



CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS GAIN PERSPECTIVE ON KOSOVO

On February 24-25, eleven U.S. Congressional staff members visited Kosovo as part of a study tour organized by the Balkans Trust for Democracy/German Marshall Fund. The group attended a gathering organized by USAID with representatives of Kosovar civil society. The staffers had a chance to talk one-on-one with leaders of various civil society organizations about the challenges and issues they face.

"Local residents can solve problems by working together, therefore, you are on the path of peace and secure future", said Stephen Schatz, from Rep. Dan Burton's (Indiana) office.

During their stay, the staffers were introduced to Kosovo issues by Chief of Mission Phil Goldberg and USAID Mission Director Ken Yamashita, and visited several Kosovo regions and met community representatives. The study group attended the dedication of a new water/sewer system in Xërxe/Zrze, part of the USAID Municipal Infrastructure and Support Initiative (MISI) implemented by Mercy Corps, during which the delegation, met with village and Rahovec/Orahovac municipal leaders, both Albanian and Serbian Kosovars, the results of interethnic reconciliation efforts.

ACHIEVEMENTS CAN BE MADE THROUGH JOINT EFFORTS

Xërxe/Zrze, a mixed Albanian and Roma Kosovar community in Rahovec/Orahovac Municipality, organized a celebration on February 25 to dedicate its new water/sewer system. The elders of the community, members of Community Working Group, officials of the Rahovec/Orahovac municipality, teachers and students were all present to celebrate their achievement in cooperation with USAID's Municipal Infrastructure and Support Initiative (MISI). This cooperative effort, across ethnic lines and between local community and municipality, helped solve a health hazard by providing a covered sewer system along with bridging an ethnic divide, and linking village and municipal officials.



(Left) Ken Yamashita, Stephen Schatz, from Rep. Dan Burton's office congratulates Mayor Haxhijaha, the successful completion of the project

Assisted by MISI, the Community Working Group advocated for the project which cost 115,000 euros -- 35,900 euros from the municipal budget, 28,000 euros from USAID, and the remaining funds were the Xërxe/Zrze community's contribution. The project, one of 42 projects in MISI, is one of the largest supported by the initiative. MISI is designed to assist communities and improve conditions for returns and reintegration of minorities through cooperative efforts of ethnic groups. As Ken Yamashita, USAID/Kosovo Mission Director said at the dedication ceremony, "Achievements can be made through a joint effort, and the joint work of different ethnic groups creates peace and harmony."

FACILITATING CROSS-REGIONAL COOPERATION OF USAID MISSIONS

On March 1-3, USAID/Kosovo hosted Keith Simmons, Mission Director of USAID/Serbia and Montenegro. The visit is part of both Missions' commitment to cross-regional cooperation and integration of USAID programs. Simmons was introduced to the Kosovo Missions projects focusing on democracy and governance issues, primarily local government, and met UNMIK officials.

During his visit, Simmons, accompanied by USAID/Kosovo Mission Director Ken Yamashita, visited several programs and met field staff who briefed them on how municipal leadership is working toward accomplishing the Kosovo Standards. His tour included field trips to Shtërpçe/Strpçe (a municipality with a Serbian Kosovar majority), Podujevë/o and Gjilan/Gnjilane, municipality partners of Local Government Initiative, and Kamenice/a, meeting with officials and USAID's Resident Municipal Advisors.

PRAKTIKANT HOST ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

Five roundtable discussions about improvements in the legal intern ("praktikant") program were held in January and February by the USAID-supported professional legal development program implemented by the American Bar Association/Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI). The praktikant program provides financial and organizational support to law graduates for the mandatory one-year apprenticeship that must be completed before law graduates are eligible to take the Kosovo bar examination. Key issues discussed were effective mentorship, program financing and program improvement. The roundtable discussions, were organized by one of ABA/CEELI's closest working partners, the Kosovo Chamber of Advocates' Praktikant Committee. The current and past praktikants and their mentor-lawyers along with other lawyers reviewed the impact of the program, suggesting improvements, and urging non-participating lawyers to engage in the program by accepting praktikants in their offices to offer on-the-job preparation for the next generation of Kosovo lawyers.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP IDENTIFIES NECESSARY ACTIONS FOR STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Podujevë/o municipality achieved positive results from simple changes in running meetings, thanks to suggestions by its USAID's Local Government Initiative resident municipal advisor. The municipality chose to make a recent public workshop more interactive, by involving everyone present in the public meeting, rather than just using set speakers to address the crowd. The end result -- the municipality received far more concrete replies on how to deal with issues while the most difficult task was selection of proper actions. The workshop was held to identify actions that need to be taken to help meet the Standards for Kosovo, who within community can help, and what the role of municipal leadership will be in the process. A critical suggestion was to move future meetings out of the municipal building, bringing the discussion to a more comfortable environment for everyone. Other suggestions were to increase the "transparency" of the municipal government for all ethnic communities, and to establish equal education for everyone and include education programs that promote tolerance and awareness. Participants identified their primary task, as villagers, to be the true guarantee of security for all, through actions at the local level. The suggestions from the participants will help municipal officials improve outreach and communication with the public.

PROGRAM HELPS NGOS SERVE KOSOVO YOUTH

Strengthening NGOs serving youth is one of USAID's regional cross-cutting objectives. The Balkan Children & Youth Foundation (BCYF), a USAID partner, is helping build NGOs' skills and develop a vibrant, sustainable youth NGO sector in the Balkans. In Kosovo, BCYF, in cooperation with Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS), encouraged youth NGOs to participate in a process of identifying strengths and weaknesses, while developing their core competencies. The NGOs selected for the program received technical assistance (training and participation in peer support groups) as well as small grants for their activities. Supported by several donors, but primarily by USAID/Regional Office, BCYF during 2002-04 has assisted 135 youth-serving NGOs throughout the Balkans; while in Kosovo, through the partnership with KFOS, 57 NGOs have been served, a remarkable number in comparison to the region.

Upcoming Events

March 7, USAID's Kosovo Cluster and Business Support will introduce the annual plan to the cluster stakeholders.

March 8, International Women's Day

March 14-19, USAID/Kosovo will host several of USAID/Washington staffers.

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