooperated very well”¹⁷ with the LDK. Politically the two organizations have been close since their founding. They have both followed similar strategies vis-a-vis the Belgrade regime during the 1990's and vis-a-vis the international community since the 1999 intervention. During the 1990's resistance, both MTS and the LDK were part of a larger strategy to organize Kosovo Albanian society in opposition to Belgrade's dominance. The strategy was to build parallel social structures – including schools, clinics and political institutions – as if Kosovo was already independent. Ideally, by creating a de facto Republic of Kosova, the Serbian government would lose Kosovo by default. Since the intervention both organizations have similarly pursued a

¹⁷Interview with Mr. Zef Shala, then-Treasurer for MTS, July 8, 2002

strategy of defensive cooperation with the international community. In the immediate aftermath of the NATO air strikes, both MTS and the LDK attempted to project a sense of entitlement to control over the emerging institutions. Both the 1990's strategy and the post-intervention strategy have had mixed results. In neither case did the LDK or MTS emerge with control over Kosovo's political or social institutions. In both cases the organizations are still considered important actors, but in neither case are they considered predominant, and both face serious challenges. Both organizations seem to be having difficulty maintaining their current positions.

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of MTS's organizational history on its current situation. In the space of about 15 years it has gone from a fiercely oppositional, and highly politicized, dissident organization, to a massive local NGO with operational partnerships with some of the world's largest international NGOs and Intergovernmental Organizations. From that position, it has now become an organization held in suspicion by some of its former international partners, and popularly perceived as something of a historical artifact. It is an organization of mostly older men, often with bureaucratic, Eastern European “intellectual” backgrounds, working in a field that is dominated by international NGOs with relatively young operationally oriented international staff, and often even younger local staff who often have the benefit of modern training programs. Add to this the fact that its dominant political partner and patron, the LDK, is increasingly on the defensive. Overall, it is a testament to the activists that MTS maintains the projects that it does.

On the provincial level, it has managed to identify some viable projects including cooperation with OSCE on inter-ethnic dialog, and as the UNHCR local partner for the Roma IDP camp in Plemintina, just outside Prishtina. At the local level, in some municipalities, such as Suva Reka it does have activists that are interested in using the organization as a vehicle to improve their communities. However, in some places it may be simply a matter of inertia that keeps MTS operating at all. Indeed in some locations, such as Skenderaj, the office of the organization is little more than an old men's social club.

Unfortunately in one area where MCI invested a significant amount of work with MTS there has been little long term reward. Through the transition from humanitarian relief to social assistance, MCI, along with the other lead food agencies, agreed to work on capacity building with both the municipally based Centers for Social Work (CSW) and the Local Distribution Partners (LDP), of which MTS was by far the largest.¹⁸ At the time the LDP were suspicious of the transition of responsibilities to the CSW's, fearing that they would eventually be cut out of the process. MTS was right to be concerned – transferring social assistance responsibility to a public agency, and away from private, politicized local NGO control was a priority. However, local NGOs which had been involved in final food distribution, such as MTS, were needed for the transition process. In order to facilitate the complicated role that these local NGOs would play MCI initiated a series of capacity building projects.

¹⁸Other LDP included the Red Cross of Kosova, and the Yugoslav Red Cross. Many of the minority and some of the majority communities were served by local “Emergency Committees” which did not have a formal structure. There was an effort to help some of these groups become more established local NGOs, but it

There was an underlying assumption that this capacity building would diffuse some of their concerns of exclusion, and promote their emergence as a legitimate, service oriented NGOs. MCI was to assist both MTS and other LDPs in assisting the local CSW in identifying local residents with social assistance needs and in organizing for future social service activities.¹⁹ Ideally, the emerging state sponsored social welfare agencies would be complimented by the LDPs.

In its essence this was a fundamental effort at building a democratic civil society. In socialist Yugoslavia, public social welfare was dominated by institutions that were integrated into the Yugoslav system of self-management. Each municipal CSW had 'self-managing communities of interest' (smci) that reflected a given area of specialization. For instance some CSWs had smci that addressed general social protection, others addressed issues related to children, health or other issues. The executive committees of the social welfare smci worked with municipal assemblies and executives to administer the CSWs. The Albanian resistance built parallel systems that did not seek to compliment this public system, but to serve as replacement institutions. At the time of the humanitarian aid to social assistance transition, the goal was to build up both the public social welfare capabilities in the CSW and the private, civil society organizations such as MTS as *complimentary* agencies. The CSWs were to undergo a radical organizational transformation that would streamline them into local branches of a more traditional state

did not seem to have any longterm impact with the exception of the Dragas municipality where the Helping Hand of Dragas was established.

¹⁹“Operating Framework for UNMIK, UNWFP, UNHCR, Implementing Partners, CSWS and Local

social welfare agency. The self-management components were disregarded and the administration was centralized to Prishtina. MTS and the social service NGOs would be encouraged to re-organize themselves as community based organizations that would fill any gaps left by the CSWs through local initiative.

In retrospect it is difficult to assess how far the awareness of creating a pluralist social welfare sector permeated the transition process. Certainly this process was discussed informally, and creating CSW – MTS linkages through participation in the institutionalized Field Level Transition Meetings was a major priority. Building a plurality of complimentary agencies was definitely a point of discussion amongst MCI and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the two agencies charged with building capacity at the CSW and LDP level in the Peja and Prizren area.

The idea of organizing complimentary agencies, however was overshadowed by a number of factors including pressure to get the social assistance system up and running as quickly as possible, and tensions between the CSWs and MTS. The capacity building assistance that was being offered to both the CSWs and MTS was organized around the implementation of the social assistance scheme which would replace the humanitarian aid programs of both WFP and US AID. Having the implementation of the social assistance scheme as the focus created a project centered approach. Although the implementation of the social assistance scheme was only one aspect of the longer term re-establishment of the social welfare system in Kosovo, it represented the largest single financial input to the

transition by outside donors. Because it was organized as a project, the transition from humanitarian to social assistance was seen as self-contained – there was a certain amount of time and resources available for the transition. Both the time and resources available were determined by the international donors and defined within the funding grants. Besides increasing the pressure to get the transition underway in a given time period, this project approach also created a sense of competition between the local beneficiary organizations. Both the CSWs and MTS, as well as the smaller LDPs were convinced that they were being cut out of some aspect of the project. Neither side saw their position as complimentary, but rather competitive.

Today, there is little evidence to suggest that there is an awareness of the differing roles of public and private agencies in social welfare on the local level in Kosovo. The CSW cooperate only informally with their local NGO counterparts. Former LDPs, in particular MTS, remain fixated on providing commodities as the most appropriate response to poverty. Commodity distribution is, however, no longer a viable option in Kosovo – international and domestic resources are not available for these kinds of operations. This is particularly difficult for MTS because their long and successful history in many communities makes them an identifiable resource for the poor. Local MTS activists regularly report being contacted by poor and vulnerable citizens looking for help. Often they have been referred to MTS by municipal political leaders. Activities that are proposed by MTS branches to meet local needs are nearly always project proposal that

Assistance Scheme”

need funding from outside sources. Identifying community based self-help projects which can be locally initiated without external funding is extremely rare. Despite having very deep local roots, the leading former LDP, MTS, does not act as an organization that either represents or serves local communities. Rather, they operate as a service contractor for the international NGO community. In a sense they are continuing the strategy of a parallel organization – operating as independent institutions with an eye toward external funding. They are not engaging the local population in developing responses to poverty that make use of available local resources.

This is not a situation that is unique to the organizations that were formerly involved in the food distribution network, such as MTS. Throughout Kosovo there is a chronic problem of participation, as the new UNDP Kosovo Human Development Report makes clear. Kosovo's civil society organizations are failing to accurately represent their constituent citizens. This failure is most often decried in the political sphere, with the most emphasis being placed on the political parties. The fault for this lack of political development is often placed at the feet of UNMIK as the primary international political actor on the scene. In the words of the Human Development Report, “As a major power-broker in Kosovo today, UNMIK also must assume a primary responsibility for promoting more participatory and representative approaches to governance in Kosovo.”²⁰

But the responsibility for promoting participation also extends to the NGO community, both local and international. Local NGOs are operating in a manner that

²⁰UNDP Kosovo, *The Rise of the Citizen: Challenges and Choices: Human Development Report Kosovo*

mirrors the international NGOs. In Kosovo, international NGOs are primarily adjuncts of the dominant international institutions and donor countries.²¹ Because of the unique situation of Kosovo, where these same international institutions and donors are so deeply involved in the actual process of governing, the international NGO community has become part of that process. This is not to say that the international NGOs have become an arm of the state. Instead the NGOs are part of the interaction between the international community and the local political process in the form of UNMIK, the donor community and the PISG. UNMIK and the donor community often express their policy positions through funding and support for international NGOs. The projects that the NGO community are implementing are concrete expressions of the policies of the intergovernmental organizations and major donors that support them. In most cases these are good projects that are being supported because of good policy – the promotion of minority returns, agricultural development, or improvements in local education. Often these projects do have a large degree of local involvement in the form of matching contributions of local fund or in-kind labor. Despite this, clarity demands that they are recognized as policy implementations of outside actors – mostly donor states and agencies.

The programs are often problematic in that they are implementation of the policy goals of the most powerful actors in the regional political constellation – the UN, the EU, the United States and other donors. Just as the local NGO community is not approaching

2004, (UNDP Kosovo, Pristina: 2004), p. 51

²¹David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, (Simon & Schuster, New York: 2002), p. 197, 208 – 209, 221 – 222

their particular situation critically, international NGOs in Kosovo are not approaching their role in the province critically. There should be no surprise that the local NGO community has the same orientation as the international NGO community in Kosovo. The local NGOs look toward the internationals as an example and guide for their own actions. Local NGOs are often “service-oriented, organized around short-term, donor-funded projects, and without strong constituencies”²² in part because that is the model that they see from the international NGO community. Neither local NGOs, nor their larger international counterparts, on whom they heavily rely for leadership, are mobilizing citizens around alternative policy paths.

In particular the international development NGOs, such as Mercy Corps, have become very cautious about their role as critical advocates for the most vulnerable. Self-confident that their strong sense of mission is keeping them internally grounded, NGOs have been reluctant to organize and lead social action publicly in Kosovo. Most NGOs have adopted what could be called a quiet approach to fulfilling the demands of their noble public commitment. As an example, economic justice is promoted through grassroots projects, such as micro-credit programs. These programs, although often successful in providing the resources to vulnerable entrepreneurs, do little to challenge the fundamental injustices in financial resource distribution. The most ambitious aim is to create an alternative financial resource base by leaving behind a local micro-credit organization, usually in the form of a local NGO. Ironically this is in some ways similar to

²²UNDP, 2004 p. 54

the strategy of parallel institutions that the Albanian community embraced in its opposition to the Belgrade regime of the 1990s. In both cases, the action is meant to provide functioning, self-contained but limited institutional alternatives.

A radical option is to promote mobilization not only on the project level, but also on the political level. Many international development NGOs, including Mercy Corps have a strong commitment to social and economic justice. This commitment nearly universally extends to opposing ethnic, racial or religious discrimination, as well as injustice based on gender. These commitments are actualized in programming and projects. Political promotion of these commitments are less common, often because international NGOs are reluctant to become involved in what is perceived as local politics. There are certainly risks involved as well. In many countries, taking an oppositional stance to the government would lead to a quick expulsion of the organization, and perhaps even a physical danger to the organization's personnel. However, the point is not to engage in local party politics, although at time it may be necessary to work with local partners that are publicly aligned with a given party.²³ What is more important is the clear expression of political preference in terms of responding to the demands of the organization's constituency. If international NGOs are aligned in solidarity with the world's poor and vulnerable, they must be willing to express that solidarity at the political level.

In a situation like Kosovo the need for political engagement by the NGO community is especially acute because the political development of the province has been stunted. The

²³This happens regardless, however, in the current context those alignments are hidden and considered

inability of the international diplomatic community to resolve the question of Kosovo's status has left the local political dynamic with a structural obstacle. The question of status permeates the entire political spectrum, obstructing progress on other fronts in a variety of ways. In terms of political party development, promises to resolve the question of status dominates the political legitimacy claims of the parties. The lack of a status resolution strongly encourages the sense of legal, economic and social uncertainty, which blocks progress in establishing the rule of law, financial investment and the creation of social solidarity. Compounding the structural obstacles that have been created in the political system because of the unresolved status question, there are aspects to Kosovan culture, both Serbian and Albanian, that impede representative democracy. Albanian Kosovan culture is in the midst of a transition that involves, amongst other aspects, traditional sources of authority at the local level, such as the immediate and extended family, being challenged.²⁴ These challenges are still occurring, and it is not certain that what could be termed 'democratic sources of authority' will prevail. Serbian Kosovan culture is undergoing a similar transition, although because of the more extensive integration of the Serbian population into the Yugoslav socialist system, many of these changes are more closely linked to the post-socialist experience. In both cases the cultural transitions involve confusion and contestation over representation. Most international NGOs are participating in these transitions, whether or not they are conscious of their impact.

somewhat taboo.

²⁴Gloria La Cava, et al, World Bank Kosovo Social Assessment, *Conflict and Change in Kosovo: Impact on Institutions and Society* (World Bank: December 2000), p. 32-33

International NGOs are agents of modernization. At times they may seem to be confused agents, at one moment promoting new life choices, and at other times seeking to protect traditional livelihoods. For example in the local context for Mercy Corps, the tendering process for community infrastructure projects is a rationalized market-based activity. It highlights the need for accountability in making use of local resources, regardless of such traditional concerns as family connections, or village affiliation. At the same time, other aspects of Mercy Corps' programming, such as the insistence on local in-kind contribution in partial repayment of financial support, promotes greater local integration in a manner that can reinforce traditional solidarities, sometimes at the expense of a broader social solidarity. At this particular juncture in Kosovo, it is vital to remove at least some of that ambiguity by incorporating more explicit demands for justice in NGO programming. With so much of the Kosovan society – both Albanian and Serbian – in flux, strong demands to orient the transition toward establishing just institutions and structures are necessary, and may potentially be extraordinarily effective.

Conclusion

The future of Kosovo is perhaps murkier than it has been since the international community launched its intervention in 1999. The relationship between Serbia and the province is less clear than ever. The Belgrade government seems closer than ever to being ready to strike a deal, and the emerging Kosovan governing arrangement may actually

facilitate stronger decision-making among local political elite. At the highest level, a resolution may be close at hand, but the shape of that resolution is as obscured as ever, if not more so. In relation to the situation of Serbian Kosovan IDPs, there is an emerging combination of more accurate information and, pre-war social patterns of movement between Serbia and Kosovo. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, internally, Kosovo suffers a severe deficit of political mobilization. Citizens are disconnected from their representatives. More problematically, there are few local models that can help promote those connections in a democratic manner. Addressing this situation is the greatest and most direct challenge for international NGOs in Kosovo.

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