**UNMIK/FR/0059/01
FEATURE RELEASE - 3 August 2001**

**Interview with OSCE Head Ambassador Dan Everts:**

**Elections, the First Step in Creating "an inclusive society"**

**By Alexandra George**

*How has the political landscape changed in Kosovo since last year's elections?*
It hasn't changed so much on the Albanian side because we still have the same parties, in fact a few more. But we also have the active political interest of communities who weren't there last time, the Turks and the Serbs. So we are hoping for, looking for, a much more inclusive Election, which will be very good for the international credibility of the Election and the outcome. We hope that this can be achieved and right now we are in the middle of starting this Registration and party certification.

*What is the importance of the Voter Services period?*
Besides registering the communities that didn't participate last time, that is of course very important-it is also important to catch those people who came after the Municipal Elections, those people who returned from abroad, those people who will have reached the age of 18 by the time of the Election, and those people who have changed addresses. They should go to the VS Centres and be properly recorded in the Voter Registry. So this is to make the Voters' List as accurate and reliable and as up-to-date as possible.

*What is your message to Albanians about the participation of Serbs in the elections?*
The message is obviously that if Kosovo wants international goodwill and support and credibility it has to be seen as a tolerant society where all communities that belong here have the full enjoyment of rights, including democratic rights and voting rights. Kosovo would look much poorer without active Kosovo Serb participation in the democratic process, especially if the whole community would be left out, either by their own choice or by isolation. So we all have to work towards an inclusive society with inclusive institutions. That means inclusive elections-and that means basically tolerance and encouraging everyone to participate.

*What will this Election mean for Kosovo and the region?*
If this Election is well conducted, as well as the last one, or even better-then it will show that Kosovo has its place among democratic societies. It will be a factor of stability for the wider region. So it is crucial that this first Kosovo-wide Election is conducted fairly, without violence, without fraud, peacefully and democratically. If we all succeed, and if the Kosovo population succeeds in doing so-its standing internationally will be very, very high and it will gain a great deal of credit and support as a result.

A lot is at stake.

Note for editors
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For a selection of photographs, please contact Mr Ky Chung at 038 504-604 ext. 5467

**UNMIK/FR/0053/01
FEATURE RELEASE -6 July 2001**

Minorities
**Small Steps for Minorities Significant Steps for Kosovo**By Alexandra George

As Kosovo-wide elections approach, UNMIK wants all Kosovo communities to accept that the time for adjustment is at hand-that the international community's insistence on progress in building a multi-ethnic democratic society be broadly recognized. The problem is equally a Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb one. Signs are that, despite serious difficulties, Kosovo Serbs are beginning to accommodate to the idea of a Kosovo with a future different from the past.

In the aftermath of war and a decade of discrimination and monolithic control, reconciliation and integration of Kosovo's ethnic communities was never expected to be a quick affair. Today, two years down the line since the end of the conflict, some in UNMIK believe they see the first signs that attitudes are changing. Every day more Albanians recognize the need to be integrated and to co-operate with the Serbs, a Gjilan/Gnjilane international administrator has recently told reporters. Equally important is the growing number of Kosovo Serbs  who recognize the new reality created in Kosovo.

UNMIK believes that the changing attitude of Kosovo Serbs in the Serb enclaves is an outcome of the FRY elections last year. Their representatives in municipal administrations seem more ready to co-operate, officials say. They hope that this reflects a new mood among the majority of Kosovo Serbs who hitherto recognized neither UNMIK nor the need to co-operate with Kosovo Albanians. "They are becoming conscious of the need to take part in the integration process, and the number of people integrating is large," the Gjilan/Gnjilane official enthused.

At the grass roots level, on the other hand, many practical as well attitudinal problems remain to be solved. "The main problem for the Serbs in the 13 villages around Gjilan/Gnjilane, which this office serves, is access to public services," says the head of the Gornje Kusce Local Community Office. He himself has no problem liaising with the municipality Board of Directors, largely Albanians, to try and remedy the situation. The biggest problems are PTK's failure to restore phone lines to Gornje Kusce, despite promises, and the electricity shortages. In addition, "no-one can pay the backlog of bills as most Serbs are unemployed," he says.

Mirjana D., who lives in a spacious, well-furnished house down the street, agrees.  If she had a phone line in her shop it would be easier to do business. The frequent power cuts spoil food products.

The Gornje Kusce Local Community Office (LCO) is one of 23 (three are for Albanians living in North Mitrovica) established under Regulation 2000/45 of 28 October 2000 to assist minorities in resolving such problems as access to public services, to enhance their security and improve UNMIK's presence in minority areas. The LCO's also help improve living conditions by co-ordinating work in education, health, social welfare, public services, agriculture etc.

LCOs therefore have a key role in countering Kosovo Serb marginalization from the political mainstream. For example, it took until last week for the Gjilan/Gnjilane Municipal Assembly to appoint members of the Communities and Mediation Committees, and it was not until then that minorities were appointed to the Municipal Assembly's eight committees.

Apart from reluctance on the part of the majority representatives to share political power, even when different political parties are in the Assemblies, "Kosovo Serbs don't have any hope that these committees will help solve their problems as without internationals we cannot do anything," according to a local official.  In meetings with villagers it is apparent that no one knows about the municipal assemblies or their workings.   Thus, to date, the UNMIK Local Community Officer (LCO), an international based in the UNMIK Gjilan/Gnjilane office and the LCO oversees in Gornje Kusce (a second one is soon to open) are the principal institutional mechanism where minorities can address their concerns.

Freedom of movement eases
Although freedom of movement remains a major problem, some improvements are evident. Since last November, State Kosovotrans has run a daily bus service from four villages to bring 15 Gjilan/Gnjilane Serb municipal workers to and from work- accompanied, however, by UNMIK Police or KFOR.  Every Tuesday and Thursday KFOR increases its presence along the main Gjilan/Gnjilane street near the Serbian church so that Kosovo Serbs can make their weekly purchases.  According to the Local Co-ordinator for Gornje Kusce: "KFOR and the Kosovo Police Service have done a lot to improve security. Even movement to Gracanica has improved."
But not everyone is reassured. The Grbic family remains afraid: they use the UNHCR bus (from July 5 the Department of Transport took over the service) that runs three times a week to buy food in Gjilan/Gnjilane.  Their 64-year old mother complains: "We cannot go anywhere by ourselves.  We're scared."

Unemployment rife
With unemployment as high as 97 per cent in some places, the trials of daily life loom even larger in the Kosovo Serb than in other communities. Gornje Kusce used to have 550 employed before the war - now only handful work, some in schools, some in mining.  In Silovo, out of 1,500 people at most 30 people, or 2 per cent, are working: for the past six to seven months 10 men are employed in the KPS. Some 15 people were hired by the construction company, Binacka Morava, a socially-owned enterprise; a few others work as teachers.  The remainder survive from social assistance or agriculture.  According to one resident, Sucica  Dejkovic:  "People can't sell their produce any more because the Serbs who lived in Gjilane have gone and the market is dominated by Albanians, who consume their own products."

Everyone agrees that KFOR plays a key role in helping Kosovo Serbs find jobs.   Major Steven Katz, CIMIC, USKFOR, Gjilan, is in charge of four teams in his unit - North and South Gjilan/Gnjilane city, Kamenica, Novo Brdo. They all aim to help all communities economically and in job creation.
Two weeks back CIMIC donated three garbage trucks to the local sanitation company in Gjilan/Gnjilane, making the hiring of five Kosovo Serbs a condition. As a result, Serb villages now have garbage collection.  "It's the first time Serbs have worked in the sanitation company since the war's end," says Katz. KFOR pressure also led to the hiring of 75 Kosovo Serbs out of 800 employees at Binacka Morova, where they are mostly engaged in construction. Other USKFOR projects involving hand-made rug and textile production will soon lead to the hiring of 18 Serb village women.

Elections: a step towards political participation
With little social interaction, trading contacts inside Kosovo are tentatively growing: "Albanians buy our milk and we buy vegetables in Gjilan/Gnjilane," acknowledges Mirjana D., who runs the shop in Gornje Kusce. But since the Ground Safety Zone (GSZ) opened she has been there twice to visit her daughter and stock up on products for her shop.  However, many Albanians also go to the GSZ to trade.

Will people like Mirjana vote in the forthcoming elections? She voices one widely-held view: Kosovo Serbs will register, but their  voting in November will depend on FRY President Kostunica's counsel. "We cannot live without Serbia," she says. However, such views irritate many Kosovo Albanians.  AAK international relations head, Blerim Burjani, underlines the point: " I think Serbs should shed the illusion that Serbia is their centre that directs them.  They should integrate into civil society.  It's good if they participate in forthcoming elections and recognize Kosovo as their state."

Important for UNMIK as Kosovo's administrator, and for the majority community of Kosovo Albanians is another prevailing Serb view: "If freedom of movement does not improve considerably many Serbs won't register no matter what Kostunica says," says Mitar D.,

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|  | **UNMIK/FR/0050/01FEATURE RELEASE -22 June 2001** Elections**Kosovo Women Come of Political Age**By Alexandra George"The Kosovo-wide Assembly elections are a great opportunity for women to participate in the political process," says Kristin Astgeirsdottir, Project Adviser, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) a former Member of Parliament from Iceland.  With a 33 per cent gender requirement for political parties recommended by OSCE's Central Election Commission now pending SRSG' approval, Kosovo women will have a landmark opportunity to impact on political life.The international community is already gearing up to support women candidates. OSCE recently began a new series of women-empowerment activities. In May, OSCE's Democratization Department held a seminar,  "Women and Politics," attended by 40 female politicians from a broad spectrum of political parties, to encourage women politicians' more active role in their parties. Parliamentarians from Germany, Netherlands, Iceland, Norway and Finland shared first-hand their experiences as candidates in their own countries where they built up women's parliamentary coalitions and political interest groups.  International NGOs, like STAR Network and the National Democratic Institute, provided training on public policy advocacy, campaigning and communications.OSCE and UNIFEM recently held the first two- in Lipjan and Vushhtri - out of 30 seminars, entitled "Women and Leadership in the Municipalities" involving training of Municipal Assembly members and Municipal staff, both women and men, on gender issues.  UNIFEM is also organizing meetings with women voters. According to Astgeirsdottir:  "We need to stress democracy is an individual right, that Kosovar women's husbands cannot vote for them. Our work is all about training in gender-awareness."Women leaders like Dr. Flora Brovina, President, League of Albanian Women (an NGO), Melihate Termkolli, representative, LDK Women's Forum, and Greta Kaqinari of Albanian Christian-Democratic Party of Kosovo, agree that lack of education and an entrenched patriarchy are major barriers to change. For Brovina: "Women should not just be a decorative piece in a political party.  I want women to have a respectable voice, but their voices will take time to resound." She cites the 80 per cent female unemployment, dire health problems, and lack of female education, especially in rural areas, as the main impediments to progress. "Women have problems distinct from those of men in the house, at work, in villages, in parliament - so women should support women," she notes.  The OSCE Election Department's Outreach section is focusing on gender awareness as part of its voter education campaign: one of its four outreach teams will conduct face to face meetings exclusively with women voters throughout Kosovo, and in the fall a series of roundtables on election issues, including gender awareness, is planned.  OSCE and UNIFEM will also train women candidates in the fall.Political parties are also forging new ideas on behalf of their cause. LDK Women's Forum platform advocates the establishment of a Ministry of Women's Affairs in the new government as a way to promote women's advancement. "We are determined to institutionalize women's issues because without that no sound basis for normal development exists," says Termkolli.  However, opinions differ among women who are already established politicians. Greta Kaqinari disagrees: such a ministry would merely marginalize women: she and Flora Brovina would like gender quotas to be legally established for governmental appointments at both central and municipal levels.  This is a topical issue among proposals presented this week by local NGOs and civil society members to Security Council ambassadors during the latter's recent visit to Kosovo: that equal opportunities be reflected in the new legislation.Clearly a momentum for change, no matter how measured in a society divided between modernizers and traditionalists, is underway.  The Central Election Commission's recommendation of both a gender and geographical requirement in political representation in the future Assembly helps move Kosovo society forward to democracy. According to Sean Gralton, Senior Legal counsel, OSCE Central Election Commission Secretariat, "our point with the gender quota is to ensure everyone is represented in the Assembly. The same applies to the geographical requirement: to make sure people from small municipalities, who don't have as much power or votes, should also feel the Assembly belongs to them." Precedents from Scandinavian countries bode well.  Both Norway and Sweden began with female quotas in parliament, but today women parliamentarians make up a larger percentage than the original ratio. According to Gralton: "That means at some point men and women voters also thought having women in politics was a good idea which validates our gender policy in Kosovo." Both Brovina and Termkolli agree that, with the new quota in the future Assembly, the prospect for women's advancement is "moving along positively". Kaqinari, who was a member of the 1998 Kosovo Assembly, recalls: "Back then there was no room to fight for gender issues because our battle was over living or dying." 050 Note for editors The full document may be consulted online in English at <http://www.unmik.org/>.  |