



Review of ECMI Kosovo/a Civil Society Project:

The Standing Technical Working Group and Expert Committees

Study Visit and Training Workshop

Council of Europe and European Court of Human Rights

Strasbourg, France, 16 – 21 November 2002

Report for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Evaluation Prepared by:

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Relationship to grantee:

Dr von Hippel attended an ECMI event in Pristina in March 2001 as an expert consultant, and reviewed a workshop in Flensburg, Germany, July 2001. The reviewer monitored the Study Visit and Training Workshop held at the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France, 16 – 21 November 2002.

Summary:

The ECMI civil society forum, comprised of a multi-ethnic Standing Technical Working Group, was established to facilitate dialogue and enhance the capacity of political parties, civil society organisations and NGOs in Kosovo to deal with issues of public policy at a local level. At the Strasbourg meeting, the working group was exposed to many facets of the work underway at the Council of Europe, as well as at the European Court of Human Rights. They heard a number of presentations by senior members of the Council and the Court, and were given the opportunity to engage in a dialogue relevant to their own professions in Kosovo. The meetings were well-attended, there were always more questions than time allotted, and the atmosphere was very positive. The reviewer attended all the training sessions and interacted with the participants informally during the tea/coffee breaks and meals. The reviewer is personally known to a number of the Kosovars, particularly the minority members in attendance, and they felt free to discuss their opinion of the project with her. Overall, the reviewer was extremely satisfied with the event, and with the project in general. She would continue to be involved if requested by ECMI. More specific comments follow.

Purpose of the project:

The Kosovo/a Civil Society Project aims to build capacity amongst Kosovo's nascent civil society, empowering them to engage more effectively in the policy-making process. The inter-ethnic forum that has been established, and the component working groups, allow a number of important technical issues to be discussed and debated outside the formal structures of government. Some of the members have had experience in government during the early stages of the UNMIK administration, while others have not. The hope is to enhance the communication flow between this group and government, and between this group and the wider Kosovar society.

The project also aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society representatives to identify and resolve issues of common concern. Through the facilitation of regular high-level meetings, the project participants engage in dialogue with representatives from the political structures of Kosovo, and develop policy options in support of the evolving democratic institutions.

By ensuring the inclusion in this process of representatives from marginalised and vulnerable communities, the project also seeks to broaden public participation in decision-making. It promotes the exchange of ideas to help build broader consensus for democratic consolidation. The project therefore establishes a process that focuses attention as much on the process of government as on the outcomes of public policy-making, and generates information that makes reform efforts transparent and accountable.

The group normally meets in Kosovo, but occasionally receives training in other parts of Europe where facilities and expertise are available. The continued dialogue, both in-country and abroad, fosters relationships among members of the group, even across ethnic lines, while also helping them to develop informed views about current political developments. By building local expertise on issues of public concern, the project therefore enables the participants to engage their elected representatives in critical dialogue.

Critical Review of the Project (in first person):

Because this group has been meeting for over a year, their meetings have become increasingly more constructive and less prone to political posturing. Participants are familiar with each other, though they may not like each other or have reservations, particularly across ethnic lines. Despite these problems, which are inevitable in any post-conflict society, they sit together and discuss issues of common concern. Since July 2001, which was the first meeting I attended of this group, I have noticed a significant easing of tension across ethnic groups (and certainly a major change since I worked in Kosovo in 2000).

One example of this occurred during one of the morning meetings. The proceedings were interrupted so that one Bosniac representative could tell the group how his son, who

was 16 years old, had been badly beaten near his home. The reason given was his ethnic identity and nothing more, though the incident had not then been fully investigated by the police. The man shared his grief and fear with the group, talked about how he had supported Albanian political parties, and even the KLA during the war against Milosevic, and how he did not want to leave Kosovo though he was being threatened to do so. The participants discussed the incident in good faith and decided to prepare a group statement. They were aware that they do not hold any real political power, nor have any means of influencing the police or legal departments of the government, but felt that they had a voice and could make a difference. I was impressed by the clarity of their argument, and the speed to which they responded.

There were one or two Albanians in the group who did not want to become involved, but the vast majority were supportive and against ethnically-based violence. I can contrast this experience sharply with the number of similar incidents I witnessed while working in Kosovo, when most of the Albanians were either afraid to prepare such a statement, did not believe that the incident occurred as reported, or were overtly hostile to any such action. Moreover, it was clear to me that these Kosovars now see that their voice is important, and I suspect that ECMI should be given some credit for helping to build and nurture this capacity.

As noted in my previous review, I think the participants are well chosen and respected in their constituencies. They are articulate and comprise a healthy mix of political parties and NGOs, and range in age from youth to mature professionals. They also represent a mix of ethnic groups, and women are well represented. The multi-ethnic component of this project facilitates discussion between representatives of the different ethnic groups - not just between Serb and Albanian, but also between Roma, Bosniac, Turk and others with the Albanian majority - which is necessary for trust to be built between the communities. Typical with projects of this kind, it is difficult to predict whether the involvement of this particular cross-section of Kosovo society will have the intended spill-over effect through dissemination of information gleaned from the meetings. From what I could tell through monitoring the process, and my knowledge of some of the members, however, I think that it already does and will continue to do so.

Throughout the week, the agenda included a range of discussion topics, such as education, social cohesion, human rights, and building democratic institutions. The main objective has been to raise awareness as to the range of technical assistance available to the Group and increase the dissemination of knowledge on European institutions and standard setting. The dialogue between participants and speakers went both ways – Council of Europe members also asked Kosovars what else they can do to help enhance civil society in Kosovo. They happily distributed their contact information, and offered to continue the dialogue through email and when visiting Kosovo in the future. The Council of Europe has had a strong relationship with Kosovo since UNMIK began its work in June 1999, and I suspect because of this good relationship, more Kosovars know what the institution is and what it does than many British people do (from informal discussions upon my return).

I thought that Graham Holliday, the ECMI representative who moderated the sessions, did a superb job and was well-respected by the participants. He continuously reminded the participants that it was their forum, and that he was merely a facilitator of their process. Since I first started observing the work of this NGO, I have seen a discernible transition of ECMI becoming more of a facilitator, which is a central objective of the initiative, and the Kosovars taking more control over the process. This is extremely healthy and in line with what UNMIK has also been trying to do in its transition process.

As far as I could tell, the funds from the Westminster Foundation were well-spent, and the Foundation duly attributed. The hotel and events were not lavish, but comfortable and pleasant. ECMI also arranged the event as described in the project proposal. This meeting forms part of a longer process of on-going consultations, and will certainly be included in the final report of the programme.

Since this meeting was not about how to improve relations between civil society, UNMIK, and the evolving structures of governance in Kosovo, as previous meetings were, there were no major conclusions to be drawn. It was evident to me that the Kosovars learned a great deal, were very interested in the sessions and showed up to all of them (despite the temptations of shopping in a modern European city that has access to a number of goods not available in Kosovo). Their questions were often tough, but also salient, and the speakers interacted and appeared to enjoy and gain from the process as well.

The international component of the administration in Kosovo has been reduced significantly, and Kosovars are now administering most aspects of government. The ECMI process has therefore also undergone a concurrent shift in its original aims. I was not clear at the last meeting that the organisation would find an appropriate role for itself during this transition period, but it appears now to have established an important niche by creating much-needed political space for a civic forum for Kosovars.

There were some complaints by minority members that the work of ECMI was more constructive last year than this year (when there was more of a direct dialogue with UNMIK), and that it was unclear what effect they were having on UNMIK or in Kosovo today. (The Albanian majority does not concur with this.) I think, however, that these are inevitable aspects of change, particularly as this group becomes less involved in the day to day workings of the Kosovo government. I also think that it is now up to the group, more than ECMI, to develop ways of enhancing their influence and their technical work, which is part of the process intended by ECMI and was reiterated throughout the training event.

I still think ECMI has an important role to play in Kosovo, and this particular project should ideally continue for several more years, although potentially ECMI could play more of a backseat, advisory role and a local partner could take on the administration of the project. Civil society forums and think tanks are an important part of any democracy, and the more comfortable Kosovars become with this process, the better able they will be to serve their communities and realise that they have a role to play, even if they are not in

the government. And in this particular training event, their voice has also been heard in an important European forum.

At the previous meeting in Flensburg, some of the Kosovars complained that they had little time to experience the city and the culture of the place they were visiting. This time ECMI allowed sufficient opportunity for leisure activities, while still preparing a comprehensive training and study programme. There were difficulties in finding accommodation and getting around the city because the European Parliament was also currently in session. Thus many of the Kosovars had to be spread out in a number of different hotels. When the conditions on the ground became apparent, ECMI organised a coach at short notice. Logistical problems inevitably surface in any trip, and ECMI should be commended in taking this initiative. The Council of Europe was a bit far from the main part of the city though, and taxis were expensive. I'm not sure if it might make more sense in future sessions to give the participants an extra per diem for their own travel arrangements, which would give them added flexibility and more access to the city.