



***On the Record: Civil Society in Kosovo – Rebuilding After the War***

**Issue 1: Understanding the Parallel Society, March 27, 2000**

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**From the AP Editorial Desk by Iain Guest**

One year ago, on March 24, 1999, NATO began the attack on Serbia in an attempt to force Serbian forces from Kosovo. That goal was achieved when Serbian forces withdrew on June 12. But a heavy price was paid. Approximately 800,000 refugees were expelled by the Serbians to Macedonia and Albania, thousands were killed, and 60,000 homes were destroyed. The refugees returned to mass graves and destruction.

As this series of *On the Record* goes out, the theme in Kosovo is reconstruction. Officials of the U.N. Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which governs the province, recently announced that humanitarian aid will be phased out by the middle of this year. Municipal elections will be held in Kosovo this September.

But Kosovo remains deeply troubled. Kosovars are haunted by the terrible violence that was wrought during the war and desperate to resolve the fate of thousands of relatives that are missing or detained in Serbia. Most of Kosovo's minority population has fled the province and those who remain fear for their lives. Ethnic violence recently erupted in the northern city of Mitrovica, which is divided between Albanians and Serbs, claiming several lives. Kosovo's Serbian leaders are boycotting the United Nations' efforts to create a multiethnic administration.

Adding to the problems, the legal identity of the province remains deeply ambiguous. In theory, Kosovo is still part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; in practice, it is pushing toward independence. Bernard Kouchner, head of UNMIK, recently appealed to the U.N. Security Council for clarification.

Kouchner is also desperate to find the funds to pay for reconstruction. Donors pledged \$970 million to Kosovo in Brussels last November, but very little has come through so far. U.N. officials contrast this niggardliness with the billions spent by NATO governments on the

bombing campaign last year.

Partly as a result of all these factors, critically important building blocks of reconstruction are still not in place. Ten months after the Serbian withdrawal, there is not yet a truly functioning judiciary, and only 347 Kosovar police are patrolling the streets. All of this hampers Kosovo's recovery.

### **Understanding the Parallel Society**

This issue of *On the Record* asks why, in the face of so many difficulties, the international community has failed to make more use of Kosovo's civil society.

It is conventional wisdom that the reconstruction of a wartorn society should start on the day after the cessation of hostilities. The survivors will have immediate needs in the form of food aid and medical assistance. They will also need shelter and protection against violence and landmines. But the long-term goal is reconstruction. Experts agree that emergency relief should be done in such a way as to build for reconstruction.

This should have been easier in Kosovo than any other war torn society because Kosovars have a long tradition of self-reliance. During the 1990s, they refused to be bullied into submission by a repressive and racist Serbian government and instead established a 'parallel society.' It was put into place by the defiant Albanians after Serbia revoked Kosovo's autonomy in 1989. By 1998, it was administering essential services to over 90 percent of the population.

Some of the components of this parallel society were introduced to readers in the last series of *On the Record*. That series told the story of several civic organizations from their creation in the early 1990s to their struggle against the violence that engulfed Kosovo in 1998. It then followed them into exile in March, along with the other Kosovar refugees.

Our goal then was to understand how civil society functions under such pressure. Our goal in launching this new series is to understand how civil society functions during the first phase of reconstruction, when the dominant presence is not a repressive regime but a huge international relief machine.

What was the parallel society in Kosovo during the 1990s? The answer is -- much admired but little studied.

The political foundation was provided by an Albanian political party, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), which was headed by a pacifist, Ibrahim Rugova. The LDK drew its legitimacy from a referendum that gave it 93 percent of the vote. The rest went to a smattering of smaller parties.

The goal of the parallel society was to fill the hole left by the abrupt withdrawal of Serbian government services in 1989. Under the parallel society, these services were administered by functional councils (environment, health, agricultural, education, human rights, etc.) that were composed of Albanian professionals who were dismissed from their jobs. These were highly

competent technicians. It was hardly surprising considering that Prishtina had the third largest university in the former Yugoslavia. At one stage, doctors in the parallel system were treating 6,500 Albanians a day.

The entire apparatus was funded by a 3 percent tax that was levied on Albanians in Kosovo and by contributions from the Albanian Diaspora. It has often been alleged that mafia and drug money contributed. This may or may not be true, but ordinary Kosovars made a tremendous sacrifice to come up with 3 percent of their paltry income. Throughout ten long years, they found enough to provide professionals (doctors and teachers) with approximately 300 DM (\$150) every two or three months.

The real driving force behind the parallel society was not so much money as self-survival. This is best illustrated by the Mother Teresa Society (MTS), which was able to establish a network of 636 sub-branches throughout Kosovo. These community centers became the delivery point for food aid, health care, and a range of other social services.

Three hundred fifty doctors worked in MTS clinics for a salary, but the strength of this network lie in its volunteers. According to Terry Heselius who head Mercy Corps International in Prishtina, 7,000 volunteers helped to run the MTS network. They included 600 nurses and 1,000 medical workers, all of whom had been dismissed from their normal jobs.

Similar stories could be found throughout the parallel society. On December 14, 1989, a group of eminent Kosovars established the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms. By the mid-1990s, the Council had sub-branches in every community in Kosovo. Two thousand volunteers were collecting information on discrimination and feeding it to the Council in Prishtina for distribution to the outside world.

This suggests that the parallel society was more than administrative and political 'structures,' as it is often portrayed. Rather it was the manifestation of a determination by an entire people to rise above the imposition of a repressive rule and take control of their own lives, without resorting to violence. One of those profiled in this forthcoming series of On the Record, Halit Ferizi, put together a volunteer network of community support for the disabled that was more extensive and effective than many found in wealthy Western nations.

This remarkable experiment in civil society was unique. It belonged to a context that was particular to Kosovo in the 1990s and will hopefully never be seen again. Certainly, it had limitations. For example, it defined itself in terms of an enemy -- Serbian rule. It was nationalistic -- although Serbs and other minorities were serviced, the parallel society was first and foremost for Albanians. But to describe Kosovo's parallel society merely in terms of structures is to misrepresent its single most important ingredient. For want of a better term, it might best be called 'capacity.'

### **The Capacity Survives**

This capacity survived even as the structures changed and Kosovo careened toward open war.

The transformation began in 1997, when young Kosovars lost patience with Rugova's nonviolence and took the streets to demand their education rights. Its principles of nonviolence received a major blow with the emergence of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA), dedicated to expelling the Serbian government by force. The parallel society was placed under enormous pressure in March 1998, when Serbian forces attacked the region of Drenica.

A year later, NATO governments further contributed to the erosion of the political base of the parallel society by placing the leader of the KLA, Hashim Thaci on the Kosovar delegation to the Rambouillet peace conference in Paris. This elevated the unelected warrior Thaci to the level of the democrat Rugova. It also legitimized the KLA's use of violence to expel Serbian forces.

The structures of the parallel society were shattered by the war and by the mass exodus of refugees from Kosovo. They went into cold storage after June 12, when U.N. administrators first entered Kosovo, until they were formally dissolved (on January 31, 2000) following an agreement between the three leaders of the major Albanian political parties -- Ibrahim Rugova, Hashim Thaci, and Rexhep Qosja. The three agreed to joint a new joint interim administrative structure (JIAS), under the United Nations, that will govern the day-to-day life of Kosovo until its political status can be resolved. With that, the parallel society appeared to pass into the history books.

But the capacity survived. That much is clear from the groups and individuals who were profiled in the last series of *On the Record*, and who appear in the following issues.

However elusive it may be, however hard to define, however impossible to turn into 'agency-speak' -- this capacity continued through the traumas of last year: the NATO bombing, the Serbian rampage, and the terrifying exodus to the refugee camps of Macedonia and Albania.

It needs to be stressed that refugee flight is not the mindless, panic-stricken movement of distraught people, as it so often appears on television. Rather, it represents a supreme example of willpower and organization in impossible circumstances. The men are often the first to be killed or detained. It is left to the women to collect the family. Most likely, families will comprise infants, youngsters, elderly, and infirm, who then have to be steered through minefields and paramilitaries to a foreign country. This little group then has to be housed and fed -- sometimes in an open field. Describing these people as 'victims' is inappropriate. It is hard to imagine more toughness, more resilience -- more capacity.

Whatever this capacity was, it was at the disposal of reconstruction last year. This is not to say it would have been easy -- capacity is hard to define and it rarely features in UN handbooks.

But 'capacity-building' jumps out from every page. The amazing thing about UNMIK last year is that it went into Kosovo prepared to build capacity, but not use it. Kosovars had demonstrated precisely those abilities -- of taking control and managing their affairs -- that the United Nations so badly needed.

## **The United Nations' Contradictory Mandate**

Why was this resource so willfully ignored? One reason is that Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council, which established UNMIK on June 10, 1999, had to reconcile two contradictory principles.

On the one hand, Kosovo was still part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). On the other hand, the FRY could play no part of a Kosovar administration. This required a delicate balancing act from U.N. officials, who determined from day one to steer clear of anything that suggested a political affiliation or preexisting structures.

One official in a relief agency recalls urging the United Nations to work with the parallel environment council to clean up the stinking piles of garbage in Prishtina. That, he was told, would 'imply recognition.' Only now, nine months later, are Kosovo's professionals being gradually drawn into the administration of Kosovo. The United Nations plans to set up 19 administrative departments, which will need experienced professionals -- but in their individual capacity, not as former members of the parallel structures.

The United Nations' rationale was that the parallel structures had been 'politicized.' Either they were closely associated with the LDK, or they had been effectively taken over by the KLA, which rushed to fill the vacuum left by the retreating Serbian forces and seized power in many communities.

This may sound reasonable. In fact it was highly selective. When it suited the agencies, or served their humanitarian goals, they were perfectly prepared to work with components of the parallel society.

The Mother Teresa Society is a good illustration. As noted above, the MTS network provided a network of distributions points during the 1990s and so was central to the parallel society. If anything, it became more important in the immediate aftermath of the war, because 800,000 people needed emergency assistance and housing repair material. The MTS provided the only practical way of reaching these people.

But the MTS system was also vulnerable to 'politicization.' There were several reports of MTS centers being infiltrated and even taken over by the KLA. In two towns -- Ferizaj and Gjilan (Gnjilane) -- MTS centers refused to distribute relief aid to minorities, prompting an angry intervention by U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Instead of turning away in disgust, UNHCR and its NGO partners worked to improve the MTS. The MTS network expanded to 830 sub-councils. With help from the UNHCR office, Mercy Corps International (which had worked with the MTS since 1993) paid the salaries of MTS warehouse workers and managers. It also worked with MTS to create a more effective and decentralized administrative structure. Seven regional centers were established, and board meetings are now being held. According to its Vice-President, 12 MTS staff are on salary in Prishtina, 200 at branches, and 1,080 in sub-branches. It is a model example of building the capacity of a local civil organization and helping it to adapt to new circumstances.

Nothing like the same attention or effort has been devoted to other councils or components of the parallel society. One of the profiles in this series looks at the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms, whose community network was totally devastated during the war. The Council tried to claw its way back last year and managed to mobilize many of its former members around the exhumation of mass graves. Although there were offers from the international community to provide the Council with money and training there was no methodical attempt by the international agencies to give it the kind of focus and calculated capacity-building that would rekindle the community activism of the 1990s. And there were enough human rights to be protected in Kosovo in 1999.

Add to that environment, health, education, agriculture, and all the other non-political functions that had performed so well in the 1990s: none of them were called upon by the U.N. administration in the second half of 1999. Only when it came to the delivery of emergency relief aid was the United Nations prepared to put aside its misgivings about 'politicized structures.'

### **Humanitarian Invasion**

By the month of December, when the research for this series was conducted, the international presence in Kosovo had reached unprecedented levels. There were 285 international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) registered with the United Nations -- compared to just 45 NGOs registered locally. According to U.N. figures, UNMIK would eventually comprise 6,230 internationals and cost \$456 million. In addition, over 30,000 foreign troops served under NATO's Kosovo force (KFOR).

Though severely lacking in some components (notably international police) this was the largest peace-building mission ever mounted by the United Nations in relation to the size of the local population. It was bound to have a dramatic impact on a tiny country that had been isolated for a decade, and then subjected to a massive trauma.

We are talking here of all the international players in Kosovo: the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), KFOR, and international NGOs, which have assumed an unprecedented role in rebuilding Kosovo. Any international agency that has brought a vehicle to Kosovo, set up an office, and hired Kosovars needs to ask whether its impact has been beneficial on such a fragile society.

The UN Security Council never considered such things when UNMIK was conceived, because such missions are a product of extreme urgency that allows no time for reflection or political compromise. The entire process can be astonishingly indifferent to actual needs on the ground.

There was little restraint in Kosovo itself, where relief agencies were driven by pressure from the donors and the approach of winter. As one UNHCR official told *On the Record*, 'even if we wanted to work with civil society, we often didn't have the time. Everything was geared to getting through the winter.'

## **Working with Civil Society**

How can outsiders best help to strengthen Kosovar civil society without imposing foreign values and sapping its spirit?

This key question rarely receives enough attention. Some kind of outside help is obviously essential, because the challenge that faces Kosovar activists today is so totally different from the challenge of the 1990s. Then, it was to resist and survive Serbian pressure. Now, it is to contribute to the creation of a multiethnic liberal democracy. They have some of the skills needed, but not all.

Here, clearly, is a critical role for the international community. It is usually expressed by the concept of capacity-building.

When relief agencies perceive a potential partner, they will strive to improve its capacity. Hence the intelligent support provided to the MTS by UNHCR and Mercy Corps International. But the underlying purpose of the agencies last year was to distribute relief aid more effectively, not strengthen MTS. Indeed, if MTS needed to adapt and get out of the business of emergency relief aid, building its relief capacity could actually turn out to be counterproductive.

The point is simply that capacity building tends to reflect the donor's priorities, not those of local civil society. This series profiles one imaginative aid model, funded by the USAID's Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI), which is aimed at helping communities to determine which projects they would like funded. But even this is geared to making OTI's aid more effective.

Very rarely does an aid donor stand back, determine the needs of civil society, and then tailor aid to meet those needs. One reason has to do with the point raised above -- it is very difficult to pinpoint the capacity that makes civil society effective. But usually the effort is simply not made.

## **A Slice of History**

This series covers a narrow slice of Kosovo's turbulent recent history, namely the second half of last year when the province was poised between relief and reconstruction. In some respects, events have moved on since then -- one thinks of the creation of joint interim administrative structures. But we believe the profiles still provide a valuable perspective of a critical issue. Where possible, we have updated the material. All the articles have been checked by those profiled.

The format takes the form of a series of portraits that are broadly representative of civil society as just described. We have tried to go beyond those groups that are normally profiled (women, war crimes, human rights, etc.) to include the disabled, environment, and media. The series will conclude with a review of policy implications.

Some of those profiled will be familiar to our readers from previous issues: the Humanitarian Law Center, the women's group Motrat Qiriazhi, the Center for the Protection of Women and Children, and the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms. Others will be less

familiar: HANDIKOS, which provides community support for the disabled; and Radio 21, an independent radio station. Both emerged under Serbian rule to play a role in the parallel society.

The series will also profile campaigners who have emerged since June 12, 1999, in response to a new challenge or at the invitation of an international agency. They include 24-year-old Sabit Rrahmani, founder of the first political party for minorities in Kosovo; Musa Rrudhani, a prominent member of a new experimental form of community government known as a community improvement council; and a 15-year-old environmentalist named Gouri Shkodra. The series also profiles Akan Ismaili, who took over the running of the Internet Project Kosovo (IPKO) on March 1.

The dispatches were written by Iain Guest, a member of the Advocacy Project who visited Kosovo in November and December 1999. Additional research and editing was provided by Teresa Crawford and Peter Lippman, two members of the Project, who wrote the last series of On the Record. Teresa worked in Kosovo during the second half of 1999, when she helped to establish the IPKO.

Copyediting on the series has been done by Jacki Edlund-Braun, and the series is distributed to our listserv by Aeronet Communications, which provides technical support for our Project.

Subscribers to On the Record will notice some important changes in the way this series is presented. In the first place, there is more emphasis on supporting the advocacy of those profiled. This is in line with a broader shift in the work of The Advocacy Project. We are determined to develop a deeper and more sustainable partnership with campaigners and push the envelope of internet-based advocacy.

We will also try to keep readers informed of future developments as they affect the Kosovar groups -- most likely through our website. We are currently revising our website, and once that is completed, visitors will find an illustrated version of the entire series.

We also hope to start producing hard copies of On the Record, making more use of photos, and exploring the possibilities of turning our material into educational material for use in classrooms.

These changes will keep The Advocacy Project innovative and relevant, and the process will be greatly assisted by producing this new series on Kosovo. Indeed, we at The Advocacy Project have reason to be grateful to Kosovo civil society -- as do governments, aid agencies, and anyone who seeks to better understand the process of rebuilding war torn societies. The people profiled in this series are resilient and resourceful. We have much to learn from them.

(This series will employ both Albanian and Serb spellings at first reference to a town. Thereafter, the Albanian spelling will be used. The spelling Kosovo will be used throughout.)