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TOWARDS A BETTER INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SERB AND GORANI COMMUNITY NETWORKS

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I. Introduction

Civil society in Kosovo is largely fragmented: it is not only often divided along ethnic lines, but there is also frequently a lack of communication and cooperation among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from the same communities. In view of the particular needs and internal fragmentation of most minority communities in Kosovo, ECMI Kosovo, on behalf of its project *“Empowering Civil Society to Participate Effectively in Policy and Decision-making Processes through Dialogue with Government Institutions”*, funded by EU and managed by the European Union Office in Kosovo,¹ aimed to foster the establishment of minority CSO networks with the ultimate goal of enabling them to advocate for their specific needs and interests while united through one voice.² This pilot initiative aimed to launch the process of intra-ethnic CSO dialogue through the establishment of **two (2) intra-ethnic minority CSO networks**, while taking into consideration Kosovo’s distinct context, particularities, and experiences, along with good practices from other Western Balkan countries.³ This initiative is especially crucial as party representation within these communities is highly polarized and often characterised with antagonistic, hostile behaviour. The establishment of these networks aspires to create an environment which fosters dialogue and opens a direct form

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

² Currently, only Serbian CSOs are organised in a network in Kosovo (KPAN – Kosovo Policy-Action Network).

³ For instance, national minority councils were established in Serbia in 2010. Each council has between 15 and 35 directly elected representatives. Similar national minority councils have been established in Croatia as well.

of communication within the networks. The following presents a short overview of the developments in relation to the establishment of these networks.

II. The Establishment of two (2) Intra-ethnic Minority Community Networks

Through ECMI Kosovo's extensive field work, communities have expressed their desire to develop a channel for dialogue and a means to better organise their activities. Communities have stressed the need to improve policies, increase commitment and programs of Government Institutions of the Republic of Kosovo in regards to the integration of non-majority communities in Kosovo, and to ensure full respect for the rights of non-majority communities in Kosovo. Moreover, effective implementation of laws for the protection of non-majority communities is crucial. Ultimately, the relevant stakeholders concluded that the establishment of community networks would be the most efficient manner to address their concerns. Thus, ECMI Kosovo facilitated the process to establish community networks through a series of workshops, meetings in the field, and consultations with all actors. In November 2013, in partnership with *Communication for Social Development (CSD)* and *Network of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Women Organisations of Kosovo (NRAEWOK)*, ECMI Kosovo established two (2) intra-ethnic networks aiming to foster inter- and intra-ethnic cooperation among CSOs in Kosovo.

During 2013, ECMI Kosovo and its partner organisations, CSD and NRAEWOK, conducted an assessment to evaluate which communities have the greatest willingness and potential to establish an intra-ethnic network and the best modalities to develop such a network. This assessment included a series of interviews with key CSO representatives of each community and other relevant actors. Based on the assessment and the criteria set, two (2) minority community networks were officially established in November 2013. The first minority community network was established among CSOs active in Prizren and Dragash/Dragaš from the **Gorani minority community** and the second minority community network was established among youth CSOs active in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Viti/Vitina, Parteš/Partesh, Klokot/Klllokot, Novobërdë/Novobrdo, Ranilug/Ranillug and Kamenicë/Kamenica from the **Serb minority community**.

The Anamorava/Pomoravlje region stretches through south eastern Kosovo, and has generally been characterised with stable inter-ethnic relations. However, the Serb community living in this area faces similar problems to other Serb communities, especially the youth. The establishment of a network will foster a link between various

The establishment of Anamorava/Pomoravlje region will foster a link between various CSOs from the region and better advocate for their respective local government structures.

CSOs from the region and better advocate for their respective local government structures. Since many of these municipalities are newly established through the decentralisation process, the network is essential to providing a secure channel to work together. Moreover, many Serb inhabitants from this area feel they are underrepresented in comparison to other regions in Kosovo, showing the necessity of the network in order to make their voices heard at the central level.

The Gorani Community network is the first such structure to bring together all CSOs from the Gorani community. Considering that the Gorani community is one of the most marginalised minority communities in Kosovo, this is a major development in terms of their ability to lobby and advocate for their issues.

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i. Consultation with Serb and Gorani CSOs

ECMI Kosovo, together with its partner organisations, organised **four (4) workshops**: two (2) with the representatives of CSOs from the Serb community and two (2) with the representatives of CSOs from the Gorani community. The aim of these workshops was to sign the network document developed by ECMI Kosovo, which sets the role and responsibilities of the CSOs forming part of the network. Moreover, the document establishes the **Secretariats** of Serb and Gorani community networks, which consists of at least five (5) representatives of different community CSOs.

ii. Secretariats of Gorani and Serb Community Networks

The selection process of the members of the Secretariat was organised by representatives of ECMI Kosovo, CSD and NRAEWOK.



The Secretariat of the Serb community network consists of six (6) CSO representatives working in the municipalities of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Viti/Vitina, Parteš/Partesh, Klokot/Klllokot, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Ranilug/Ranillug and Kamenicë/Kamenica.



The Secretariat of the Gorani community network consists of five (5) representatives of Gorani CSOs working in Prizren and Dragash/Dragaš.

iii. Follow-up meetings

During March, ECMI Kosovo, CSD and NRAEWOK representatives organised follow-up meetings with the aim of identifying issues that both community networks want to raise in local and/or central level institutions.

Members of the Gorani community network decided to raise the following issues: lobby for the establishment of the new municipality of Gora in Dragash/Dragaš; research on returnees (students, teachers, administration workers and technical staff to school buildings); and research regarding quotas for minority employment in public institutions.

Members of the Serb community network proposed to: research on economic development and unemployment in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Viti/Vitina, Parteš/Partesh, Klokot/Klllokot, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Ranilug/Ranillug and Kamenicë/Kamenica; research on engagement of

youth in sports and cultural activities; and analyse transparency and accountability of institutions at the local level.

With the support of ECMI Kosovo and its partner organisations, Secretariats of Gorani and Serb community networks are in the process of designing questionnaires initiating the research on the selected issues.

II. ECMI Kosovo's Support

For a period of one (1) year, ECMI Kosovo and its partner organisations, on behalf of the project funded by the European Union Office in Kosovo, will support each CSO network with the following tasks:

- Legal, administrative and communication support, including the development of founding documents (e.g. Statute, [The Network Document](#)). The network document emphasises that the Network shall operate as an informal body and its members shall be representatives of non-governmental organisations dealing with protection and promotion of rights of the Gorani/Serb community in Kosovo. The document aims at explaining into more details the aim of the Network of Gorani/Serb community, and the role and the responsibilities of the members of the Platform and the members of the Secretariat, which was established based on the procedures settled in the document.
- The establishment of a Secretariat;
- The development of an Action Plan;
- The development of a network website;
- Publication of a bi-monthly newsletter for one (1) year;
- Influence policy-making processes in two (2) priority areas, including the publication of two (2) policy briefs with analysis of relevant issues and recommendations, as well as press conferences and/or roundtables to discuss these policy briefs.

For more information about the project and its activities, please visit the [project website](#).