

Why decentralization process in Kosovo is running late?-18.12.2008

Moderator: Good day and welcome to Media Center. Today's debate titled "Why decentralization process in Kosovo is running late?" is organized by Media Center, with support from Finnish Office in Priština. Decentralization process, a process which is important for everyone in Kosovo has been announced on several occasions, but it was delayed. Our today's panelists will try to explain the reasons for that, and they are Vice-president of Serbian National Council, Dr. Rada Trajković, Minister of Self-government in the Government of Kosovo, Mr. Sadri Ferati, and President of Independent Liberal Party, Mr. Slobodan Petrović.

I would like to request that your opening remarks are not longer than 8 minutes, in order to leave more time for our fellow journalists to ask questions. We will start with representative of the Government. Mr.Ferati, the floor is yours.

Sadri Ferati: I wish to take this opportunity to, at the very beginning, welcome Mr. Petrović and Mrs. Trajković. I will answer your questions in Serbian, in order to be as clear as possible. I will present a short opening statement, in order to leave more time for questions. Our interest is to have strong local government, with broad competences, prescribed by relevant documents already adopted by the Assembly of Kosovo, with broad autonomy of president and municipal structures, and with strong financial support, in order for them to be able to conduct their tasks and fulfill their responsibilities. For that purpose, Inter-ministerial group has been formed, led by myself and by Mr. Pieter Faith, head of ICO, and five sub-groups led by responsible individuals, deputy ministers, permanent secretaries, heads of offices and representatives of ICO. These groups also include representatives of the ministries dealing with municipal government, representatives of the opposition, position and civil society, with desire to make that process comprehensive and well designed, with good chances to be implemented soon. Legislative group has conducted its business. Group for implementation of new municipalities has prepared a concept and designed an idea, from now and until the moment when free local elections are to be held, forming and implementation of complete structures of these new municipalities, from forming of this starting teams and until starting administrations and preparations for transfer of responsibilities from existing to new municipality, and commencement of work of the group for transfer of authorities. Process of transfer of additional responsibilities will last from January til March, especially in the field of municipal, public and utility services and in the social protection scheme, and later in the transfer of ownership of meadows, bush and forests. This action will take place in groups. Group for determining of capacities and donors is doing a remarkable work and it has a clear concept to work with existing utility structures, in order to enable new municipalities to, as soon as possible, accept competences and to be able to conduct them in the interest of citizens, and also to prepare staff in locations where new municipalities will be formed, we are preparing our staff in order to be able to, as soon as possible, professionally transfer responsibilities when new municipalities are being formed. We also have determination from the donors to help us in a phase in which we are now and with providing us with financial

means we need, in order to be able to start with promulgation of projects in municipalities, especially in those locations, where capacities for municipal administration need to be constructed, which include object and supporting documents. All this is in accordance with Ahtisaari's package, which is the only document that has managed to be successful in this area, and which managed to provide far greater quality than models which exist in our surrounding. I wish to emphasize once again, that, aside from priority goal, to enable forming of strong municipalities, our goal is also to, at the same time, provide possibility for citizens from minority and majority communities to have all rights prescribed by the Constitution and laws of Kosovo, to be implemented by their municipalities and to lead those rights on a local level, with what they will be in a position to influence quality of life of citizens, and to enable all citizens of Kosovo to build our Euro-Atlantic perspective. Once again I wish to express my gratitude to all actors who are helping Kosovo to overcome the condition of partition, which is a result of long lasting bad management in Kosovo, in the past, I wish to thank donors who have allocated substantial financial means for this process in order to make municipality a first institution which will be here for needs of all citizens. In that way they will help us promote standards of governing and help Kosovo in fulfilling all criteria on its long path towards European integration. That is all I have to say at the beginning, and I will gladly answer all your questions.

Slobodan Petrović: I would like to thank you for inviting me, I welcome the representatives of the media and my colleagues, panelists, who are present here today. What is related to this topic is that this is the interest of Serbian community. Since I presume that you have a lot of questions related to this topic, I will try to be as brief as possible, in order to give you an opportunity to ask more questions. ILP has three main goals related to our party's programme, which are very important for this subject. First goal, which does not have an alternative, is survival of Serbian community in Kosovo. Second goal is economic development, promotion of living condition for a common citizen, remembered by politicians only before the elections. And our third goal, equally important, is return of displaced persons who left Kosovo after 1999. Not only their return, but also preparation of projects for sustainable return, because this process does not only depend from ILP. It also does not only depend from the Government of Kosovo. Aside from Priština and Belgrade, important factor in this process is international community. Topic of today's debate is decentralization and why it is late. That is also my question, why is decentralization late. Our position that decentralization is in the interest of Serbian community and in the interest of a common citizen, and we are striving to make this process commence as soon as possible. There are several reasons why we are pro decentralization and pro its commencement to start as soon as possible. Decentralization process should include people who originate from here, people who have credibility and knowledge for such a process. One of the most important things, related to Serbian community, which supports decentralization, is the area which should fall under new municipality of Gračanica, which is, by the area it covers, one of the biggest municipalities in Kosovo. At the moment we do not have a clear picture, since this area is under jurisdiction of Priština, but city of Priština does not have an instrument to stop illegal construction in the region. What is causing it is selling of Serbian property, which is an individual right of each citizen, but this is also another segment which is making them afraid and motivated to sell their property and leave Kosovo. Therefore, this is one of the most important factors. The thing which is very important here, and in the world, that decentralization is very

important for common citizens, it enables them to use those institutions, ie. the municipality. It is always better to have more municipalities in order for people to be in a chance to obtain elementary documents needed on a daily basis: certificates, id cards, etc. It is very important to preserve a demographic picture, because, plainly said, if decentralization takes place later, than there is no point in promulgating the decentralization at all. According to the plan, decentralization envisages forming of six new municipality, with Serbian majority. It is like that in this case, if this process is delayed, it will not be like that, since illegal construction is present, and there is no institution to prevent that from taking place. Therefore it would be very important to create new municipality of Gračanica as soon as possible, with good personell, with good people, who will know how to prevent that. ILP has an intention to help those people who have been forgotten by everyone. Of course, we have a mandate to help, first of all, Serbian community, through institutions. What you need to know is that our support is requested by many people. What is very important for us is that it is being requested also by those people who are not members of our community, which clearly speaks that we have gain their trust, trust which is not easy to get, which is, at this time, very important for us. ILP's actions related to this issue was that it has engaged a team of people who are experts in this field, and who have prepared projects. What is most important for one municipality is that it needs to have a plan for urban construction and we have prepared an idea for such a plan for the next 30 years, which will be in the interest of citizens living in this municipality. This is our contribution. What we will support is that process of decentralization is being led by people who live here and who have the intention to stay. Accute problem within Serbian community is that we are lacking educated individuals, capable and qualified individuals. What is also important is that those people need to be brave, and that they know how to work and who are willing to work. What you all know is that we, from ILP, are working transparently, we do not do anything in a hidden manner, and we promoting everything which is in favour and in the interest of Serbian community and in the interest of all citizens of Kosovo, and we are also publicly speak about those people who are working against it. We know that we have had very little time to spent time with each other and to promote those activities on which we worked during previous period of 10-11 months since we are in the institutions, but we have prepared cwertain bulletins and acts which you will see. For those who do not know or who do not want to read there are pictures of what ILP has done so far. These are just some of the clear pictures. That thing, which is the only measure for me, for my party, for Government , and for all those who wish to deal in politics, who wish to deal with people. This is everything which was done, this is all clear. This is a message for all those who wish to deal with protection of Serbian interests in Kosovo. I call those political factors who have the intention to contribute, I also have understanding for those who do not dare to say it in public, those people are also welcome. There are people who have bravely, with their statements, gave a stimulus to our party, and this is very important for us. One of those people is Mrs. Trajković, who has her vision, which she promotes...

Rada Trajković: I do not know that I ever gave you my support.

Slobodan Petrović: I didn't say that you gave us support, but wing to our back. The fact is that

we disagree in great deal, but that is not the reason to disagree in part which is in the interest of a common man. Everything that was done so far was mere politicising, and many people have profited on problems of Serbs from Kosovo, and it needs to be said in public. I am not saying that we have done a lot, but if I say that in ten months we have done more than everyone has done in ten years, that's devastating. I do not want to blame anyone for that. Maybe the time was not right, and maybe there was no knowledge. I am not saying that it has been done deliberately. But this is a reason enough to support everything that we promote.

Moderator: Let us go back to the topic of today's debate „Why is decentralization process late“?

Slobodan Petrović: Once again I thank you for your attention. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to ask questions, on which I will be very glad to answer.

Rada Trajković: First of all, I would like to thank this Media Center. Simply because it has become a center where we meet most often, and discuss in democratic atmosphere, all those people who need to be discussing even more often. When I say that, I imply neighbours, citizens of Kosovo and Metohija, Serbs and Albanians, regardless whether they are in institutions or not. I think that you need to continue with that value that you have nourished, and, since it is the end of the year, I wish to congratulate you on what you have achieved so far. Of course I expect to see similar meetings and similar debates in the future. Democracy includes different positions, but democracy does not include confrontation, or any occurrence of violence. I hope that everyone who are following this, especially representatives of the press will be, during next year, in that way responsible and that they will be working on writing texts in which extremist groups will not be favorized in relation to something which is a message which needs to mean stabilization of life. I will now speak about the topic of today's debate. I would start from something which is reality. I have carefully listened to what Mr. Ferati said about what his ministry, in cooperation with international factor, attempts to do here, something which is a beginning of project on decentralization of Kosovo and Metohija. But we seem to have a small problem, as you know UNMIK is still in power and it is still a political body, but we say publicly that it is a body without possibility to govern. It is a political body with virtual possibilities and, at this moment, I would define the mission of UNMIK, having in mind the fact that it was reconstructed and transformed, consider as ministry of foreign affairs of Kosovo, since it represents Kosovo and Metohija in front of international institutions, where Kosovo cannot be represented because it does not have acclaimed independence in the UN Security Council. During its most recent reconfiguration, UNMIK preserved several administrators, mainly in areas with Serbian majority. This shows that Serbian issue in Kosovo and Metohija is not resolved still. Multiethnicity of this region is on lowest borderline of ethnic exodus, civilization exodus in a sense of devastation and destruction of churches and monasteries is a reality which is behind us and international community should not and dare not legalize. On the other hand we have a different reality which us Serbs and Serbian state does not like essentially, and that is the fact that highest political might at this moment, highest resources, strongest financial basis is in the office of Pieter Faith. Now there is a problem, you all know for how long we have been

discussing about deployment of EULEX in Kosovo and Metohija, and about those agreements which resulted in UNSC with promulgation of six-point plan, whose acceptance was a precondition for deployment of EULEX, in that sense I understood those six points as issues which need to be resolved and which will lead to stabilization and permanent survival of Serbs in Kosovo. You all know that Mr. Faith has a dual role. On one hand he is the special representative of the European Union, and on the other hand he has a position of international civil administrator, who represents a body which is not institutionally legalized, neither by UN, neither by EU. I would say that he is in a position of representative of countries who recognized Kosovo, but, baring in mind that decentralization represents a necessity for Serbian community, to be, first of all, protected from institutional discrimination coming from certain ministers and Government in Priština. Decentralization is the way to organize life and to protect all communities and to try and make this region truly multiethnic. In that sense, I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to my state and to tell them that major bureaucratic discussions in Security Council in one reality, such as complaint to ICJ, such as deployment of EULEX, but different reality is what takes place in the field. Everyone should understand and accept this other reality. There is no status quo in this region. We, as a state, have missed a lot while we were struggling on a global level, because I believe that we did not do enough on preserving Serbian community, and therefore we are faced with a fact that every day Serbian community becomes weaker. Baring in mind that we have a new status quo in Kosovo and Metohija, I expect that we will use that time in the right way, in a way which includes that we will enter decentralization process together with Mr. Feith's office. His office has a political influence on Albanian institutional and political leadership on one hand, which is not a small factor in something we wish to achieve, and we cannot exclude Albanian factor in this region, and, on the other hand, we fully refuse Mr. Feith as holder of second function, which comes from illegal and illegitimate status, as representative of the countries who recognized independence of Kosovo and Metohija. In that sense I expect that, after implementation and commencement of work of EULEX, we will start with working on problems which include decentralization, and which mean forming of municipalities in which Serbian population will be dominant. I would like to say something, I do not like to speak about parties and I am not here to comment on achievement of parties, but when I said that UNMIK is a relevant mission, but without power, I must say that problem of ILP is that it is legal, but political might is being achieved through elections and with support from the people. I do not want to speak about how much health institutions have achieved in hardest moments and I do not want to speak about some other achievements, we must understand that everything which is done properly is considered to be good and I wish to appreciate everything which was done good, but the world does not start from me, nor from Slobodan, and I believe that once we will sit down, we will start valuing each other properly. That is all I wish to say at the beginning, but I must say that I support the idea of Mr. Ischinger, that in order for region of Kosovo and Metohija and Serbia to become an area of stability, all of us need to, first of all, invest our efforts to, for example, organize meeting between minister for local self-government from Priština and his counterpart from Belgrade, with mediation from international community, and to present their political standpoints, which are completely opposite, to jointly understand responsibility for the people they represent, people who live next to each other and who need stabilization, regardless whether they are Serbs or Albanians. All of them are frightened and they do not like war, all of them are having difficult lives, except wealthy people on both sides, and, in that sense, I expect that relaxation of relations and commencement of true processes in this region will start in a way that a very transparent communication will commence, which will

enable normal communication between neighbours, between Serbs and Albanians.

Valjdet Osmani TOP channel: Question for Mrs. Trajković. Throughout last 10 months many processes happened in, as you are saying, Kosovo and Metohija, and many countries has recognized independence of Kosovo. Do you consider that Serbian community will soon recognize new reality and join Kosovo institutions?

Rada Trajković: I am a Serbian woman and I am telling you that elite in Belgrade is not ready to recognize independence of Kosovo, as it has not been done by Security Council and, in that sense, with respect of all states who recognized independence of Kosovo, I belong to those people who believe that unfinished status creates a possibility for new talks and dialogue between institutions in Priština and Belgrade. Therefore, a possibility for discussion between new Albanian and Serbian political body is being created. Of course, my wish would be that this new Albanian political body is not comprised by those from Albanian milieu of illegal organization, but true democrats. Maybe later, when we get closer to EU standards and when we become able to move freely throughout EU and throughout Kosovo, maybe then it might be realized that independent Kosovo is not a solution, or maybe it is a real solution. Let us give time for relaxation and for easier reaching of political decisions.

Valjdet Osmani TOP channel: How much time is needed?

Rada Trajković: Well, I really don't know how much time will be needed. Albanian nation should decide to change its political in institutional leadership, and I don't know how much time will also be needed in Serbia. Therefore, at the same time, Serbia is not accepted as the state, and, at the same time, it does not mean that discussion is not needed and to lose time due to the status quo.

Zijadin Gashi – Radio Free Europe. There are rumours that there will be elections next year. What is happening with that? What will be undertaken until then...will there be new municipalities? Question for Mrs. Trajković, will you cooperate with ministry for local self-government in the area of decentralization. It was said that there will be a transfer of responsibilities and what will be your role in that?

Sadri Ferati: Thank you. I will be as short as I can. I represent an immense work on ministerial level. I failed to say whether decentralization is late and I thank you for reminding me. From the aspect of political will of Kosovo institutions, decentralization is not late. There is also no delay

in preparing documents. However, we are not satisfied with dynamics or strengthening when it comes to decentralization in Serbian community. When it comes to municipalities with majority Serbian population, we are doing everything to make this community leader of the process, but that is not happening. We have not heard that there is a response from Serbian community and I am very glad that here we hear calls for discussions, because without those people the whole process cannot start, therefore communities should manage achievement of their rights. While we speak about for whom this process is good, and about integration into Kosovo society, I wonder who is disturbing, and who is stimulating this process? We have an answer to that...it is not Kosovo institution. Therefore, problem lies with communities who do not wish to take over the process and their responsibilities. Therefore, we have five new municipalities and I simply do not want to comment why those municipalities are not functioning. Question is, does someone want ten more Mitrovica's? The point is that citizens of all nationalities have equal rights. Part of that is realized with Ahtisaari's package. It is not possible to partially apply Ahtisaari's package. Therefore all parts of that package will be applied, and not only those which are in the interest of only one side. There was an idea that majority population has leading rights, but it cannot be realized without mechanism to protect minority communities within municipalities. There is no place for discussion on that. Actions will be taken to integrate existing municipalities into Kosovo institutions, regardless it implies citizens from Ranilug, Novo Brdo or Mitrovica. Everyone should have the right to return to their property and to manage their institutions. Therefore all of us should contribute. I will take this opportunity to listen to what Mrs. Rada Trajković has said and to call, as minister, all interested citizens and my counterparts from Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, to discuss about this and about quality of life, and that is the core of things. All I can say is that Kosovo will be governed by its citizens and on this subject I am willing to talk with all factors from all institutions, from surrounding countries etc. Therefore, my desire is to cooperate with everyone, in the interest and for the welfare of citizens of Kosovo.

Rada Trajković: With respect to what Mr. Ferati said, and I wish to believe that it is his true determination and will, but I must say that we are, in the field, faced with different facts which do not speak in favor of what was said here. What minister Ferati said has no sense in the field because what was done so far was done with the purpose to compromise Serbian community in Kosovo even more or to decrease the number of Serbs living in Kosovo. We have had initiatives from central government in Priština and from local government where there were attempts to commence projects in Serbian communities which are in opposition to their interests. I would like to mention project of construction of a mosque in village Berivojce, in which majority of population is Serbian, resulting with pressure against Serbs and their departure. In central region we have had a case where Government of Kosovo, in which Mr. Ferati and some ministers from ILP are, has started with initiative to construct residential area in village Staro Gracko, for so called veterans of KLA. Exactly in a place and among those people who were, as you all know, among first victims and where 14 harvesting farmers were killed almost at the same time. After that we have had a proposal to construct residential area between villages Preoce and Lepina, in a part which is to become a part of new municipality of Gračanica. A school is being built in a village Prilužje, which will influence on destabilization and decrease of number of Serbs. It is also pointless to speak about Đakovica, where a park was built on a location where a church

used to exist. All this speaks about ill-intentions of certain leaders within local and central institutions. In that sense, I must say that my determination is such. In order to preserve influence of Serbia in Kosovo, it is needed to preserve Serbian community in Kosovo, and decentralization can be more than helpful in achieving that goal. Belgrade should be talking with Priština, because you know that a person should do everything it can to survive and to be pragmatic. Long term goals and strategy are needed. I would like if this region becomes safe for all. I would like to say that, regardless the fact that EULEX was deployed without problems, there will be problems when legalization of criminal and people dealing with criminal takes place, because those people are greatly infiltrated and are on leading positions, and that a period during which we need to do everything to preserve Serbian community is ahead of us. We should be working on decentralization.

Slobodan Petrović: I would like to inform the public that what Mr. Trajković said is not, to say the least, correct, and to inform the public that Government of Kosovo did not reach the decision to construct residential area for KLA veterans, even less with participation of ILP. This is shown by the fact that Mrs. Trajković does not even know where it is located. It is located between villages Preoce and Lepina, near Suvi Do village. ILP was the party which stopped the construction of that residential compound, and we have witnesses to that, who are here with us today. Mrs. Trajković should know that, after our intervention, and with the support of minister of health in the government of Kosovo, large contingent of medications was released from customs terminal in Mitrovica.

Rada Trajković: With respect, I would like to say something. I do not nullify the struggle of ILP for projects mentioned here. I have to say that Mr. Zannier has given his approval for import of medications which are passing through customs terminal in Mitrovica, which has become a major obstacle for transport of medications, and if they helped in that, I am very grateful. We are all discussing, and I spoke with Political Council of NATO and with others, in order to stop numerous projects directed against Serbs, therefore I consider that it has been good if there were more interventions. It clearly speaks about lack of mutual communication, but it is good if everyone is for the same interests. I do not have it with me, but I will bring you original document in which is stated that „Government of Kosovo approves construction of residential compound for war veterans...“

Slobodan Vujičić, president of the Society of Montenegrins: Where are Montenegrins in decentralization process. Mr. Ferati, you said that you would be speaking with Montenegro, but what have you done for Montenegrins in Kosovo? Are you going to speak with the Prime Minister of Montenegro about Serbs? Also, when Mr. Petrović speaks with Serbia, with EULEX and others, he is not mentioning us. Mrs. Trajković says that decentralization is the key for survival of Serbs, and decentralization is good for all those people living in Kosovo. Montenegrins are then being assimilated.

Rada Trajković: Than I am an assimilated Montenegrin woman.

Slobodan Vujičić: There, you see. So, how do you expect to come back when we are not participating anywhere, I hear that you are mentioning Jews, but where are Montenegrins?

Sadri Ferati: Yes, that is what I said, you heard me well. As minister of Kosovo I would be discussing with everybody, with ministers from all countries, about citizens of all nationalities. Everything about equal rights of all citizens. I will repeat, all ethnic communities and groups should be managing their own rights, but we do not have that address. I really see Kosovo as a state of all of its citizen. I do not see that address. It is true that Serbs and Montenegrins exist in Kosovo, and I do not know what happened when we are mentioning only Serbs. Montenegrins should organize themselves, and we will be willing to speak with everyone. I just want to say that if there is something that I don't know, I will accept it, but, as far as I know, we do not have such address. I am now appealing that, if there are leaders or established strategy, to contact my office freely.

Rada Trajković: I am saying this very often, and I will say it now. I originate from Vujačić family, and you are from Vujičić family. Albanian political leadership has proclaimed unilateral independence. This independence is protected by NATO, and budget of Kosovo is being filled by international community. As long as I exist, this region was financed by the Government of Serbia. Multiethnicity of Kosovo is preserved by the Government of Serbia. With respect to all those who financed my father, not my grandfather, because he came from Montenegro, and Mr. Ferati, who was financed until recently, because all of us have id cards that we are born here, and that we are citizens of Serbia, I consider that responsibility lies on Belgrade. We have been and we remain part of that state as long as UNSCR1244 not changed.

Sadri Ferati: I would just like to add, I will gladly accept invitation from Montenegro. It is clear that we are different, my father was not financed by Serbia, on the contrary, it took away each drop of sweat, however we are in a situation where all of us should be living from our work. No one should be adding, nor depriving us from what we deserve. This is the beginning of perspective and discussions. Thank you.

Slobodan Petrović: First of all, I know Slobodan very good for more than 30 years, we were

friend at school, and I consider what he said as a statement. Decentralization is for those municipalities in which Serbs are majority, and I am sure that you know that mission of our party is to promote multiethnicity on a certain level, and especially for people who lived here prior to 1999. There will be no problems with us ever, but major problems should be addressed to Belgrade, Priština, Bruxelles and Washington. I would like to take this opportunity to say that, since we are in the institutions, we met with good and bad people, and I am happy to say that I met more good people than bad. I wish to thank Mr. Ferati, who does everything he says. I wish you happy forthcoming holidays.

Sadri Ferati: I would like to present a conclusion and to determine where we are, in order to prove that Kosovo institutions are fulfilling obligations from comprehensive proposal and that what is lacking as a component is the cooperation from Serbian community. I am glad to have gained support from this round table, regarding integration of all ethnic communities, including Serbian. Once again I appeal to everyone, to say that there is a response from Serbian community, when we are interpreting this process to them and affirming this process. We are offering all communities to govern their rights and that with cooperation of all of us, everything would be faster and easier. Citizens should be governing their municipalities in all areas. Therefore, what has passed is behind us and it is now time for each citizen to use its rights and that each citizen is equal. It will not be easy, there is pressure and dilemma's, but only with agreement of all parties, you will see how successful Kosovo institutions are. Once again I thank you.

Moderator: This is the end of the debate.