



Building the Law Profession in Kosovo

For ethnic Albanian Kosovars graduating from law school in the 1990s, it was virtually impossible to complete the last step necessary to become a lawyer - the practical internship with a lawyer or "praktikant" prior to taking the bar exam. It was a time when Albanian Kosovar judges and prosecutors were being dismissed during the Milosevic era when discrimination against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo occurred.

For Burhan Maxhuni, a law student from Mitrovica in northern Kosovo, his dream of becoming a lawyer was first interrupted in 1989, when he was arrested for attempting to attend a speech in Pristina. "Everything was peaceful. We were just there to cheer the delegation," said Maxhuni. He felt the impact of unfair laws when he was sentenced to two months in prison for peacefully demonstrating against the Serb government.

After his first-hand experience with the law, Maxhuni returned to school to complete his studies and graduated in 1991. But like many law students, he was unable to find a job and left for Germany to work as a laborer. In 2000, he returned home when the war ended to pursue his dream of becoming a lawyer. But he still needed practical experience in the law profession. Maxhuni was selected to participate in a legal education initiative through the USAID-supported American Bar Association/Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative praktikant program.

USAID supported the praktikant program as part of its rule-of-law initiative to increase the number of professionals practicing law in Kosovo. New lawyers were needed in Kosovo following the conflict, but without the internship they could not practice. USAID worked with the Kosovo Chamber of Advocates to help sixty participants in the praktikant program, including Burhan Maxhuni, gain the necessary experience to practice law.

The program placed Maxhuni with a practicing attorney for one year. During their internships, law school graduates go to court, talk to clients - all the daily work that is expected of professionals, and receive a 200-euro/month stipend. Upon graduation from the program, Burhan Maxhuni was eligible to take the bar and become a full-fledged legal professional in Kosovo.

"I want to be a lawyer. I want to be involved with the law somewhere and be good at my profession. This program will help me to get involved with law again, and in the profession again. I don't know if I could do it without this program."

- Burhan Maxhuni, *participant*



Photo: ABA/CEELI Wendy Brafman

Burhan Maxhuni (seated, right) meets with young lawyers to share the best practices they learned.

When the praktikant program started in 2003, Kosovo had only 252 lawyers. USAID's support of the praktikant program will increase the number of new lawyers, and continue to do so with the Kosovo Chamber of Advocates' support of the praktikant program. Today, Maxhuni is working as an assistant to a Mitrovica private practice lawyer while waiting for his turn to take the bar exam.

