



CSSProject for Integrative Mediation

South Serbia:

General Assessment and Recommendations

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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 and 2007 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 in 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 endeavors 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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1. Introduction

CSSP learned about the complex interethnic relations in South Serbia during its work for conflict resolution in Kosovo and its advocacy efforts for the Anti-Discrimination Law in Serbia. CSSP obtained a better overview of the situation by conducting three information visits to South Serbia and in 2007 expanded its contacts to stakeholders, local decision-makers and representatives of the Serbian Government. It approached the Coordination Body of the Serbian Government for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja on the possibility of cooperation; in 2007 CSSP and the Coordination Body signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” to work in South Serbia. In the same year the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation in Belgrade agreed to support CSSP’s activities in 2008, which aim to improve interethnic relations in South Serbia by trust-building measures. While the Coordination Body sees a need for trust-building between the local ethnic Albanian majority population and the ethnic Serbian minority as well as between local and central governance institutions, CSSP specifically aims to a.) improve interethnic relations in Bujanovac, as this municipality has the most complex ethnic balance and to b.) support the Coordination Body in its efforts to create a sustainable dialogue with government institutions. The beneficiaries and stakeholders in a.) are local decision-makers from Bujanovac and in b.) the municipalities of Preševo and Medvedja, the Coordination Body and other state institutions of importance for South Serbia (e.g. Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Defense).

The following is a report of the visits and an analysis of the obtained information, which serves as a basis for the recommendations to the Coordination Body and other local and state institutions. In order to get a well-balanced analysis of local problems, CSSP consulted both Serbian and Albanian local leaders, as well as representatives of the Roma population and international organizations on its information visits. CSSP met representatives of political parties and religious communities, NGOs, local representatives of the Serbian Army and Police, OSCE and UNDP. The report also sums up the contents of the meetings with the European Commission, the German Embassy, the Serbian Coordination Body and the Serbian Defense Ministry in Belgrade.

2. General Assessment

Despite many problems, people perceive their everyday life in the region as normal. In Bujanovac and Preševo, mistrust and tension exists between the local institutions dominated by ethnic Albanians and Serbian state institutions and not between the

neighbors.¹ However, ethnic groups live in separate spheres; they inhabit different parts of the municipality and visit their own schools and religious sites. At the same time, the service sector and the municipal administration are being shared.

Although the regional conditions are difficult, dialogue and cooperation between the different ethnic groups still exist and are supported by local NGOs and international organizations. Many non-governmental and multilateral organizations have played an important role in the peace process, especially in reconstruction, the return of IDPs, democratization and the setup of a civil society.

In local NGOs, such as „Neighbors for Peace“ or the “Nansen-Dialogue-Center” in Bujanovac, Albanian and Serbian citizens work together and are committed to the setup of a civil society, to the participation of women in social and political life and interethnic school and youth projects.

Since 2001, when the Končulj Agreement was signed, the international community has played an important part in the peace process and the implementation of the Čović Plan by the Coordination Body. Particularly the OSCE, NATO and the US Embassy in Belgrade as well as UNDP, USAID and the Cooperative Housing Foundation (CHF) are very active in the region². The OSCE has taken the lead in building civilian institutions, training police and mediating between local politicians. In 2002, the OSCE initiated roundtables with representatives of every side on issues such as recognition of diplomas, amnesty for former fighters, economic aid grants, and human rights. NATO and KFOR exerted influence on the former UCPMB guerillas, to avoid a shift of borders and to solve conflicts peacefully. On this issue they cooperate closely with the Serbian Army and Gendarmerie. However, the role of the international community in the peace process is assessed by the Serbian side rather skeptically, whereas the Albanian side judges the international community more favorably.

The establishment of the multiethnic police force on state level is a good example for the integration of all ethnic groups into the state bodies. In the seven municipalities of the administrative district Pčinjski Okrug, 60% of policemen are Serbs, 30% are Albanians and 10% belong to other ethnic groups, such as Roma and Bulgarians. Multi-ethnic police force is improving (for example in Bujanovac the police consist of 50% Serbs and 50% Albanians) and ethnically sensitive recruitment continues. Joint Serb and Albanian police is patrolling in Albanian villages, while only Serb policemen patrol in Serbian villages. However, with less than 10% of policemen, the Roma-

¹ As in Medvedja ethnic Serbs make up two thirds of the population, the tensions here are less intense.

² ICG Policy Briefing No 43: „Southern Serbia: In Kosovo’s Shadow“, 27 June 2006, p.4.

population feels underrepresented and discriminated against. Due to deficits in education, they are filling only the lowest ranks.

Especially the establishment of the multi-ethnic police force has contributed to an improved security situation in the region since 1999. However, up to now, the cooperation of local decision makers with the Serbian Army in Vranje has only proved in disaster operations and the supply of the population with water, food and medicine. The first CIMIK-project of the Serbian Army was established in close cooperation with the Norwegian Army in Vranje. In the future, CIMIK wants to reach the civilian population through transparency. Despite the satisfactory security situation, the presence of the Serbian Army and Gendarmerie at the Kosovo and Macedonian boarder causes a feeling of insecurity and isolation among the Albanian population, as they feel excluded from the communication between Belgrade and the local army units.

A unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo could lead to a political radicalization in the region. As a result of such a development, radical parties on all sides could gain in the local elections in spring 2008. The unresolved status of Kosovo is also a burden to the interethnic relations in the region as the uncertainty paralyses political and everyday life. People wait for a decision but also fear that Kosovo's independence could have a polarizing impact on interethnic relations. Even today, Albanian politicians advocate for unification with Kosovo, although they know this plan is not realistic as the Serbian government will not allow this to happen. This secessionist rhetoric is one of the causes for mistrust in the Serbian population. Related to the status of Kosovo, the state institutions, the police and the army prepare for politically motivated incidents and a possible wave of refugees in 2008. These measures are also a burden to interethnic relations in South Serbia. According to the opinion of the Albanian population, the measures are not conducted transparently and local Albanian representatives do not feel sufficiently informed.

Due to the uncertain status situation there was no investment in the last years. This has a negative effect on the already bad socio-economic situation in the region, leading to impoverishment of the population and mutual accusations. Representatives of the ethnic Albanian parties in Bujanovac criticize the Serbian government for giving economic support just to municipalities in the region with an ethnic Serbian majority population, whereas local Serb party representatives observe that Albanian businessmen increasingly buy up small Serbian businesses.

The Coordination Body was founded in order to improve economic conditions in the region and to thereby remove lack of investment as a reason for ethnic tension. The Coordination Body was founded as an instrument of resolving ethnic conflict. The

main aim was to stop and prevent armed conflict, to enable integration, to enhance economic and social situation, etc.

3. The Coordination Body and the Municipalities Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja

In 2000, due to the Kosovo events, the Serbian government established an agency to coordinate the activities between the Serbian government and the Albanian population in South Serbia, in particular in the three municipalities Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. The population in these three municipalities is composed as follows: Preševo is inhabited by 90% of ethnic Albanians, whereas the population of Medvedja consists of 67% ethnic Serbs. Bujanovac has the most complex ethnic composition; the population consists of 55% ethnic Albanians, 34% ethnic Serbs and 9% Roma.³

Since its establishment the Coordination Body has been actively involved in the development of the region and conducted extensive infrastructure measures, which led to an improvement in living conditions. From January 2000 to March 2006 there was clear progress in the region regarding infrastructure measures, such as road and highway construction and water supply. The Coordination Body was able to distribute direct aid and even social aid to individuals. Under Serbia's deputy premier Čović, the Coordination Body drew up a plan⁴ to integrate all ethnic groups and their local representatives in the working groups of the Coordination Body and oblige them to solve their problems within the Serbian institutions in order to avoid secessionist tendencies.

According to the self-perception of the Coordination Body its activities aim to improve the economic situation and living conditions of all citizens. All ethnic groups benefit from investments in infrastructure, health service and security. These measures are supposed to also help improving interethnic relations in South Serbia. For example, the Coordination Body has set up teams, among other things on security, consisting of police officers and army. However, the ethnic Albanians refused to participate in this team. In the last two years the activities of the Coordination Body have decreased for different reasons and the relation to the ethnic Albanian population has not improved. The Coordination Body feels its real efforts are not adequately acknowledged, whereas many Albanians conceive the pace of reforms as too slow.

³ Zavod za statistiku, „Saopštenje CH31“, Republika Srbije, Br. 295, god. LII, 24 December 2002.

⁴Detailed information on the website of the Coordination Body: http://www.kt.gov.yu/files/history_en.pdf, see also: “Program for the Political and Security Stabilization and Economic – Social Development of Municipalities Bujanovac, Preševo and Medvedja for the Period from January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2007”: http://www.kt.gov.yu/files/program_en.pdf.

The result of this situation is a lack of trust and cooperation between the three municipalities and the Coordination Body.

Since the leadership of the Coordination Body was reorganized in 2007, a new strategy was developed which exceeds infrastructure measures. The agency aims to be more proactive in the region and to reach the Albanian population again. For example, the Body now employs two ethnic Albanians to work in the Preševo and Bujanovac offices, in order to ensure closer and easier communication with the ethnic Albanian community and to understand and prioritize their needs. To CSSP it has expressed a clear interest in improving its relations to the three southern municipalities. The setup of a civil society, the development of the rule of law and human rights are at the top of the Coordination Body's priority list. The political and societal integration and sustainable economic support are crucial objectives of the Coordination Body. In order to realize this strategy successfully, the management of the agency needs to overcome the mistrust of the Albanian majority population. The Coordination Body sees itself as a facilitator, acting between the three municipalities and state institutions. It has organized meetings and acted when requested to by the Albanian community. However, the leadership of the agency is aware that its authority and sphere of influence have decreased in the last two years in South Serbia. In the current political situation it is very difficult for them to win the necessary influence in the relevant ministries in Belgrade.

According to the ethnic Albanian majority population of South Serbia the conflict is not based on local tensions but was fueled by the Serbian government under Milosević to serve Serbian interests and to discriminate against the non-Serbian population. The purpose of this policy was to suppress every form of ethnic Albanian autonomy with regard to Kosovo. From the ethnic Albanian point of view, this institutional discrimination – and not the everyday relations in the municipalities – leads to interethnic conflicts. To this day, the ethnic Albanian population neither feel adequately represented in the national institutions, government and parliament, nor sufficiently integrated into the legal and educational system and the local police. Some ethnic Albanian parties boycotted the last parliamentary elections. Currently, there is just one Member of Parliament with an ethnic Albanian background in the Serbian parliament.

The work of the Coordination Body, which is seen as an extension of the Serbian government, is still perceived by the ethnic Albanian population as intransparent. This leads to mistrust and the perception that the Coordination Body is a pro-Serbian development agency. Albanian politicians speculate with audience appeal that the personnel of the Coordination Body consisted of members of the Gendarmerie and

Serbian task forces willing to intervene in the region if Kosovo became independent.⁵ From the Albanian point of view, the agency does not coordinate its activities with the respective local governments and information appears intransparent. They argue that Minister Ljajić and the leadership of the Coordination Body do not consult ethnic Albanian representatives of the municipal assemblies even when they visit South Serbia. This leads consistently to a boycott of joint sessions of the Coordination Body from the ethnic Albanian side. Many ethnic Albanians argue that the Čović-Plan neither decreased the tensions with the security forces, nor has it induced the promised economic development in the region.

4. Interethnic Relations in Bujanovac

Despite its multi-ethnic composition and against the advice of the OSCE, the municipality of Bujanovac is governed by a mono-ethnic coalition consisting of PDP and PDD since the last municipal elections in June 2006.⁶ Since then, all sectors of the municipal administration have been staffed by Albanian representatives, including the cultural sector and health care. This reverse discrimination puts pressure on interethnic relations in Bujanovac. Ethnic tensions arise due to the behavior of the now majority Albanian municipal representatives and the preference of Albanian employees in the local employment structure. From the local Serbian point of view, this happens at the cost of the Serbian population and is conceived as discriminatory. The result of this situation is that political leaders in Bujanovac do not cooperate and that Serbs feel marginalized.

According to the Albanian majority population, the educational system strains interethnic relations in Bujanovac, even though it is a state body and does not underlie municipal accountability. Many Albanian parents see their children disadvantaged in school education as their ethnic background is disregarded in history and language classes. Serbian school books are not translated into Albanian so that Albanian textbooks from Kosovo are used and tolerated by the Serbian government. They are, however, not based on a Serbian curriculum and do not prepare for higher education in Serbia. The issue of higher education is further aggravated by the fact that in a way the local ethnic Albanian population does not feel part of Serbia. Consequently, most of ethnic Albanians study in Kosovo or Macedonia. However, the ministry of education does not provide for scholarships or loans outside of Serbia proper.

⁵ However, it should be mentioned that the Albanian community was invited to take part in the Coordination Body's Security Task Force but refused to participate.

⁶ Interview with Martin Brooks, OSCE Bujanovac; in: ICG Europe Report No 186, "Serbia: Maintaining Peace in the Preševo Valley", 16 October 2007; p. 4.

The ethnic Albanian population group still feels underrepresented in the legal system, which underlies state competency. Only one of nine judges in Bujanovac has an Albanian ethnic background. Despite passed bar exams, Albanian law graduates cannot find employment. The equipment and infrastructure of the Bujanovac court is below standard compared to other municipalities. The educational and the legal system do not underlie municipal accountability; for this reason, interethnic issues can only be solved by the government in Belgrade. The local population, however, perceives the Coordination Body as a state body and expects more support for their concerns in these issues.

Within the Albanian population in Bujanovac there are different visions about their future in South Serbia, which is the reason why the Albanian coalition is confronted with internal quarrels. While the party of the mayor Nagip Arifi (PDD) participates in political life in Serbia, Jonuz Musliu (PDP) supports the secession of the majority Albanian populated areas in South Serbia.

Local Serbian politicians and leaders in Bujanovac feel marginalized by the takeover of the mono-ethnic city assembly and excluded from the local political decision-making process. They argue that the goal of Albanian politicians is not to participate in state institutions and social life within Serbia but to separate the three south Serbian municipalities from Serbia and to unite them with Kosovo. Many Serbs see Albanians as a disloyal minority undermining Serbian sovereignty and wanting to join Kosovo. Local Serbian politicians criticize frequently the international community for being biased in favor of the Albanians and that Albanians benefit most from their support. From this point of view, the international community has damaged Serbian-Albanian relations. Serbian representatives also believe that Albanian parties only participate in local self-governance to benefit from it and to receive funds.

The Roma population in Bujanovac feels that its interests remain unnoticed both on the local and state level. As a Serbian speaking Muslim population group they feel squeezed between the interest groups and discriminated against. Although Roma are quite fragmented over the whole region, they have formed a political party to advocate for their interests. It gained two seats in the local elections in Bujanovac. The representatives of the Roma-party are integrated in the political decisions of the municipal assembly but they cannot represent their interests adequately for various reasons. According to the Serbian representatives of the municipal assembly, the members of the Roma-party are used by the ruling Albanian coalition for their purposes.

5. Summary and Recommendations

In order to sustainably improve interethnic relations in South Serbia it is necessary to overcome the mistrust between decision-makers on local and state level. This should be done in the immediate context of the developments in Kosovo and the local elections in South Serbia. The involved parties should develop a process that takes into account their mutual interests, focuses on interethnic stakes and solves existing problems accordingly. A successful example for such a process can be found in the multiethnic establishment of the police force.

For the Albanian population in Serbia it is important to ensure better recognition of their interests by state bodies. This extends to their proportional representation in the judiciary, equal opportunities in all ranks of the police, a sufficient number of Albanian speaking teachers and an according equipment of schools. The Albanian population wants to be represented in state bodies and to have their voice and interests heard. They want to feel a part of the society and expect the Coordination Body to represent them towards the government.

The **Coordination Body** should ensure transparency in their interaction with local partners in the three South Serbian municipalities and should develop its activities together with them. Even though the Body has local offices, the municipal representatives do not feel sufficiently included in planning and conducting the agency's activities. Taking into account previous steps towards including municipal representatives in its activities, the Coordination Body should nevertheless not decrease but strengthen its efforts at approaching them. Joint planning meetings, with clear dates and a set agenda, should take place on all levels in order to avoid misunderstandings. The Coordination Body should make an effort to take into account and work on all complaints presented to them. The results of the joint meetings should be made publicly available.

Visits of high-ranking government representatives, which are welcomed also by the Albanian population, should be conducted in a transparent manner and should actively involve the municipalities.

In order to avoid tension, sensitive issues such as security or border protection, in which army and police are involved, should be discussed by authorities in Belgrade with their local counterparts in the municipalities. This is imperative especially with regard to the developments in Kosovo.

Issues in the area of enhancing economic development, infrastructural measures, health care, civil society and human rights should be worked on jointly and be clearly coordinated with the municipal councils in order to ensure cooperation that satisfies all sides and takes interethnic issues into account.

Measures of economic development and investment should be transparent and take into account the interests of all sides, thus enhancing their acceptance and sustainability; tenders should be announced publicly; the amount of investment should be raised.

The Coordination Body should further adapt the composition of their personnel in order to proportionally reflect the local interethnic composition of the population, thereby furthering the acceptance of its measures and representing the interests of all groups of the population.

For the Coordination Body and the Serbian state institutions it is important to see their efforts in improving local living conditions acknowledged by the Albanian population. Therefore the Albanian municipal representatives should make the state measures transparent to the local population and should avoid polarizing rhetoric.

In **Bujanovac**, the decisions of local actors run parallel and do not aim at cooperation. Since having won the municipal elections, the Albanian majority dominates municipal business and does not integrate the Serbian population. Municipal representatives should fill positions in a transparent way and in proportion to the municipal census in order to include the Serbian minority in municipal work. In turn, positions in health care, economy, education and police should also be filled in accordance with the local census. Thus, a balance between the groups in municipal and state employment should be created.

The Serbian population of Bujanovac, which makes up 34% of the population, is, among other things, interested in equal participation in municipal decisions because they feel excluded from these. Similarly, they do not feel sufficiently integrated into economic decision-making, even though according to their own statements they own 66% of local real estate. The municipal committees should meet in a timely and transparent manner and make sure to include all population groups in their decisions.

The Albanian population demands equal access to local state institutions (courts, schools), which extends to questions of equipment and employment. Because they feel excluded from administration in state bodies, they claim control over municipal business (culture and health care). The government in Belgrade as well as the ministries of Justice and Education should take into account the concerns of the Albanian population, for example through the Coordination Body. Thus, local

interethnic relations could be improved and the Coordination Body could fulfill its tasks in accordance with its current strategy.

The main interest of the Roma population is to receive improved support within the local education system. Their demands are improved access to higher education, improved health care and accommodation and in general improved social conditions and opportunities for advancement within society. These should be taken into account by state and local institutions.

6. Planned Measures

CSSP considers measures within the framework of its method of Integrative Mediation to improve the relations between all ethnic groups on municipal and state level. Their successful implementation will benefit the Serbian state and the three South Serbian municipalities as well as the Kosovo region, and will contribute to regional stability. CSSP foresees to implement two processes in South Serbia. a.) In Bujanovac CSSP can mediate between local decision-makers by implementing trust-building measures and thus support them in finding solutions to their problems independently. b.) CSSP can support dialogue and trust-building between the three municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja and the Coordination Body, enabling them to cooperate. Therefore, CSSP proposes the following measures:

1.) In spring 2008, after local elections have been conducted, there will be a two day brainstorming meeting with CSSP, representatives from the Coordination Body and the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation in order to develop and define goals and priorities of the project.

2.) In autumn 2008 a problem-solving workshop with representatives of the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja as well as representatives of the Coordination Body and other state institutions should be conducted. The aim of this workshop is to identify problems decide on further steps towards the improvement of dialogue and possible trust-building measures between the Coordination Body and the three municipalities.

3.) In late autumn 2008 there will be a joint meeting between representatives of the different population groups as well as municipal representatives from Bujanovac. This meeting aims at improving interethnic relations in the municipality and will be conducted in cooperation with the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation.

4.) In February 2009 there will be a follow-up for each of the processes on the implementation of the induced trust-building measures. In both cases, the follow-up

will take the form of a joint meeting with those representatives having participated in the measures.

5.) In spring 2009 there will be a second problem-solving workshop between the Coordination Body and the three municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. The aim of this workshop will be to further work on the problems identified in the first workshop and in the follow-up as well as on further issues that arose during the process as a whole. Participants will be the same as before, but where necessary further stakeholders will be included.

Note: CSSP will include political decision-makers as well as civil society stakeholders from Bujanovac, Preševo, Medvedja, Leskovac and Vranje in its measures and workshops. In addition, a number of representatives of state institutions (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Defense) will be included in the process from the start. In the whole process CSSP will make sure that all relevant societal groups, including women, take part. This includes representatives of the different religious communities.⁷ Similarly, the local military leadership should take part.⁸ Participation is dependent on ensuring stakeholder buy-in; here the Coordination Body will play a crucial role.

⁷ The Islamic community is interested in the opportunity of exchange and joint meetings. However, they expect an invitation from the more powerful Serbian-Orthodox Church. Thus, it would be helpful if the religious dialogue were initiated on highest level in Belgrade. With an agreement on highest level a meeting on local level could take place.

⁸ Given the permission of the Ministry of Defence, the head of the CIMIC project in Vranje expressed interest in the army's taking part in CSSP induced measures in South Serbia. The Albanian population does not take part in conscription and thus excludes itself from military service. CSSP should take this point into consideration when planning its measures.