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### Report on the Regional Round Table

### **Sharing Albanian Best Practices on Participatory Governance**

*Supported by East East and the American Embassy in Albania*

*Durres 10<sup>th</sup> May 2008*

*The Institute for Democracy and Mediation- IDM<sup>1</sup>* has been for a long time working closely with local government and civic structures throughout Albania struggling to promote participatory governance at the local level. Following the preparation of a unique theoretical and operational rationale on Community Liaisons' role as an effective structure that involves citizens in the agenda setting process, IDM's department of local mobilization and decentralization in cooperation with the Albanian Ministry of Interior<sup>2</sup> is encouraging local government to institutionalize community liaison as a structure that would stand between the citizens and local government aiming at: a) community mobilization and organization; b) developing local partnerships and interaction. Indeed this model has already been introduced successfully in the city of Durrës and with substantial contribution of the Municipality itself.

Community Based Groups (CBGs) represent another efficient tool leading to participatory governance and greater civic involvement in the local policy and decision making processes. IDM has a long experience in the field and has so far successfully implemented various related projects in the cities of Laç, Bajram Curri and Shkodra. The successful impact of these projects has already laid down the basis for further action by IDM in a genuine struggle to increase public support and strengthen partnerships with local government representatives for a major policy development in this context, both in Albania and in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Institute for Democracy and Mediation and its activity you can refer to our website: [www.idmalbania.org](http://www.idmalbania.org) , or contact us by e-mail: [info@idmalbania.org](mailto:info@idmalbania.org).

<sup>2</sup> On this purpose, IDM's Executive Director and the Deputy Minister of Interior have signed a joint letter which guides local government representatives to include the CL position on their structures, as a useful and efficient means for local democracy.

Based on IDM experience, community participation and mobilization schemes as well as tools that address the gap between the community and local government are particularly effective in multiethnic societies, such as Kosova and Macedonia. Indeed these countries are characterized by a large diversity of population, consisting of various ethnic and linguistic minority groups, and IDM considers the Community Liaison position and its innovative approach of community mobilization as extremely relevant to the above-mentioned context. Furthermore, due to emphasis on the relations between the Community Liaisons and the Police (in the frame of community policing activities) the Community Liaisons may well serve also to conflict reduction and improving law enforcement purposes, in addition to those related to good/participatory local governance.

On this purpose, IDM organized in Durres, on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2008 a Regional Round table aiming:

- promotion of best experiences and practices of community mobilization and community participation at the regional level (Kosova, Albania, Macedonia);



*and*

- raising of awareness among local actors and decision-makers in Kosova, Macedonia and Albania on the necessity and benefits of community participation schemes;

Furthermore this Round Table represented a regional initiative aiming at sharing IDM's best practices in the field of community participation and building participatory (local) governance through Community Liaisons and Community Based Groups. During the past years IDM has implemented various projects on this problematic and its experience has proved that community structures are essential for achieving sustainable impact in building participatory governance. Particularly the experience of Shkodra through community based groups and Durres through community liaisons, offers a sound model of how the community can interact with local government, bring citizens' concerns closer to local authorities and accordingly influence local decision making processes.

Present at the meeting were local government representatives from Albania, Macedonia and Kosova, representatives of the Albanian Association of Municipalities, civil society organizations from Macedonia, Kosova and Albania, involved in community participation and local governance matters, representatives of the donor community in Albania and the region and employing a regional approach.

The Round-table started with the presentation of IDM's up to now engagement in the Promotion of Participatory Local Governance and more concretely the role of Community Liaisons and Community Based Groups in the Local Democracy. Special interest was shown in the main towards the Community Liaison position, functions and concrete role. Many participants, especially representatives from local governance, expressed their will to know more on its functions and areas for improvement. One of the main discussed issues related to the Community Liaison was the selection criteria. As it is often the case, many of these positions appointment bear also a political connotation. Although the Community Liaisons are proposed by the community they are appointed by the Municipal Council which decision is not always based on merits or performance. As Shkodra existing experience of Community Liaisons shows, many of them are primarily representatives of the Mayor or specific political elite. In fact here stands also one of the main challenges to be addressed as far as functionality and efficiency of community liaisons is concerned. Many of the members of the round table reached to the conclusion that these Community Liaisons should be representatives of the community and be selected with its approval, to be after appointed by the municipal council.

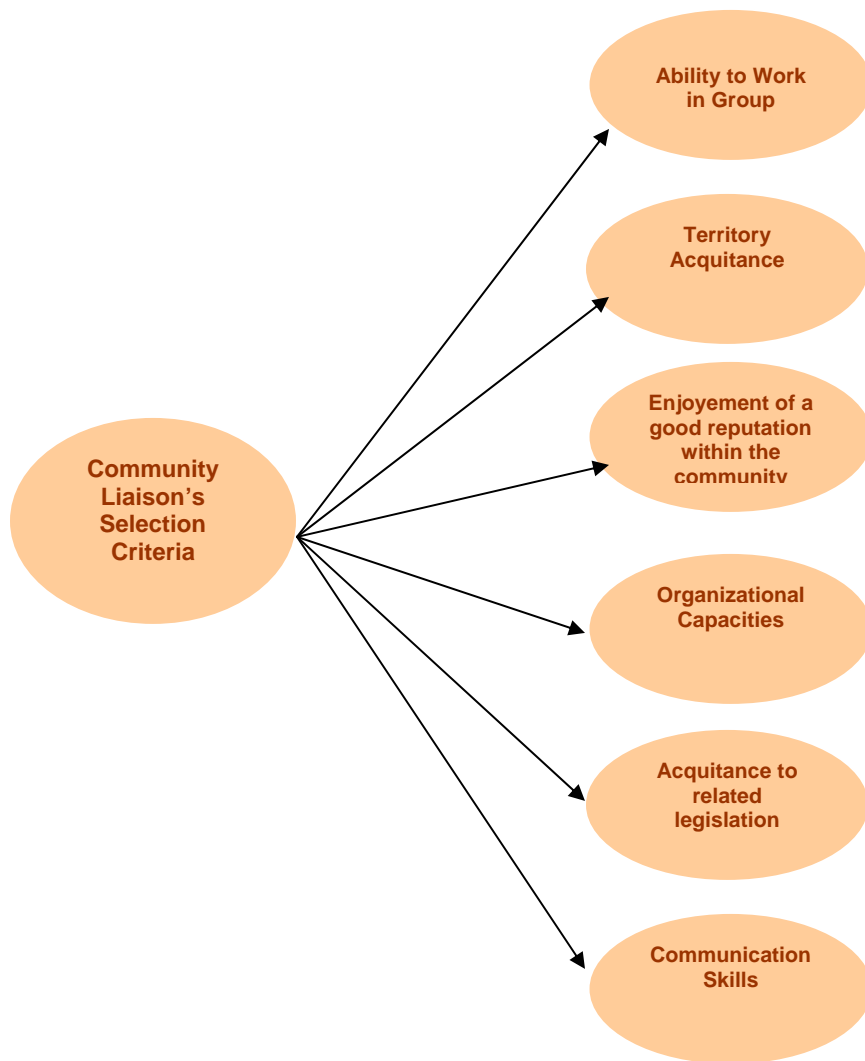


This has been the case of Durres for instance, where IDM for the first time and with the support of the Municipality of Durres promoted and integrated the position of the Community Liaison within the Municipality. Several meetings took place jointly with the community and local governance representatives. The direct result of these meetings was the proposal of the community liaisons by the community itself and appointment of 6 of them by Durres Municipal Council. IDM will follow now with their training and capacity building as far as their interaction with the community is concerned.



Another positive experience related to proposal, appointment and functionality of Community Liaisons comes from the practice of Municipal Unit No.10 in Tirana. Present in the Round Table discussions, the Head of this Unit. Mr. Gerdi Bogdani gave a presentation on the up to now performance of Community Liaisons and challenges to be addressed. From this Unit's practice the Community Liaisons are proposed by the community and appointed by the Head of the respective Municipal Unit. However

their current selection demonstrates that there is a fair balance as far as political representation is concerned. Indeed importance is not given to the liaison's political belongingness rather than to his/her reputation and personal capacity to interact with the community.



The extended discussion on Community Liaisons' performance and efficiency pint pointed also the challenges to be addressed and areas for improvement. As Mr. Denis Zavalani, Coordinator of Community Liaisons for Municipal Unit No.10 indicated, the number of Community Liaisons is very small compared to the areas and number of residents they have to cover through their daily work. In addition, there is a scarce infrastructure providing for the development of activities and organizing of public debates on various issues.



Moreover, Mrs. Entela Hysenllari, Head of the Coordination Office with Municipal Units and Citizens Commissions, in the Municipality

of Tirana, identified as a lack the operational capacities of the Community Liaisons and stated that Tirana Municipality expectations from IDM in this regard would be the capacity building and further training of the already operating Community Liaisons in Tirana. In fact, there are approximately 200 Community Liaisons engaged in community work in all Tirana Municipal Units. In the near future IDM in cooperation with the Municipality of Tirana and Municipal Units N. 10 and No. 1 will organize a joint workshop with Tirana's Community Liaisons' Coordinators with the aim to identify problems as well as reach to common sustainable solutions for a more efficient role of their position.

One of the round table main goals was also promotion of good practices related to community mobilization and community participation. To this purpose, Mrs. Voltana Ademi, former Deputy Mayor of the city of Shkodra and currently IDM coordinator for activities in this city gave a presentation on schemes of community mobilization through community based groups, mainly focusing on IDM's best practices in Shkodra.



In fact with the support of the existing Local Community Liaisons in Shkodra, IDM has promoted in this city its experience on community mobilization. In regions No. 2 and No. 3 of the city were set up and are now operating 5 Community Based Groups which have been more than active in the last 2 years in the city of Shkodra. These Community Based Groups have contributed not only to the

bringing closer the community concerns to the attention of local structures, but have also cooperated with these same structures for the realization of joint projects with the aim of community life improvement. A Memorandum of Understanding is already in place between the Municipality of Shkodra and the Community Based Groups by so developing a strong feeling of community self belongingness in these regions. In addition such cooperation has resulted in a positive practice which has



been recognized by the local structures themselves and is now expanding to the other regions of the city absorbing hence new partnerships with other law enforcement institutions. The functioning models of good governance through community based groups have raised the awareness of Shkodra Municipality to approve within its budget for 2008 a specific fund for the stimulation of civic participation in the community development through activities and community projects.

The best practices on Community Participation IDM attempted to share in this regional round table were particularly of interest for the Kosovo and Macedonian actors present in the meeting, who regarded this round table as an optimal opportunity to gain from Albanian practices of community participation.



In fact these countries are characterized by a large diversity of population, consisting of various ethnic and linguistic minority groups, therefore the Community Liaison position and its innovative approach of community mobilization could lay an extremely relevant role to the above-mentioned context. Furthermore, due to emphasis on the relations between the Community Liaisons and the Police, in the frame of community policing activities, the Community Liaisons may well serve also to conflict reduction and improving law enforcement purposes, in addition to those related to good/participatory local governance.

If we are to give a brief landscape of the Kosovo and Macedonian community mobilization experience, we would see that much remains to be done. In the case of Macedonia most of the Local Government Units do not have prepared/adopted documents for cooperation with civil sector and communication occurs mainly with the



initiative of Civil Society Organizations.<sup>3</sup> As for Kosovo, Mr. Ilir Tahiri, advisor to the Gjilan Commune, explained that there is a similar structure to the Community Liaison and Community Based Groups in Kosovo. These structures are called the Village Councils and before the war they were self-sufficient and self-appointed bodies with a consulting role. However cooperation with such councils was difficult due to political connotations and problems deriving from them. After the war

however, these councils have had an extended cooperation with many subjects, both public and private. Despite some existing forms of community mobilization, mainly deriving from the pre-war period in Kosovo, the mobilization schemes and structures in Kosovo remain unconsolidated and with too few competencies and capacities. In fact IDM, in cooperation with local government actors from Albania and Kosovo, will organize a visit in the Gjilan Commune and jointly with public actors and international donors will hold a workshop where concrete schemes for Kosovo Community Mobilization will be elaborated and brainstormed.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Durres Round Table represented a regional initiative aiming at sharing IDM's best practices in the field of community participation and building participatory (local) governance through Community Liaisons and Community Based Groups. During the past years IDM has implemented various projects on this problematique and its experience has proved that community structures are essential for achieving sustainable impact in building participatory governance. Particularly the experience of Shkodra through community based groups and Durres through community liaisons, offers a sound model of how the community can interact with local government, bring citizens' concerns closer

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<sup>3</sup> CPM Project "Practices of cooperation of civil society organizations with units of local government" Vesna Atanasova, Neda Milevska-Kostova, Bardyl Marku.l

to local authorities and accordingly influence local decision making processes. As also expected, representatives of local government structures, from both Albania and Kosovo, showed their highest interest in implementing these very practices in places where they are inexistent and consolidating them in places where some similar structures are already operating. It is within this frame and context that IDM considers its role as very dynamic and expertise-granting. Possessing both the theoretical perspective of these structures and their operation in the local democracy as well as the practical input IDM can offer based from its up to now experience in the field, the staff of IDM is now ready to fully cooperate with local government structures both in Albania and Kosovo both in its role as a coacher as well as long-term partner. Some concrete steps to be followed in this regard established by the Durres round table are:

- Organization of a comprehensive workshop in Tirana, in cooperation with the Association of Municipality Units of Tirana, together with senior representatives of Tirana Municipality for the identification of needs to upgrade the role of Community Liaisons in Tirana, capacity building/ best practices . Part of this workshop will be also international organizations interested and working on good and participatory governance in Albania.
- Organization of a workshop in Kosovo, Gjilan, with the participation of local government actors from Albania and Kosovo, as well as the donor community, with the aim to elaborate concrete schemes for Kosovo Community Mobilization and jointly approach the Donor Community for these schemes' concrete implementation.
- Local Governance stakeholders present in the round table expressed their willingness to be part of IDM's national efforts on informed media debates, best practice of participatory governance and especially the role of Community Liaison.
- All participants recognized and are willing to be part of IDM's endorsement of policy-making processes at the national and local level that would aim at an Albanian perspective of tri-party partnerships among government, civil society, and business sector in view of sharing responsibilities for better development programs and policies.
- IDM enjoys full support and cooperation of local governance structures to enhance awareness among local decision makers to approve acts that will lead to support and partnership development with civic groups as instrumental to improving transparency and governance, as well as design appropriate partnerships of civic groups with law enforcement institutions for enhancing proactive law enforcement through an inclusive grass-root approach.

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