

**EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES – ECMI KOSOVO**

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**ECMI Kosovo Conference: ‘Decentralisation and Civil Society Involvement’**



On 10 September 2009 ECMI Kosovo organised a conference on ‘*Decentralisation and Civil Society Involvement*’. The event took place at restaurant Markov Konak in the future municipality of Gracanica/Graçanicë. The conference was part of ECMI Kosovo’s project on ‘*Support to Minority Communities in the Decentralisation Process*’ financed by the Ministry for Foreign affairs of Finland. The conference was aimed at facilitating dialogue on the decentralisation process and particularly the role civil society can play in this process. The event was

attended by representatives from civil society operating in the new municipalities, representatives of the Ministry of Local Government Administration, and representatives of international organisations engaged in or interested in the decentralisation process.

The conference was opened by ECMI Kosovo representative Mr. Lars Burema, who welcomed the participants and gave the floor to Minister of Local Government Administration (MLGA), Mr. Sadri Ferati, who gave a brief introductory speech on decentralisation explaining the powers decentralisation gives to the new municipalities and the benefits the process offers for community members. Following Minister Ferati’s speech, Mr. Arban Abrashi, MLGA representative took the floor to go into more detail regarding the current developments, particularly concerning the establishments of the Municipal Preparation Teams (MPTs). Both Minister Ferati and Mr. Abrashi took questions from the participants, regarding the funds available for MPTs, the role of MPTs in elections, the consequences for the RAE communities, and the building of trust between the Serb and Albanian communities.

After a short coffee break representatives of NGOs currently active in supporting the decentralisation process were given the floor in order to briefly explain their activities and answer questions regarding these activities. Representatives from Fractal, the Center for Peace and Tolerance, UNDP and ECMI Kosovo all provided short presentations



Following the lunch break the participants were divided into two working groups in order to identify the main challenges facing the decentralisation process and develop recommendations on decentralisation, particularly relating to the role civil society could play in this process.

**Main challenges identified:** A lack of information on the decentralisation process in the Serb community; a lack of trust between communities; a lack of capacity of the communities in the new municipalities; the negative position of Belgrade towards the decentralisation process.

**Proposed recommendations:** intensification of the current information campaign, with great use of media; sharing the experience of civil society with the new municipalities, through, for example, expert groups or socio-economic councils. It was also recognised the trust of the Serbian community in the Kosovo Government could only be gained through progress in all sectors, not just decentralisation.