



CSSProject for Integrative Mediation

Trip Report

Struga

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Integrative Mediation: Bringing Local Leaders Together

CSSP – Verein für Integrative Mediation e.V. (CSSP e.V.) is a registered non-profit association based in Berlin, Germany. It was founded on 16 June 2006 in Berlin and has ten founding members. Its purpose is to improve inter-ethnic communication and cooperation, and the implementation of peace initiatives to resolve local conflicts through Integrative Mediation. It also promotes efforts to support the development of democratic processes as a tool to overcome conflicts. The organization is fully funded on a yearly basis by the German Foreign Ministry and the Bundestag through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and has its offices in Berlin. In 2006 part of its activities were also sponsored by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

The origin of CSSP e.V. lies in the implementation of the lessons learned from ten years of work of the International Mediator in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995 – 2004), Dr. Christian Schwarz-Schilling. As International Mediator he placed a particular emphasis on increasing dialogue. Through review, critique and the evolution of his extensive experience as a mediator, the methodology of Integrative Mediation was developed. It brings together several elements of conflict resolution at the local level in a comprehensive approach. Integrative Mediation is the core of CSSP e.V.

CSSP e.V. seeks to empower local individuals through tailored mediation processes. This includes providing local individuals with professional training in mediation, negotiation and problem solving techniques and skills, as well as offering expertise and assistance in resolving their conflicts. At the same time CSSP e.V. tries to strengthen professional mediation in its target areas to increase capacity and provide credible alternatives to conflict. The CSSP team firmly believes and strives for building peace from the bottom up and strengthening a community's capacity to overcome its internal disagreements and to create a fertile ground for democratic (political, economic, and social) development.

The comprehensive approach to mediation includes various levels of responsibility, multiple actors, and a variety of techniques, drawing on classical mediation and developing holistic and decentralized processes. It combines five different core elements: Mediation, Consultation, Professional Training, Advocacy, and Research & Analysis. The elements are combined in various forms and situations to develop a holistic and individual process.

CSSP e.V. assists local actors to develop initiatives and to implement confidence-building measures which apply to their specific needs and circumstances. Overall Integrative Mediation endeavours to bring the general and hierarchical process of conflict resolution down to the local level by focusing on joint meetings, dialogue, confidence-building and experience sharing.

CSSP e.V. does not seek to replace or remove ownership of the peace process. Instead, Integrative Mediation complements the work of those already in the field. The main aim is to leave decisions and solutions in the hands of local actors.

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Table of Contents

OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF CSSP IN STRUGA 1

POLITICAL ASSESSMENT OF STRUGA 2

 MUNICIPAL COUNCIL COORDINATION 3

 MUNICIPAL COUNCIL PROCEDURES 5

 INTERETHNIC COMMISSION 7

 TRANSPARENCY AND INFORMATION-SHARING 10

 CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT 12

OUTLOOK..... 13

APPENDICES 15

CONCLUSIONS 16

TRIP SCHEDULE..... 21

Overview of the work of CSSP in Struga

As part of the implementation of the decentralisation process in Macedonia within the framework of the Ohrid Agreement of 2001, the ethnic balance in Struga shifted. Being populated by a majority of ethnic Macedonians before the introduction of the decentralisation laws on 1 July 2005, today, due to the changing of the municipal borders and subsequent incorporation of surrounding villages, the municipality of Struga has roughly 63.000 inhabitants of which 56% are ethnic Albanians, 32% ethnic Macedonians, 5% ethnic Turks and the remaining population is made up of Roma, Vlachs, Serbs, Bosnians, and others. Although ethnic tensions as a result of this shift in majority did not become violent - apart from some incidents among youths in schools - interethnic dialogue has been strained. The decision-making processes in Struga have been impacted by the ethnic division, even though problems are not perceived as grave by inhabitants as they are often portrayed in the public media.

In the summer of 2005, CSSP made the decision to place all its activities in Macedonia on hold to await the implementation of the decentralisation process and the effects that would ensue. It was perceived by the international community that problems and tensions would arise in Struga because of the shift in the ethnic balance, and CSSP maintained regular contacts within the municipal leadership to monitor the situation. During several visits to the municipality between the Summer 2005 and the Fall 2006, CSSP found that ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians had very different perceptions of the situation and progress in Struga. While the ethnic Albanians generally believe that the situation is good and that no problems and conflicts related to interethnic relations exist, it appears that ethnic Macedonians feel increasingly uncomfortable with the local political and social developments.

Due to a boycott of ethnic Macedonians in the last elections in 2005, ethnic Albanians not only hold a majority but are also disproportionately represented in the Municipal Assembly. This situation is challenging since at the national level ethnic Macedonians are in power and at the local level they are under-represented. Furthermore, at the national level the majority party, the Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) is in a coalition with the ethnic Albanian Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), which is in the opposition in Struga. Therefore, the relationship between the local and the national government is difficult. In the fall of 2006, CSSP assessed the political situation as stable though not good. The level of tension was expected to increase as the municipal leadership was feeling increasingly isolated from the new Macedonian government and relations between the ethnic groups were further strained. While holding meetings with several key leaders from the municipality, CSSP was welcomed by all sides to work with key leaders from Struga.

Because of this request from the local leaders, a professional training for key leaders from the municipality of Struga was realised in April 2007 with funding from the Austrian Development Agency. It was the first step of implementing Integrative Mediation in Struga and working with a particular emphasis on improving interethnic relations within the municipality. During the professional training, participants chose four issues that they believed are of great concern in the municipality. These issues were improving the transparency and information-sharing processes in the municipality, strengthening the relations between the municipal government and the NGO sector, reviving the inter-ethnic commission and making it more effective, and modifying the coordination of the municipal council so that topics suggested by the political minority can be included in the agenda. The topics were discussed at great length in specific working groups throughout the training and proposals were presented, commitments were made, and 'next steps' were determined.

In July 2007 the CSSP Team returned to the municipality of Struga to follow-up on the conclusions that resulted from the training and assess where more support is needed. A series of interviews were set up, some with the training participants to see what progress had been made on the issues since April, and some with other local leaders and NGOs to share impressions of CSSP from the training and gather more information about questions that arose from the participants. The topics that arose at the April training served as a guide for the discussions during the interviews. The following section summarizes the conclusions made by CSSP from the discussions that took place in Struga.

Political Assessment of Struga

During the follow-up visit, the focus of CSSP was the improvement of inter-ethnic dialogue in the municipality of Struga. Although the participants from the training - both ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, Vlachs, Serbs, and Turks - at first reassured the CSSP Team that inter-ethnic relations were at a satisfactory level, the discussions soon showed that many disagreements and misunderstandings did exist between the ethnic groups. Although many of the topics initially did not have an obvious ethnic component, through the course of the discussions the underlying ethnic aspect became clear. Therefore, it can be concluded that underlying tensions between the ethnic groups do exist.¹ Hence, the CSSP Team placed special emphasis on determining and assessing the inter-ethnic aspect of every issue of concern that was voiced by the municipal leaders and civil society representatives.

The findings of CSSP are elaborated below and grouped under five different topics: Municipal Council Coordination, Municipal Council Procedures, Interethnic Commission,

¹ There are disagreements among other ethnic groups that live in Struga, but this report focuses predominantly on the ethnic relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians.

Transparency and Information-Sharing, and Civil Society Development. The report concludes with an outlook based on the overall assessment of the current situation in Struga as encountered by CSSP in spring / summer 2007.

Municipal Council Coordination

The lack of coordination within the council was a major issue of concern from the working groups of the training and also the interviews demonstrated that it is key problem in the municipality. The party coordinators never meet outside the council sessions and do not jointly plan the agenda. This causes all opposition parties, regardless of ethnic make-up, to feel that it is impossible to have their issues placed on the agenda and be discussed in the council. Meanwhile the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), the majority party which is made up of ethnic Albanians, is able to work on its own agenda without regards for any other party's interests. The DUI party is very influential in Struga politics since both the mayor and the president of the council are members, and the party holds a simple majority in the council. This enables DUI to determine the outcome of all council votes, unless Badinter Principle applies.²

Because party coordinators do not meet and discuss what issues should be put on the agenda a general feeling of distrust among the party leadership has developed. The opposition parties argue that they are not sent the agenda in a timely manner and therefore have no influence as to what will be discussed. Nor can they effectively prepare for the topics. Therefore, they see boycotting political processes as their only option to demonstrate their discontent. The majority party maintains that the opposition parties do not present recommendations or alternatives to the proposals made by DUI, and therefore do not participate constructively in the democratic process.

This situation has brought the political process to a stalemate which is clearly evident due to the repeated failure to adopt a statute for the municipality. DUI wrote a new statute, which has gone to vote four times already and has never passed because of boycotting from the opposition parties because the Badinter Principle was not applied. Several ethnically sensitive issues, such as adding Albanian as an official language and changing the voting procedure in the interethnic committee to consensus voting, are mentioned in the proposed statute, which cause uncertainty with the ethnic Macedonians. However, it seems that these issues have never been openly discussed and no option development to find solutions that would be acceptable to all has ever taken place.

Another aspect that affects the workings of the council is the disagreements between the local and the national leadership. Frequently, the national party leadership instructs

² Badinter Principle was established in Macedonia for all decision-making processes that include decisions of an ethnic nature. In such cases a simple majority vote is insufficient; rather any vote must also include a majority of the

local party leaders to vote a certain way for national political reasons, rather than considering what would be most beneficial for the local context. Consequently, local party leaders then have to go back on commitments made previously or change their votes at the last minute. This dynamic foments the mistrust that already exists among the different parties. It is also frustrating to those people in the municipal leadership who promote consensus-building and whose efforts seem in vain when in the end votes are modified due to outside influences. It is difficult to resolve this situation although it should become apparent that a successful democratic process in Struga would benefit all political parties.

A problem that ties into the dynamic described above is that the opposition parties lack a clear program. This ambiguity about political goals of each party complicates the coordination process. It also causes the opposition to define its platform in reaction to the work of the majority party. In order for the democratic system to function effectively, it is imperative that all political parties have clear goals and projects they want to pursue during each year.

The underlying problem that inhibits good coordination in the municipal council is the lack of trust among the leadership of the different parties. Regardless of ethnic background, there is a level of distrust which is only reinforced by the lack of communication of the coordinators. Currently, no mechanisms exist to increase this level of trust and no conscious initiatives have taken place to address this issue.

However, all local leaders demonstrated goodwill to cooperate. One of the training participants, Mr. Bujar Hoxha, is council coordinator for DUI and because of his position vowed to take active steps to improve coordination and call a meeting with all coordinators to discuss modifying the current procedure. Two other training participants and members of the council, Mr. Simon Aleksieski and Mr. Melaim Nazifi, both in the opposition, agreed to support Mr. Hoxha and work together with him. This is a first attempt by local leaders to reach beyond party lines and strengthen the democratic political process in order to benefit the entire municipality of Struga.

Together with the council coordinators CSSP has developed the concept for a professional training specifically targeted at the party coordinators, party leaders, the mayor and president of the council. Focus of the training will be the coordination and cooperation on political issues and overall functioning of the municipal council and political structures. The training is foreseen to take place in November and will be funded with support from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

CSSP and the local leaders jointly developed the following conclusions to improve coordination of the council in Struga.

minority. In Struga decisions where the Badinter Principle applies include for example renaming the streets or choosing criteria for monument construction.

Conclusions on Municipal Council Coordination

- It is important to all sides to improve party coordination and communication of the Struga municipal council. Mr. Bujar Hoxha, DUI party coordinator, agreed to call a meeting of the main party coordinators in the council for Wednesday, July 11, at 16:30 to discuss this issue and receive input from all political parties. CSSP is invited to observe the proceedings.
- The meeting of party coordinators was held and all sides agreed that it was a useful and important step in developing more efficient party coordination. It was agreed that all sides would make suggestions on how to further improve coordination and therefore agreed to a regular monthly meeting of council coordinators in preparation of the council sessions. During this meeting the coordinators would discuss procedures and topics for the council without any political debates.
- All party coordinators agreed that adding at least one issue from the opposition parties to each agenda would be a step in enabling the opposition to discuss their concerns. Each Council agenda should indicate who proposed the topics for discussion.
- To further develop options on how to improve coordination of the Council and build trust, the mayor, the president of the Council, and representatives of the political parties all agreed that a specific target training would be supportive of the process. CSSP has agreed to conduct a training including the mayor, the council president, and the party coordinators in November 2007. All have agreed to participate.

Municipal Council Procedures

CSSP found that the lack of knowledge and implementation of political operating procedures are major obstacles towards further democratic development in Struga. Members of the council and of civil society complained that general municipal operating procedures are neglected. This affects two different sections of the political structure. First, the formal procedures about information-sharing within the council are not being respected. Although municipal regulations clearly state that official documents, be it commission reports, agenda proposals, or current developments in urban planning, need to be distributed to all members of the council in a timely fashion, this does not take place. Requests for information or reports either take months to be answered or never receive a response. The failure to carry out these procedures adds to the feeling

of distrust that exists among council members. It is imperative that the majority party takes the leadership in observing these regulations in order to create the basis for a democratic political environment.

The second section where procedures are not followed is in the functioning of the various commissions. The commissions do not hold regular meetings, are not aware of their responsibilities, and do not communicate with the municipal leadership. In the case of the interethnic commission, even the process of membership selection was not transparent and has caused controversy amongst council members. The commissions need to be held accountable for their work and should submit regular reports on the progress they have made. Furthermore, the council has to interact with the commissions by consulting them on issues that fall in the area of their expertise. Both entities should receive guidance and support from each other. As long as the work of the commissions is not valued, they will not enrich the democratic political life but remain ineffective entities that have no role in the system.

The disregarding of the official procedures by any local leader greatly affects the transparency of the work of the municipality and prohibits other local leaders from being able to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. Procedures and regulations are the backbone of a democratic political system that protects the minority in a system ruled by the majority. Only if these regulations are respected and internalized by all, can the foundations of a stable democratic political system be built.

Below are the conclusions that CSSP and the local leaders developed in order to increase the willingness to follow the existing procedures.

Conclusions on Municipal Council Procedures

- All sides recognise the importance to of respecting all parliamentary procedures for council proceedings. This includes receiving official materials in a timely manner in preparation of the council sessions. As council coordinator, Mr. Bujar Hoxha agreed to call a debriefing meeting after each council meeting to openly discuss whether formal procedures were obeyed before and during the official council meeting.
- It is important to all sides to strengthen the work of the commissions. Information on the activities of the commissions is vague and commissions do not hold regular meetings. Therefore, it was suggested that the president of the council, Mr. Sejfula Hani, will call a meeting with the presidents of all commissions to review operational procedures, discuss any difficulties, and take

further action accordingly. The council can draw on the commission to support its work and improve decision-making in the interest of all citizens of Struga.

- Interaction between the council and the interethnic commission has to increase in order to ensure that all questions with an interethnic component are addressed appropriately in Struga. The council members have agreed to jointly determine three issues that the interethnic commission should discuss and for which it should develop options to put forward to the council for consideration.
- All agreed that the information flow among the municipal leaders needs to improve. In order to initiate this improvement, it was suggested that the president of the council, Mr. Sejfula Hani, distribute the council agenda to the presidents of the commissions to keep them informed about the work of the council. Once topics related to the portfolio of the commission arise they can attend the council meeting and provide input and suggestions. The council will actively seek to include the commissions as consulting bodies in their decision-making process.
- In order to improve the efficiency and visibility of the commissions, it is important that all commissions take on a proactive role and communicate with the public. In order to lead by example, Council Member Dr. Haxhere Alied who is also a member of the gender commission agreed to contact fellow Council/Commission Member Kumrisha Hani to organize a meeting of the gender commission and the schedule regular meetings for the coming months. Additionally she will ask civil society organizations dealing with gender issue in Struga to help create an agenda and update commission members.
- All agreed that it is important to respect the official procedures and demand that the municipal government do the same. Thus, at the next council meeting, Council Members Server Sasko and Kumrisha Hani will officially request reports from the interethnic commission. It is important that all request by council members are answered within a transparent timeframe.

Interethnic Commission

During the follow-up trip to Struga, it was of particular interest to gather more information about the work and capacity of the interethnic commission. During the training, the lack of output of the interethnic commission was determined as one of the main issues of concern in the municipality. Not only are council members unaware of who is on the commission, its work in general and its areas of responsibility are largely

unknown. There is also a lack of transparency regarding the selection process for members of the commission. Due to the absence of procedural structures, reports from the commission appear to be missing and much of the council believes that although there are many crucial issues that this commission could discuss, it does not contribute to the improvement of interethnic relations in the municipality in any way. Therefore, CSSP decided to not only meet with the participants that made up the working group on the improvement of the interethnic commission, but also with all the members of the commission itself.

When speaking to the members of the commission, several problems became apparent. First, the members themselves are uncertain of what their role is, of what is expected of them and some members are unaware of the reasons why specifically they were selected to be on the commission. After being selected, they did not receive sufficient training or orientation as to what is expected of them and how they are to carry out their position. A lack of communication between the municipal leadership, the council and the commission members is apparent. Second, the Council does not give the commission any guidance on what topics they should discuss or how they could provide the council with guidance on interethnic topics. Commission members, who are not members of the council, do not receive a copy of the council agenda and therefore are not aware what current issues are being discussed in the council. Therefore, they cannot determine how they can support the councillors. Third, the commission does not have a book of rules and is not familiar with different decision-making and meeting procedures. This adds to the lack of general guidance and inhibits the decision-making process of the commission. Nevertheless the members of the interethnic commission are determined to fulfil their mandate and make a contribution to interethnic relations in Struga.

A fourth problem is that when the commission decides to investigate certain issues that have an interethnic aspect, they do not receive information from the municipality. Several attempts have been made to gain access to figures about employment at public institutions, and there was never any response from the municipality. In order for it to fulfil its responsibilities and be proactive, the members of the commission must be able to obtain public information. The municipal leadership was encouraged to investigate this issue and seek improvement. Fifth, the interethnic commission does not have an operational budget. Since the members live far apart and have full-time jobs, it is difficult to arrange for a meeting time and place suitable for all members of the commission. Some perceive that it is difficult to commit to meetings when no compensation is available for their work. The president of the interethnic commission has therefore set up bilateral meetings with other members, but meetings bringing together all members of the commission have not taken place.

All municipal leaders and the president of the interethnic commission are very concerned about the current situation of the commission and are willing to make efforts to improve its functioning in the interest of strengthening interethnic relations in Struga. This is especially important since according to the law of decentralization, beginning in 2008, the decisions made by the interethnic commission in Struga will have legal status and therefore an impact on the municipality. It is therefore very important to prepare for this transition by improving the work of the commissions and ensuring that all its members have the skills necessary to successfully carry out their responsibilities.

Below are conclusions made by CSSP and the local leaders to improve the work of the interethnic commission.

Conclusions on the Interethnic Commission

- The interethnic commission plays a very important role in promoting and strengthening peaceful, multi-ethnic co-existence in the municipality of Struga, especially in the area of awareness, prevention, and advising the council. Currently the interethnic commission is struggling to function. It is therefore important for the commission to have a book of rules, an agenda, and clear guidance from the municipal council on what topics to discuss. The president of the commission, Mr. Agim Dauti, will call for a meeting with the president of the council and the mayor to discuss resolving some difficulties facing the commission.
- All agree that the interaction between the council and the interethnic commission should increase. Therefore the president of the interethnic commission will ask to be placed on the agenda of the municipal council to give a report on the activities of the commission so far and to seek guidance from the council on the future functioning of the commission.
- In order to increase information-sharing in the municipality, all agreed that the commissions should report on their work on a regular basis. Thus, within the next two months the members of the interethnic commission agreed to compile a report on their achievements to date, challenges, and recommendations on improving the work of the commission. Both FORUM and CSSP e.V. will support the interethnic commission in these efforts.
- In order to ensure proper relations, it is important that the members of the interethnic commission and the council are well familiar with one another. Therefore, the interethnic commission will hold an informal meeting with municipal councillors to introduce the members of the commission and

exchange ideas on the work and priorities of the commission. The president of the commission will be responsible for the coordination and the implementation of the meeting.

- All agree that in order to more effectively fulfil its responsibilities, the interethnic commission should hold regular meetings. The commission members suggested scheduling monthly sessions during which minutes will be taken that can be shared with the municipal council. Together, the members will then develop options on how to facilitate transportation to the meetings and find a meeting time acceptable to all members.
- All agree that the interethnic commission should be more integrated into the work of the municipal government. It has a preventive and active role to play in reflection of all issues with an interethnic aspect. In order to work on prevention, the commission could develop an early warning mechanism, reviewing projects supported by the municipality to ensure non-discrimination, develop best business practices, and develop projects for youth that emphasize the improvement of interethnic relations. In its active role the commission could be involved in the issues of changing street names, taking complaints from citizens, the municipal statute, and surveying the population on its attitudes about specific issues in the municipality.
- CSSP has agreed to consider providing professional training for the interethnic commission with the focus on improving the work of the commission and strengthening interethnic dialogue. The training will be either in October or November 2007.

Transparency and Information-Sharing

Many concerns in Struga relate to the topic of improving of transparency and information-sharing in the municipality. Currently, it is very difficult for civil society, municipal councillors and commission members to access public information from the municipality. As mentioned above, the procedures in place to enable these basic democratic processes are not functioning properly. The information either does not exist or is not made available to the public. This situation has to be rectified because public information should be available to all citizens.

Additionally, the website of the municipality is not updated and most of the information on it is out of date. This inhibits the ability for citizens of Struga to find out about the work of the municipality or get information on councillors, commissions, and current

developments. The website is a user-friendly tool that local leaders can use to communicate with their constituents and should be kept up to date. A new website which is in the process of being completed has not yet been shared with the public or local institutions. More efforts should be made to promote this website.

There also is no sharing of information between the municipal government and the civil society sector of Struga. Many organisations that work on issues such as anti-discrimination, ecological development, youth issues, women's issues, and promoting inter-ethnic tolerance exist. However, these appear largely unknown to the municipal structures. These organisations could be consulted by the municipal structures, members of the council and commission members to give ideas on what pressing issues and possible solutions are. There is room to improve the cooperation between civil society organisations and the municipality and to use each other's strength to develop the municipality of Struga.

Following are the conclusions resulting from all meetings regarding transparency and information sharing.

Conclusions Transparency and Information-Sharing

- It is important to increase transparency and information-sharing within all local structures and procedures.
- All sides agree that the president of the council should request regular reports from the commissions and that those reports should be distributed to all council members regularly. This aims to improve the work of the council and the commissions equally in the interest of all citizens of Struga.
- The interethnic commission has repeatedly requested information from the municipal government and has received no answer to its requests. It is important for this and other commissions to receive the council agenda and all information regarding its work in order to be able to properly fulfil their mandate.
- The Mayor should ensure that the secretary of the municipality is providing the necessary information and responds to official requests for information, even if the information is not available.
- Everyone agreed that the municipal website needs to be updated more frequently. Members of the Working Group on NGOs will work together with Mr. Vladimir Zupan to make sure the up to date municipal information is up to date and information about civil society organisations is added. The completion of the newly created website will be announced publicly so that all citizens are aware

of its existence.

Civil Society Development

Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Struga mentioned that they do not have an open, interactive relationship with the municipal government. There seems to be a lack of communication and some NGOs feel that their work is not sufficiently supported by the local authorities. NGO representatives say that their input is not requested and instead of working with councillors and commissions to discuss pressing issues in Struga, there is almost no interaction. For example, NGOs working on promoting women's issues could advise the gender committee on where changes are needed and what topics are relevant and of concern to the citizens. However, the initiative to invite closer cooperation has not been taken by either the NGOs or the municipality.

There is also a problem with communication among civil society organisations. Some have never met their counterparts in organisations that work on similar issues, like women's issues or environmental protection. One positive aspect is the NGO Support Centre, which assists local civil society organisations with meeting rooms, allows free usage of telephone, fax, and internet, and gives guidance on how to apply for funding. Although the future of the Support Centre was uncertain due to funding running out, a new location free of rent has been found and it is hoped that the municipality will cover the costs for the internet service like it did the previous year. It appears that the services of the Support Centre are not being used to their fullest potential.

There also does not seem to be a high level of awareness by the regular citizens of the work of the NGOs. The NGOs could serve as a communicator between the citizens and the municipality and would therefore enrich the democratic system. At the moment this is not taking place and it should be one of the goals of the NGOs to strengthen their ties to the citizens. The NGOs should work together on jointly promoting their work to the citizens of Struga.

Below are the conclusions that CSSP developed jointly from meetings with local leaders and civil society representatives.

Conclusions on Civil Society Development

- All sides agree that more communication between civil society organisations and the municipal leadership is a positive development. Therefore, Zivorad Savic,

Genci Muharemi, and Gjoko Milevski will request a meeting with the mayor to present ideas on improving relations with civil society and transparency.

- All agreed that the citizens of Struga need to be made aware of the work of civil society organisations in their municipality. Therefore, members of the working group on NGOs have agreed to meet with other local NGOs to design an awareness campaign. This campaign will take place sometime in the next six months.

Outlook

Although the follow-up visit demonstrated that the municipality of Struga continues to face obstacles in its progress towards a truly multi-ethnic municipality. It also showed that the willingness exists to improve this situation. The social relations between the ethnic groups in Struga are not explosive and most citizens will agree that on a personal level they get along well. There is no fear of being attacked or of having one's rights denied because of one's ethnic background. For example it appears that the personal relations between the members of the council are very good, however, in their political disputes power politics dominate and prevent any real cooperation. There are still improvements to be made, and for that, the municipality can use some additional help and guidance.

CSSP realizes the potential of the Struga municipality in resolving its disagreements and becoming a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic municipality that openly addresses its interethnic disputes. Therefore, it is planning one training with the mayor, the president of the council, and the party leaders and coordinators that will focus on improving the coordination of the council and subsequently strengthen the democratic political procedures. This training will give the local leaders the opportunity to discuss the best way to proceed as a council, taking into consideration the needs of all parties, regardless of ethnic representation.

Additionally, CSSP is planning to work closer with the interethnic commission to help its members acquire the skills to successfully take on the responsibility that has been given to them and to report on their work accordingly. The interethnic commission should be a pillar of interethnic cooperation and provide positive input to the rest of the municipality. With the next step of the decentralisation process and the ability of the commission to make law-binding decisions, it is even more important that the members are adequately prepared for their responsibility. By empowering the members to take on the tasks that lie ahead and become proactive, CSSP is strengthening interethnic relations in Struga not only in the short-, but also in the long-term.

CSSP believes that Struga is a municipality that is able to overcome its current obstacles with some assistance and develop into a flourishing multi-ethnic municipality that can serve as an example to other towns in the Western Balkans. Therefore, CSSP is dedicated to supporting the local leaders in their work and finding the financial support to continue its activities in Struga. Only by being a consistent and reliable partner is an international organisation able to build the trust and lasting relationship with the local leaders that allow it to positively impact the local peace-building process and make it sustainable. Struga is a municipality where the leaders are eager to improve the situation and willing to reach out across ethnic lines. It is now that they need support so that these promising initiatives become successful and inspire others that peaceful coexistence is not only possible but also an asset to any community.

Appendices

Conclusions

Below is the complete set of conclusions developed by CSSP and the local leaders in joint meetings in the municipality of Struga.

Municipal Council Coordination

- It is important to all sides to improve party coordination and communication of the Struga municipal council. Mr. Bujar Hoxha, DUI party coordinator, agreed to call a meeting of the main party coordinators in the council for Wednesday, July 11, at 16:30 to discuss this issue and receive input from all political parties. CSSP is invited to observe the proceedings.
- The meeting of party coordinators was held and all sides agreed that it was a useful and important step in developing more efficient party coordination. It was agreed that all sides would make suggestions on how to further improve coordination and therefore agreed to a regular monthly meeting of council coordinators in preparation of the council sessions. During this meeting the coordinators would discuss procedures and topics for the council without any political debates.
- All party coordinators agreed that adding at least one issue from the opposition parties to each agenda would be a step in enabling the opposition to discuss their concerns. Each Council agenda should indicate who proposed the topics for discussion.
- To further develop options on how to improve coordination of the Council and build trust, the mayor, the president of the Council, and representatives of the political parties all agreed that a specific target training would be supportive of the process. CSSP has agreed to conduct a training including the mayor, the council president, and the party coordinators in November 2007. All have agreed to participate.

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- All sides recognise the importance to of respecting all parliamentary procedures for council proceedings. This includes receiving official materials in a timely manner in preparation of the council sessions. As council coordinator, Mr. Bujar Hoxha agreed to call a debriefing meeting after each council meeting to openly discuss whether formal procedures were obeyed before and during the official

council meeting.

- It is important to all sides to strengthen the work of the commissions. Information on the activities of the commissions is vague and commissions do not hold regular meetings. Therefore, it was suggested that the president of the council, Mr. Sejfula Hani, will call a meeting with the presidents of all commissions to review operational procedures, discuss any difficulties, and take further action accordingly. The council can draw on the commission to support its work and improve decision-making in the interest of all citizens of Struga.
- Interaction between the council and the interethnic commission has to increase in order to ensure that all questions with an interethnic component are addressed appropriately in Struga. The council members have agreed to jointly determine three issues that the interethnic commission should discuss and for which it should develop options to put forward to the council for consideration.
- All agreed that the information flow among the municipal leaders needs to improve. In order to initiate this improvement, it was suggested that the president of the council, Mr. Sejfula Hani, distribute the council agenda to the presidents of the commissions to keep them informed about the work of the council. Once topics related to the portfolio of the commission arise they can attend the council meeting and provide input and suggestions. The council will actively seek to include the commissions as consulting bodies in their decision-making process.
- In order to improve the efficiency and visibility of the commissions, it is important that all commissions take on a proactive role and communicate with the public. In order to lead by example, Council Member Dr. Haxhere Alied who is also a member of the gender commission agreed to contact fellow Council/Commission Member Kumrisha Hani to organize a meeting of the gender commission and the schedule regular meetings for the coming months. Additionally she will ask civil society organizations dealing with gender issue in Struga to help create an agenda and update commission members.
- All agreed that it is important to respect the official procedures and demand that the municipal government do the same. Thus, at the next council meeting, Council Members Server Sasko and Kumrisha Hani will officially request reports from the interethnic commission. It is important that all request by council members are answered within a transparent timeframe.

Interethnic Commission

- The interethnic commission plays a very important role in promoting and strengthening peaceful, multi-ethnic co-existence in the municipality of Struga, especially in the area of awareness, prevention, and advising the council. Currently the interethnic commission is struggling to function. It is therefore important for the commission to have a book of rules, an agenda, and clear guidance from the municipal council on what topics to discuss. The president of the commission, Mr. Agim Dauti, will call for a meeting with the president of the council and the mayor to discuss resolving some difficulties facing the commission.
- All agree that the interaction between the council and the interethnic commission should increase. Therefore the president of the interethnic commission will ask to be placed on the agenda of the municipal council to give a report on the activities of the commission so far and to seek guidance from the council on the future functioning of the commission.
- In order to increase information-sharing in the municipality, all agreed that the commissions should report on their work on a regular basis. Thus, within the next two months the members of the interethnic commission agreed to compile a report on their achievements to date, challenges, and recommendations on improving the work of the commission. Both FORUM and CSSP e.V. will support the interethnic commission in these efforts.
- In order to ensure proper relations, it is important that the members of the interethnic commission and the council are well familiar with one another. Therefore, the interethnic commission will hold an informal meeting with municipal councillors to introduce the members of the commission and exchange ideas on the work and priorities of the commission. The president of the commission will be responsible for the coordination and the implementation of the meeting.
- All agree that in order to more effectively fulfil its responsibilities, the interethnic commission should hold regular meetings. The commission members suggested scheduling monthly sessions during which minutes will be taken that can be shared with the municipal council. Together, the members will then develop options on how to facilitate transportation to the meetings and find a meeting time acceptable to all members.
- All agree that the interethnic commission should be more integrated into the

work of the municipal government. It has a preventive and active role to play in reflection of all issues with an interethnic aspect. In order to work on prevention, the commission could develop an early warning mechanism, reviewing projects supported by the municipality to ensure non-discrimination, develop best business practices, and develop projects for youth that emphasize the improvement of interethnic relations. In its active role the commission could be involved in the issues of changing street names, taking complaints from citizens, the municipal statute, and surveying the population on its attitudes about specific issues in the municipality.

- CSSP has agreed to consider providing professional training for the interethnic commission with the focus on improving the work of the commission and strengthening interethnic dialogue. The training will be either in October or November 2007.

Transparency and Information-Sharing

- It is important to increase transparency and information-sharing within all local structures and procedures.
- All sides agree that the president of the council should request regular reports from the commissions and that those reports should be distributed to all council members regularly. This aims to improve the work of the council and the commissions equally in the interest of all citizens of Struga.
- The interethnic commission has repeatedly requested information from the municipal government and has received no answer to its requests. It is important for this and other commissions to receive the council agenda and all information regarding its work in order to be able to properly fulfil their mandate.
- The Mayor should ensure that the secretary of the municipality is providing the necessary information and responds to official requests for information, even if the information is not available.
- Everyone agreed that the municipal website needs to be updated more frequently. Members of the Working Group on NGOs will work together with Mr. Vladimir Zupan to make sure the up to date municipal information is up to date and information about civil society organisations is added. The completion of the newly created website will be announced publicly so that all citizens are aware of its existence.

Civil Society Development

- All sides agree that more communication between civil society organisations and the municipal leadership is a positive development. Therefore, Zivorad Savic, Genci Muharemi, and Gjoko Milevski will request a meeting with the mayor to present ideas on improving relations with civil society and transparency.
- All agreed that the citizens of Struga need to be made aware of the work of civil society organisations in their municipality. Therefore, members of the working group on NGOs have agreed to meet with other local NGOs to design an awareness campaign. This campaign will take place sometime in the next six months.

Trip Schedule

Tuesday, 3 July 2007 – Party Leaders

9:00 – 10:00	<p>Ramiz Merko (DUI), Mayor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss training results ▪ Get update on latest developments in Struga ▪ Get support and confirmation of participation in future training
10:10 – 11:10	<p>Mr. Sejfula Hani (DUI), Council President</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss training results ▪ Find out about coordination of council ▪ Get support and confirmation of participation in future training
11:20 – 12:20	<p>Ilija Maceski, SDSM Party Leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss training results ▪ Find out SDSM goals and platform ▪ Discuss municipality's concerns and obstacles ▪ Get SDSM support and confirmation of participation in future training
15:00 – 16:00	<p>Krste Miladinov, VMRO-DMPMNE Party Leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss VMRO role as opposition party ▪ Gather support and confirmation of participation in future training ▪ Discuss inter-ethnic relations and concerns of Macedonians
16:10 – 17:10	<p>Simon Aleksieski, LDP Party Representative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss LDP concerns as an opposition party ▪ Get LDP support and confirmation of participation in future training ▪ Discuss municipality's problems and issues of disagreement
17:20 – 18:20	<p>Zija Jonizi, DPA Party Leader</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss training results ▪ Find out DPA goals and platforms ▪ Discuss municipality's concerns and obstacles ▪ Get DPA support and confirmation of participation in future training

Wednesday, 4 July 2007 – Joint Meetings with Working Groups

9:00 – 11:00	<p>Joint Meeting with Working Group on Agenda-setting Simon Aleksieski (LDP), Utility Board Manager Melaim Nazifi (DPA), Member of Council Bujar Hoxha (DUI), Council Coordinator & Coordinator of Ohrid Airport</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss progress of work since April training ▪ Discuss current concerns and topics of disagreement in Council ▪ Encourage more cooperation and coordination
12:00 – 13:00	<p>Dr. Haxhere Alied, PPD <i>(in Labunista)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss training results ▪ Discuss opposition party concerns and goals ▪ Discuss Gender Commission's work and how to strengthen it
14:00 – 16:00	<p>Joint Meeting Working Group on Inter-Ethnic Relations Committee Kumrisha Hani, Chair of Gender Committee; Server Shashko; Turkish Party, Member of Council Vetim Sheji; Natyra (environmental) NGO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss progress since April training ▪ How can inter-ethnic commission be strengthened? ▪ What are concerns in Struga?
16:30 – 19:00 Dinner	<p>Mr. Bujar Hoxha, DUI Council Coordinator and Coordinator of Ohrid Airport <i>(in Mislodezda)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visit village's water project which was self-financed by community members and completed through self-initiative ▪ Give guidance about how to lead/coordinate meetings democratically and constructively ▪ Talk to locals about inter-ethnic situation
19:30 – 21:00	<p>Agim Dauti, President of Interethnic Commission <i>(in Agim Dauti's village)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meeting was requested by Mr. Dauti ▪ Discuss work of Inter-ethnic Commission ▪ Discuss inter-ethnic problems of Struga

Thursday, 5 July 2007 – Joint Meetings

9:00 – 11:15	<p>Joint Meeting: Working Group on NGOs & Transparency Genci Muharemi; UNDP local development office Tatjana Ristevska, Women's Rights NGO EZERKA Zivorad Savic; Police Department Vangel Dunovski; Vlachs NGO Gjoko Milevski; Election Monitoring Agency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss progress made since April training ▪ Discuss next steps that need to be taken to create awareness of NGOs in Struga and to increase transparency ▪ Discuss obstacles for civil society in Struga
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11:30 – 13:30	<p>NGO Roundtable Lunch</p> <p>Flora Doko Lumani, Association for multicultural cooperation Generation of Love</p> <p>Uranija Nina Poposka, Women’s NGO Struga</p> <p>Arberesha Vlashi, NGO Support Center</p> <p>Nestor Jauleski, NGO Areal (Ecological)</p> <p>Irfan Memishoski, NGO Ekolab, Labunishta</p> <p>Maja Markovska, Scout Center Struga</p> <p>Karmen Matoska, Women’s NGO Struga</p> <p>Melimate Mislimi, Aureola Women’s NGO</p> <p>Bashkim Mislimi, Toleranca NGO</p> <p>Irfan Memishoski, Eco Lab NGO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss NGO cooperation in Struga ▪ Discuss the relationship between the municipality and the NGOs
14:00 – 16:00	<p>Joint Meeting: Interethnic Commission</p> <p>Mr. Agim Dauti – Albanian</p> <p>Mr. Rade Nestovski – Vlach</p> <p>Mr. Xhevat Izetoski – Egyptian</p> <p>Mr. Skender Rakipi – Roma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss the work of the interethnic commission ▪ Find out what the challenges are and brainstorm how to improve them
19:30 – 20:30	<p>Agim Dauti, President of Interethnic Commission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue discussing the improvement of the interethnic commission