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The New Mandate of the Consultative Council for Communities: Challenges and Opportunities

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About ECMI Kosovo

ECMI Kosovo is the principal non-governmental organisation engaged with minority issues in Kosovo, with the overarching aim to develop inclusive, representative, community-sensitive institutions that support a stable multi-ethnic Kosovo. ECMI Kosovo contributes to the developing, strengthening and implementation of relevant legislation, supports the institutionalisation of communities-related governmental bodies and enhances the capacity of civil society actors and the government to engage with one another in a constructive and sustainable way.

1. Introduction

Following a month-long process of accreditation and nomination of new members, the President of the Republic of Kosovo, **Mrs. Atifete Jahjaga**, appointed new members of the Consultative Council for Communities (CCC) on 30 July 2014 for a two-year mandate. This will be the third mandate of the CCC and it follows two previous mandates from 2010–2012 and 2012 –2014. The CCC originated as an informal group established in 2005 as part of the Kosovo delegation to the Vienna status talks with Serbia. Following Kosovo's Declaration of Independence, and pursuant to the Kosovo Status Settlement proposed by UN Special Envoy Marti Ahtisaari, the CCC's existence as a permanent constitutional body was formalized in 2008 with the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.[1]

The inaugural meeting of the Consultative Council for Communities, chaired by Atifete Jahjaga (11 September 2014).
Photo: Consultative Council for Communities



Out of 24 members appointed to the Council, **16 (or 67%) are first-time mandate holders**. The newly appointed members and their respective communities and organisations are presented in Table 1 (see page 4). The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the Office of the President (OP) have not appointed their members to the Council as of yet. The CCC held its inaugural meeting, chaired by President Jahjaga, on 11 September 2014. At its follow-up session on 25th September, the CCC elected a chairman and two deputies. **Darko Dimitrijević** (Serb

[1] For more information please see: http://www.ccc-rks.net/index.php/perne/historia

community) was elected chairman for a one-year mandate; **Fergap Zaimi** (Gorani community) and **Josip Blaško** (Croatian community) were elected as his two deputies.

In her speech to the newly-appointed CCC members on the inaugural meeting of the CCC, on 11 September 2014, President Jahjaga highlighted the importance of the CCC and its mandate as defined by the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and relevant legislation. Jahjaga argued that Kosovo needs to strengthen its relationship with communities and create a modern, tolerant society that accepts all peoples, regardless of their ethnic background and where community members can identify not only as members of their respective communities, but also as free and equal citizens of Kosovo. The CCC plays a crucial role in this process as it is a constitutional category that serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas between communities and Kosovo's institutions in general and a platform whereby communities can fight for their rights. President Jahjaga called on the CCC to be even more vigorous in implementing its mandate, not only as community representatives but also as equal citizens of Kosovo.

***Table 1*: An overview of the members of the CCC and the community/organization they represent[2].**

Community / Institution	Name	First Time Member
Serb	Darko Dimitrijević Saša Petrović Jelena Kostić Slobodan Mitić Dušan Radaković	√ √ √ √ √
Turkish	Esin Şişko, Agim Rifat Taner Güçlütürk	√ √
Bosniak	Isak Meta Amela Radončić Mejdin Saliji	√ √
Roma	Bashkim Ibishi Avni Mustafa	
Ashkali	Bekim Syla Belkize Islami	√
Egyptian	Lendrit Qeli Adem Abazaj	√ √
Gorani	Emrin Zurapi Fergap Zaimi	√
Montenegrin	Branka Stamenković Radoman Doderović	√ √
Croatian	Josip Blaško Sebastijan Čolakić	√
Ministry of Communities and Return	Srećko Bogajčević	
Office of the President	To Be Appointed	To Be Appointed
Office of the Prime Minister	To Be Appointed	To Be Appointed

[2] Please see Annex 1 for a brief biography of CCC members

2. Accomplishments and Challenges Ahead

Established by a decree of the President of the Republic of Kosovo on September 15 2008, and based on Article 60 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and Article 12 of the Law on Communities in Kosovo, the mandate of the Consultative Council for Communities is to act as a mechanism for an exchange of ideas between Kosovo's various communities and the Government of the Republic of Kosovo. As specified by the *Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and Their Members in Kosovo*, the budget of the CCC should enable it to effectively engage in studies and surveys, obtain external advice from relevant experts, engage in the capacity-building of its members and other relevant community representative organisations, conduct programming pertaining to community issues in Kosovo, and assign portions of its budget to community representative organisations, NGOs and other actors in support of the CCC's projects.[3] Thus, it is of crucial importance for the CCC to have a sufficient budget and the necessary support structures (financial, legal, and technical) to succeed in its constitutional mission. An information bulletin published by ECMI Kosovo in June 2013 outlined how the shortcomings in budget allocation for the CCC seriously inhibit its ability to fulfill its constitutional mandate.[4] The CCC's budget only amounted to 87,385 Euro in both 2012 and 2013 and, of this figure, only 60,000 Euro remained once the cost of maintaining the Council Secretariat was included. Thus, the development of programmes by the CCC is inhibited and their mandate unfulfilled. The CCC has faced such shortages throughout its existence as an institution and will continue to face such issues for the foreseeable future.[5]

However, although its decisions are not legally-binding and regardless of its humble budgetary resources, the Consultative Council for Communities has had a few notable successes in implementing its mandate and in protecting and promoting the rights of Kosovo's communities. Its recommendations to various ministries on their hiring practices have produced results. The Ministry of Education, for example, has responded to the CCC recommendation to provide non-Albanian community members with books on learning Albanian as a second language. Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture extended a Vacancy

[3] Articles 12.11 & 12.13; *Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo*, Article 60.
[4] https://ecmikosova.org/the-budget-of-the-ccc/
[5] The CCC, supported by ECMI Kosovo, has repeatedly asked the appropriate authorities for an increase of its budget. Its requests have not been answered positively.

Notice for several positions because they were not issued in minority languages after receiving a recommendation from the CCC to that effect. The CCC also conducted research and issued recommendations on reserved quotas for students from non-majority communities within public universities; research and recommendations on levels of employment of non-majority communities in public institutions and agencies; research and recommendations on housing and social benefits for non-majority communities forcefully repatriated to Kosovo, research on the issue of diploma nostrification for members of non-majority communities affecting their ability to get jobs in the public sector, etc.

The research on the employment level of non-majority communities in public institutions raised the issue of the limited employment prospects of graduates from the University of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North (UMN) due to the unclear legal status of the university. As the university's student population is mainly comprised of members of non-majority communities and a large share of Kosovo's non-majority communities attend higher education at UMN, this issue affects non-majority communities in particular. The CCC recommendation on the issue of diplomas has brought about the establishment of a Government Team responsible for coming up with a solution that will allow UMN graduates to apply with public institutions of the Republic of Kosovo.

3. ECMI Kosovo's Support of the CCC[6]

ECMI Kosovo's support of the CCC originates with the establishment of the CCC and is wide-ranging and comprehensive. The current phase of support has included legal support in amending the CCC Statute, Rules of Procedure, financial compensation, internal acts regulating the Secretariat, as well as wide-ranging support in programmatic areas of the Council. Specific attention has been paid to increasing the public's awareness of the CCC and its importance through the production of information leaflets and promotional video clips broadcast in local and national media as well as to ECMI partners and interlocutors.

[6] ECMI Kosovo has supported the work of the Consultative Council for Communities and its Secretariat as part of the project "Supporting Civil Society Members of Consultative Council for Communities", funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kosovo.

Ever since its formation, but especially in the last years of its functioning, the Council has relied heavily on external support in order to function and fulfill parts of its mandate. Due to its extreme budget limitations and the limited staff it employs, the CCC and its Secretariat are unable to provide the kind of training and support that members of the CCC gravely need. Members have a relatively short mandate (two years) and many of them do not have the kind of legal/technical background necessary to examine and comment competently on legislation and policies. As such, they are in constant need of technical and legal support in order to inform their opinions and form their decisions. With no increase of its budget in sight, however, the CCC cannot afford to increase the size of its staff or fund capacity-building activities.

4. Conclusion

In order to succeed, the Consultative Council for Communities requires proper support structures (financial, legal, and technical). Until present, the work of the Council has been supported through external funding, channeled through ECMI Kosovo. External funding has been provided by the governments of Germany, Switzerland, the UK, and Norway, with additional support from OSCE and the Council of Europe.

After six years of existence, and being one of the few minority related institutions mandated directly by the Constitution, it is time for the Council to be provided an adequate functioning budget by the Government of Kosovo and the Assembly. The current budget is around 60.000 thousand Euros, including expenses for *per diems* and meeting sessions. This budget does not fulfill even the basic needs of the Council; in fact, it hardly allows the Council to cover its working expenses. The Council needs to be provided with a working budget in order to fulfill its constitutional mandate. Other public institutions dealing with issues relevant to the communities, such as the Office for Community Affairs within the OPM or municipal Offices for Communities and Return, generally do not face such budgetary issues.

Annex 1

Darko Dimitrijević, representing the **Serb** community, is a young reporter for "Radio Goraždevac" and activist from the village of Gorazhdec/Goraždevac in the Municipality of Pejë/Peć. Dimitrijević was nominated by the NGO "Experimental Sound" from Gorazhdec/Goraždevac. He is a first time member of the CCC, and was elected chairman of the CCC for a one-year mandate on 25 September 2014.

Saša Petrović, representing the **Serb** community, is an activist from the village of Gorazhdec/Goraždevac in the Municipality of Pejë/Peć. Petrović was nominated by the NGO "Experimental Sound" from Gorazhdec/Goraždevac. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Jelena Kostić, representing the **Serb** community, is from the Gjilan/Gnjilane region in eastern Kosovo and has been active in various NGOs in that region. She is a first time member of the CCC.

Slobodan Mitić, representing the **Serb** community, is a young activist from the Gjilan/Gnjilane region active in several NGOs in that area. He is a first time member of the CCC

Dušan Radaković, representing the **Serb** community, is an activist from the Municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica North. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Isak Meta, representing the **Bosniak** community, was the head of the Bosniak Council of Kosovo and is a seasoned activist in the civil and political life of Kosovo. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Amela Radončić, representing the **Bosniak** community, is a young activist from the Pejë/Peć region. She was a candidate for local assembly elections in Pejë/Peć for the VAKAT coalition in 2013. She is a first time member of the CCC.

Mejdin Saliji, representing the **Bosniak** community, is one of the founders of the Bosniak Council of Kosovo and professor of Mathematics in the Pejë/Peć region. He is also the founder of the Council of Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals in Kosovo, a NGO that deals with issues pertaining to the Bosniak community in Kosovo. This is his second mandate as a CCC member, having previously served during the 2012-2014 mandate.

Esin Şişko, representing the **Turkish** community, has been working in the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports in the Cultural Diversity and Dialogues section, and has also been a member of its Publications Committee. She is a first time member of the CCC.

Taner Güçlütürk, representing the **Turkish** community, is a seasoned civil activist and holds a PhD in Turkish language and literature. He has also worked as a journalist and moderator in various Turkish-language media in Kosovo. This is his second mandate as a CCC member, having previously served during the 2012-2014 mandate.

Agim Rifat, representing the **Turkish** community, is an activist and was previously a journalist in various Turkish-language media based in Prizren. He holds a Law Degree from the University of Prishtinë/Priština. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Bashkim Ibishi, representing the **Roma** community, is a seasoned civil activist and Executive Director of the Kosovo Agency for Advocacy and Development. This is his second mandate as a CCC member, having previously served during the 2012-2014 mandate.

Avni Mustafa, representing the **Roma** community, has been active in the "Romaino Resipe" NGO and is currently a member of the NGO "Balkan Sunflowers". He is a human rights activist. This is his second mandate as a CCC member, having previously served during the 2012-2014 mandate.

Lendrit Qeli, representing the **Egyptian** community, is a young activist from the Gjakova/Đakovica region. He is active in "Radio Prosperiteti", a local radio. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Adem Abazaj, representing the **Egyptian** community, is a coordinator in the "Piramida 2011" NGO dealing with Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian issues. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Bekim Syla, representing the **Ashkali** community, is a long-time human rights activist and Director of the Roma-Ashkali Documentation Center. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Belkize Islami, representing the **Ashkali** community, has worked as an intern in the Assembly of Kosovo within the Committee on the Rights and Interests of Communities and Return. She holds a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Faculty of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj/Uroševac. This is her second mandate as a CCC member, having previously served during the 2012-2014 mandate.

Fergap Zaimi, representing the **Gorani** community, is an activist on Gorani issues and a teacher from the Dragash/Dragaš region in southern Kosovo. As a member of the CCC from 2012-2014, he served on the CCC Working Group on Legislation. He was elected deputy chairman of the CCC for a one-year mandate on 25 September 2014. This is his second mandate as a CCC member.

Emrin Zurapi, representing the **Gorani** community, is a young activist from the from the Dragash/Dragaš region in southern Kosovo. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Branka Stamenković, represents the **Montenegrin** community. This is her first mandate as a member of the CCC.

Radoman Doderović, representing the **Montenegrin** community, has been serving as an advisor on economic affairs and development in the Ministry for Communities and Return, and is a seasoned political and civil activist within the Montenegrin community in Kosovo. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Josip Blaško, representing the **Croatian** community, has been a member of the CCC during the 2012-2014 mandate and, in that capacity, he served in the CCC Working Group on Legislation.

He is from Janjevë/Janjevo, a Croatian-majority village in the municipality of Lipjan/Lipljan. He was elected deputy chairman of the CCC for a one-year mandate on 25 September 2014. This is his second mandate as a CCC member.

Sebastijan Čolakić, representing the **Croatian** community, is an activist from Janjevë/Janjevo, a Croatian-majority village in the municipality of Lipjan/Lipljan, and is member of Croatia's Council for Croatians outside Croatia, representing the Croatian community in Kosovo. He is a first time member of the CCC.

Srećko Bogajčević, representing the **Ministry of Communities and Return**, is Chief of Cabinet in the Ministry for Communities and Return. He holds a degree in economics, and has previously worked at OSCE in the Municipality of Shtërpcë/Štrpce. This is his second mandate as a CCC member representing his ministry.