Cooperation of CSOs across Ethnicity in Kosovo

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Supported By: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society

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AIM OF THE STUDY

It is increasingly recognized that civil society in Kosovo has an important role to play in conflict resolution by involving and educating on the grass roots level and granting legitimacy to top-level peace processes. A growing interest of not only international agencies but Kosovo government ministries as well to support peace has paved the way for an influx of funds to 'civil society', often to NGOs doing peace education and campaigning.

The CPT and its partners have identified the relationship between democracy and development – and the interplay between democracy and development assistance – as an issue of strategic importance for achieving sustainable democratic change in Kosovo. In particular it is important to highlight consistent approach of civil movement to particular issues affecting various communities without ethnical lenses on these issues. There is apparent lack of interaction and cooperation between Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian NGO’s on issues such as promoting universal rights and freedoms and advocating for issues affecting the life of other community. Consequently, there are either no visible to public advocacy actions of civil society organization when it comes to issues / problems that are only affecting “other” community. Given the recent outburst of differently presented views on the role of the ”other”, namely activities of K. Albanian organizations with regard to the Law on historical center of Prizren and meetings condemnation of excessive use of force against Vetvendosja’s protest and on the other hand activities of K. Serb organizations gathered in the Kosovo Policy Action Network, which had emphasized detrimental activities of Kosovo institutions towards minority communities, have resulted in an open manner confrontation which took place in several conferences.

So far, no Kosovo Serb organization has stood up when some incidents or violation of human rights of Albanian community have taken place and vice versus. This research aims at looking into the reasons for lack of cooperation between NGO’s and civil society organizations on these issues and based on its findings advise on crisis prevention policies and propose some of the measures to improve communication. The Research is intended as strategic planning, response, and policy tools for development and peace-building actors in Kosovo by deriving recommendations for preventative measures from trend analysis and monitoring of key sector indicators of fundamental conflict-causing factors through the lenses of inter-ethnic cooperation of civil society organizations throughout Kosovo.

This research aims at providing substantial insight on how to improve internal communication of Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian Non Governmental Organizations on issues pertaining to human rights, interethnic cooperation and issues affecting day to day life of both communities with the clear purpose to end a long history of distrust along ethnic lines. The research aims at providing sufficient arguments to initial baseline that civil society does not only need to be constructed, but also deconstructed, and the amorphous civil society concept analyzed critically in its local context. Such a deconstruction could reveal that civil society in Kosovo contains divides along ethnic and political lines, and is an arena where contradictory struggles are waged. Donor funding of pro-peace NGOs feeds into the conflict between pro-peace and hard-line groups and risks accentuating social conflicts. The report following is of central importance not only as a critique of past cooperation. Beyond that, it proposes new guidelines for dealing with the current conflict and the asymmetrical relations between the sides. The research points to the need for ongoing critical analysis of the process of cooperation in order to be both more effective and to serve the basic interests of both sides, and will also assist external supporters in keeping track of the results of their efforts.

The principal objective of the research is to conduct an analyze of cooperation between Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian civil society organizations on issues such as Human Rights, internal
cooperation... etc, and to provide major social and political stakeholders in the Donor’s community, including the Kosovo Government and its Ministries with a system to monitor the cooperation between civil society of these two ethnic groups, as opposed to an assortment of papers and reports covering diverging aspects of the post-conflict situation in Kosovo, in order to design a more systematically approach of Kosovo Government and its Ministries on integrative issues. Ultimately, the research aims to help leaders of civil society organizations to share and construct a vision of a common future through dialogue and policy research. Hopes of international donors that civil society will play a key role in establishing genuinely multi-ethnic society in Kosovo have been dampened by realities on the ground and the perpetuation of violence and ethnic intolerance. This mood does not prevent, however, the continuous quest for viable peace. In fact, hundreds of initiatives for dialogues, meetings and joint projects have taken place since the arrival of international community in Kosovo in 1999, as means of strengthening the peace process through the involvement of civil society organizations. While no in-depth evaluation of these activities – seems to have been conducted, many people in Kosovo and Serbia point to the general lack of impact on public opinion, lack of follow-up, insufficient or inexistent coordination, deficient methodologies, un-reconciled expectations in terms of outcomes, and participation generally limited to the ‘converted’. Desired outcome is not simply dialogue but also ‘internal dialogue’. The interest is to see what Albanians and Serbs take back to their own societies once they have shared a common understanding. In the resolution of many deep-rooted conflicts around the world, NGOs, and in particular women, and initiatives and organizations that they have created and carried on their shoulders, have played a key role in building the conditions essential for a peace-making environment, including developing alternative visions for the future. The cooperation assessment is reaching beyond generalized analysis and examining in a specific manner the past and potential contributions that NGOs can make in building peace in Kosovo and Serbia.

**COMPOSITION OF RESPONDENTS**

In the research phase, the project team had interviewed stakeholders, which have a high degree of influence on the cooperation between Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian civil society organizations on Human Rights issues and other issues covered by this research. These major stakeholders in Kosovo will need to construct good working relationships to ensure an effective coalition of support for the initiative aiming to improve communication between civil society organizations. In addition to key CSO’s, the project team had conducted over 50 interviews with beneficiaries of interethnic projects. Table below outlines breakdown of surveyed CSO’s. Quantitative information gathered through the field work has been further elaborated through focus groups, which were organized with leaders of key Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions of CSOs Surveyed</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some CSOs refused to participate in the study claiming ‘that they do not identify their organization on the ethnic basis.” One CSO in particular, kindly declined to answer the survey with the explanation that the ethnic component may be part of a project when it is necessary to categorize target groups by ethnicity, such as urban planning or cultural traditions, but they do not identify their organization as an “Albanian CSO” or ‘Turkish CSO’ or ‘Mixed Composition CSO’.
The representative of this organization stated that they are just a group of willing people with a certain mission. The representative was personally against “ethnicization of the civil society” and he believed that this is a damaging dimension for our society. According to him, it bothered him personally that the ethnic dimension has being pushed on by the international community in all spheres of political and social life in Kosovo.

**METHODOLOGY:**

The research was carried out in two stages. In the first stage two separate but parallel studies were undertaken: one was conducted by a team that was covering Kosovo Serb NGO’s, composed of CPT staff Mr. Mihajlo Dekic and Ms. Biljana Trajkovic, while the other was carried out by the subcontracted experts in the field of research Mr. Jetmir Bakija and Mr. Vamlir Ismaili, who have covered Kosovo Albanian NGO’s. In the second stage these two teams worked together, and on the basis of the two initial documents produced a third, joint report presenting their combined conclusions. In addition, two focus groups were organized at which the findings from the field work was discussed in a forum composed of representatives of various NGOs and researchers team: the proceedings of the focus groups including comments and contributions of the workshop participants on the subject, were summarized and included in the final document.

In the focus groups we gathered a number of interviews with central figures in various NGOs in order to informally gather their insights and impressionistic evaluations, thus thickening our data and getting a fuller picture. Seven Kosovo Serb and ten Kosovo Albanian organizations, representing different forms of action (institution building, advocacy, research, etc.) were chosen. Evaluations, though asserted by all interviewees to be an important investment, were very scarce and generally lacked characteristics which could make them of greater use to organizations in the field.

The challenge in writing a joint report was to integrate two separate perspectives into one comprehensive document of consensus. Since the emphasis was on reaching agreements regarding the necessary guidelines for cooperation and evaluation, the joint report may not reflect existing differences or divergences in approaches, assumptions and analyses, stemming from our different societal and organizational realities.

We would like to express our appreciation to all NGO representatives who participated in the work on this study and contributed to its conceptual formation, as well as immense support to compiling report by all members of project team, without their rigorous work this study would not have been completed. Finally, we would like to thank Kosovo Foundation for Open Society for supporting this research and publication.
Over the last decade in Kosovo, large number of organizations and civic initiatives have emerged. The civil society was enriched with organization created to achieve missions ranging from developing good governance, representing rights of a particular ethic minority to reconciliation and the rule of law. Donor funds have played a crucial role in building up many organizations and that is why so many organizations have been focused on the good governance. A large number were created just to implement one off activity and upon completion they have vanished. Enhancing competences of local governments and mainstreaming decentralization process has given rise to local CSOs (CSOs operating entirely in the local level and providing services along with the local governments).

Cooperation of CSOs of two main communities the Albanian CSOs and Serbian CSOs has been a challenging as the political developments during last decade, after 1999, have interfered in this cooperation.

One focus group participant overviewed the history after 1999, highlighting 2001 (the first central elections), 2004 (March Riots), 2008 (Declaration of Independence) and 2011 (barricades and Technical dialogue talks) when political situation had an effect in cooperation of CSOs across communities. There seems to be no general agreement in civil society if these events really had an effect since civil society makes an effort to reach above the daily politics and especially in during the time of uncertainty, more cooperation is need and quest for finding a common ground should be improved.

Albanian focus group participants noted that there have been several joint initiatives between NGOs in Kosovo with different ethnic background. Initiatives through joint coalitions such as RECOM (Regional Initiative for finding truth about events in Former Yugoslavia), Central Youth Council (Consisting of Local Youth Action Councils), Civil Dialogue (post-conflict consequences) and activities conducted by the Humanitarian Law Fund (documenting human rights violations being perpetrated during the war). There are also few multiethnic networks that operate in Kosovo such as: Democracy in Action, the local NGOs network of election monitoring which has two Serb organizations within its umbrella, the Human Right Radio Networks. However, these CSOs networks are affected by politics and are sometimes seen as imposed by donors rather than own initiative. On the other hand, no Kosovo Serb participant has identified interethnic initiative that is worth of mentioning.

The KPAN as a network of Serb CSOs in Kosovo is widely known by other communities but most participants were not able to explain what the network is doing and how they could cooperate with the KPAN on some activities. CSOs of the Albanian community have pointed out that in order to enhance cooperation across ethnic lines, information flow about activities should be improved. It was even suggested that networks should send their representatives to other networks to inform on their activities (ie. KPAN send a representative to Central Youth Council to inform them on their activities).

The composition of staff in these CSOs surveyed in the Albanian and in the Serb community speaks about their ability to reach out to each other for cooperation and joint efforts. Albanian CSOs have been able to recruit more staff from other communities over the years than the Serb CSOs. It has been reported that many Albanian CSOs have staff from communities other than Serbian (ie. Turkish, Bosnian and RAE communities) but it has been reported that very few or-
ganizations have staff from the Serbian community. These organizations were mostly concentrated in the Mitrovica region. Among the Serb CSOs surveyed across Kosovo, around 15% of them declared to have staff that is of another ethnicity. Much the same way, very few had in their staff someone from the Albanian community.

Even though some CSOs refuted being categorized by ethnicity, the Kosovo of post-1999 has been marked by ethnic divisions. Reconciliation and cooperation of the two main communities has been naturally an issue to be addressed by the governmental structures as well as by the civil society. Our research shows that more than half of the Serb CSOs have some component of their organization mission addressing multi-ethnicity whereas around 42% of the Albanian CSOs have included multi-ethnicity in their mission statement. Placing in practice this component of the mission, usually proves to be more challenging in reality. But the survey also shows that the majority of CSOs have cooperated with an organization of another community in their initiatives and also a large number of CSOs have implemented a project jointly with a CSO of another community. Results of survey shows that 79.4% of Kosovo Serb respondents stated that they have some type of cooperation with Kosovo Albanian organization compared to 67% of Kosovo Albanian organizations. Out of those who stated that they have some kind of cooperation with members of other ethnicity, results shows that 64.7% of Kosovo Serb organization have implemented joint projects with Kosovo Albanian organizations while 45.2% Kosovo Albanian organizations stated the same.
While among the Albanian CSOs, public institutions and NGOs seem to be the biggest beneficiaries (27%) followed by youth (25%) and minorities (17%), results of survey among the Serb CSOs, shows that youth is the main beneficiary (37%) followed by women (17%) and minorities (15%). People with disabilities are the group that benefits the least from the Serb CSOs (4%) while children, elderly and poor benefit very little from the Albanian CSOs (4%).

The fact that Albanian CSOs have a high percentage of public institutions as their biggest beneficiaries is a clear indicator that they are more ‘polititized’ in the sense that they are rather dealing with more political issues than the social ones. In the other hand, the low percentage of the public institutions as beneficiaries of the Serb CSOs indicates that Serbs in general have not been so much interested in the ‘big political issues’ in Kosovo, which they cannot influence, so they are rather choosing to deal with the youth and women.
Cross-ethnic cooperation of civil society varies in degree across regions. It is worth mentioning that in some regions of Kosovo, such as West Kosovo and parts of Central Kosovo, this cooperation is less visible given the fact that Serbian community constitute tiny minority in those areas. Thus, it is less likely that Albanian CSOs sought to reach out to the Serb community for an activity, which most of them have had local nature. Most of the interaction with Albanian communities for the Serb CSOs has occurred in Central Kosovo, particularly because most Serbian CSOs are concentrated in Gracanica/Gracanice. Nearly, half of the Serb CSOs (49%) that have had interactions with their Albanian counterparts have been in Central Kosovo, the majority of which in Gracanica/Gracanice municipality. NGOs from Gracanica/Gracanice were mentioned by Albanian counterparts as the most cooperative ones. They are also the ones that Albanian NGO’s are more familiar with and they are perceived as the most active among Kosovo Serb community. In addition to those, municipalities of Obilic/Obiliq and Kosovo Polje/Fushe Kosovo have a sizeable Serbian community and thus some CSOs that have had the chance to interact with CSOs of other communities.

In the northern part of Kosovo, which includes municipalities of Mitrovica/Kosovska Mitrovica, Leposavic/Leposaviq, Zvecan/Zveqan and Zubin Potok/Zubin Potoku about 15% of the Serb CSOs of that region declare to have had some type of cooperation on their organization’s activities with their Albanian counterparts. It must be stated that while it is considered that about 40% of the Serb community in Kosovo lives in the Northern Kosovo, the share of the Serb CSOs survey was slightly lower due. However, it can safely be stated that since the Serb CSOs in the northern municipalities do not have any Albanian CSOs in their municipalities, very few of them turn towards southern CSO’s for any cooperation, while their interaction with the CSOs of other communities is virtually non-existent. Much the same share of Albanian CSOs (17.4%) reported that they had interaction with Serb CSOs in North Kosovo. Opinions expressed in the focus group composed of Kosovo Serb participants stated that cooperation between Serbian and Albanian NGO’s in the north are forced and artificial and are inspired only for with the short term gains. About 37% of the Serb CSOs surveyed believe that the Central Kosovo is the region where cross-ethnic cooperation in civil society produces the most successful results. Albanian CSOs point out that the region with the best results is the Northern Kosovo. But probably more telling is that 70% of the Albanian CSOs and nearly 80% of the Serb CSOs did not pick North Kosovo as the region where joint efforts of CSOs have been most successful. The Eastern region where the newly cre-
ated Serb municipalities of Ranilug/Ranillug and Klokot/Kllokot are located is another region assessed as the cooperation of cross-ethnic civil society efforts had produced positive results. This is a region with an emerging Serb civil society sector and an Albanian civil society that has placed a greater emphasis on the inter-ethnic cooperation.

Some CSOs mentioned that they have good experience with NGOs from other communities, e.g. Bosnians in the Pec/Peja region. For example NGO “Oaza” from Vitomirica has been part of several campaigns such as “election monitoring campaign, as well as census populi. Due to the socio-political circumstances this cooperation is more vivid in the central part of Kosovo rather than in other parts, especially in the North where the cooperation practically is not possible.

It was acknowledged that while some issues are sensitive for cooperation particularly among Albanian and Serb CSOs, more courage is needed on both sides to rise above the daily politics. However, some participants mention issues and sectors that have little to do with politics but that there is a great gap in communication and cooperation of the civil society across ethnic lines.
In the quest for assessing the perception of cooperation among CSOs of Serbian and Albanian communities, we must put into context the development of civil society in Kosovo. We also would have to base our assessment in comparison to the level of cooperation at the turn of this millennium when great transitions occurred in the political sphere of Kosovo. At the end of this millennium, there wasn’t any type of cooperation of civil society partly due to its weakness and in many occasions, this cooperation was non-existent. Naturally, if we were to ask the CSOs of Serbian or Albanian communities about their perception of civil society cooperation across the ethnic lines, the general findings would have been that this cooperation is non-existent or not-so-good, at best. From the time of arrival of international community in Kosovo seemed, at the time, to be the dawn of a new era. New NGOs were founded, and people-to-people projects, think-tank activities, and various Albanian – Serb cooperation projects were funded generously by the donor community, which had symbolized a transformation in the conflict and sought to accelerate the process. Some would say a “peace industry” had developed. The outbreak of violence erupted in March 2004, involving mainly young people brought many of these activities to an abrupt halt and left many disappointed minority NGO activist in the joint activities. At the same time, the overall political and social discourse has diverged into importance of urgent resolution of Kosovo status while disregarding interethnic reconciliation efforts.

A common reaction to the changing situation—the difficulties in cooperation that March events, the breakdown of trust between the sides, and the opposition to cooperative work—was the increase in unilateral activities, or activities conducted in parallel in each society rather than as a joint cooperative activities.

Now, we are at a stage when a few years have passed and the non-governmental sector has somewhat developed to a point that CSO’s should have been able to reach out to other communities for joint activities. Sometimes this was pressured slightly by donor organizations, but in terms of to
what extent this element played will be further analyzed. Today, most NGOs and the beneficiaries of the activities carried out by these NGOs believed that the level of cooperation among NGOs of different ethnic backgrounds is not very good, or not very bad but somewhere in the middle. The share of NGOs and beneficiaries that perceive this middle ground of cooperation is roughly the same for both Serbian and the Albanian communities, ranging from 35-40% of those surveyed. More telling is the perception of those NGOs and beneficiaries that believe that this cooperation is not so good or is non-existent. Nearly 30% of the beneficiaries of activities by Serb NGOs think that cooperation at the civil society level is not-so-good or non-existent, of them one-in-ten think that it is non-existent. Among Albanian beneficiaries, one-in-three believe that the cooperation is not so good at the civil society level. Serb NGOs do not differ much from their beneficiaries but Albanian NGOs are a lot more optimistic than their beneficiaries. Opinions expressed in the focus group composed of Kosovo Serb participants stated that level of cooperation is higher between Serbian and other non-majority organizations then between Serb and Albanian NGO’s. Concerning Kosovo Serb NGOs, while there is no uniform position with respect to cooperation with Albanian NGOs, the following needs and interests are expressed: a basic consensus on the key issues needs to be achieved through internal dialogue within Kosovo Serb society, and efforts need to be made to strengthen institutional capacities of Kosovo Serb NGOs. These NGOs consider the media as a powerful means of reaching out to public opinion; however they disconnection between NGO’s activities and the most visible media outlets. Additionally, fact that Serbia based media, which is the most followed by the Kosovo Serb community, does not give any importance to Kosovo Serb civil society which hampers visibility of the NGO’s work. And for genuine dialogue to take place between Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian NGO’s a strong fundamentals in both structures is required. The essential question today is how to make dialogue meaningful between two unequal societies. Here again, the importance of having internal dialogue within Kosovo Serb society is repeatedly emphasized. The weak coordination amongst Kosovo Serb NGOs is often pointed out as a principle reason for their feeble impact. Many of them say that the work of NGOs must remain free from any pressure, both internal and external. This applies particularly to pressure from political structures. Almost all Kosovo Serb NGO’s agree that channels for dialogue should be maintained to start with internal dialogue, in order to address and influence domestic public opinion. Each party needs to build ‘trust’ within its own society before directly interacting with the other. It also appears that many, although not all, NGOs have been involved in cooperative dialogue projects. The need for an evaluation of the mechanisms was thus stated repeatedly during missions and meetings: what impact have these dialogues had, especially on public opinion? Have they influenced policy-making? What type of follow-up has been implemented? Have expectations been met? Has the influence of the donors been too overwhelming? Any major re-launch of the mechanism
and projects would greatly benefit from an examination of lessons learned in order to propose a more scientific framework for future dialogue and joint projects.

It has been reiterated throughout discussions and exchanges with both Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians that the dialogues need to move from individuals (the ‘converted’) and politicians to wider societal groups, from those at the ‘margin of public opinion’ to ‘mainstream’ organizations. However those involved in communication and joint action should be further encouraged to persist, while adopting methodologies aimed at reaching out to public opinion in a more systematic way.
In reviewing the general level of cooperation among the civil society it is important to know sectors where CSOs have been engaged during their cooperation. While the issues that preoccupy the Serbian and Albanian community in Kosovo differ, the socio-economic situation is quite similar. However, the involvement in political issues and engaging institutions is much higher among Albanian civil society as in the Serbian civil society. Albanian CSOs were much more involved in cooperation for issues that dealt with democratization and the rule of law (14%) than the Serb CSOs (only 3%).

The field where Serb CSOs had cooperated mostly with other CSOs is youth issues, nearly 30% of them. Among Albanian CSOs, volunteering and environment was the field where the greatest cooperation with other CSOs seems to have taken place (around one-in-five). A considerable amount of Serb CSOs have tackled social issues in their cooperation, around 18% of the Serb CSOs surveyed had joint activities in tackling these issues. Social issues in many cases coincide with youth issues but primarily the joint activities by the CSOs were categorized as social issues.

Reconciliation and refugees, a sector where the two communities intersect, resulted as the sector in which 10% of the Serbian CSOs worked in cooperation with other CSOs, whereas 14% of the Albanian CSOs carried out some type of cooperation in this sector. Joint initiatives in reconciliation and refugees are alarmingly at a low level since Kosovo has been recovering from a harsh conflict and there is substantially large number of displaced people from Kosovo. This is one indication that the civil society of the two communities has not reached out as well as it should have on sectors where their concerns intersect.
In reviewing the level of cooperation of civil society across ethnic lines in Kosovo, it is important to review the type of cooperation that has occurred among them and the channels that they have used. Cooperation through holding a joint conference is a less effective and sustainable as cooperation in a joint action at a local community or joint lobbying for an issue. Generally, the civil society mostly cooperated in more ad-hoc initiatives such as conferences or trainings but less cooperation is encountered in more long-term partnerships in the form of formal networks and even lesser in professional services or research.

Most of the joint activities where in organizing joint conferences (25%), organizing trainings (14.5%) organizing various actions in the local community (14%). Monitoring of laws, joint advocacy activities and media campaigns are the type of activities that require more substantive cooperation, persistent contacts and generate wider publicity, which is important in the perception of the stakeholders from both communities. But roughly one-in-ten CSOs have had some type of cooperation in the three categories. It is evident that to improve cooperation and perception of stakeholders these areas are where more cooperation should be sought. When considering CSO networks, some of the organizations participating in this survey have provided examples of networks that include all ethnic communities coming from all countries of former Yugoslavia.
Motivation for Cooperation

The tensions between the communities of Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo have been tense over the last decade and certain events have exacerbated the efforts of reconciliation. This has made it hard for the civil society across these two communities to work on joint initiatives and at times strained the relations that had been building. Thus, it is interesting to know the perception of the CSOs on what has motivated them on the cooperation that they have had with each other. Shared goals of an objective seem to be motivation for CSOs on both sides to have joined forces in cooperation. This is usually referring to an objective for reconciliation of the two communities or a project working with youth or women on shared causes. It is obvious that the level of cooperation is higher among organizations that are dealing with rights of marginalized groups rather than organizations that are dealing with political issues. A good example is the cooperation among the Albanian and Serb Blind Associations. These NGOs though differ in their ethnic background they have something in common, they defend rights of the people with the same disabilities; they have a joint cause.

Outreach to other communities is reason for cooperation for the next big group of Albanian CSOs. This is understandable because the Serbian community is less integrated in the wider Kosovo society, which has pushed more than 25% of the Albanian CSOs consulted to reach out to Serb CSOs in order to involve the Serb community in their activities.

Donor requests and better fundraising methods combined result as the motivation for most Serbian CSOs, nearly 34% of the CSOs. This in fact is very much an issue for motivating the CSOs to reach across the CSO of a different community because civil society in Kosovo is nearly entirely dependent on the foreign aid, which has pushed for a multi ethnic Kosovo. In a more informal conversion, it is clear that donor requests and better prospects for attracting funds are more motivating Albanian CSOs than they formally admit. In elaborating the reasons for the cooperation, however little, some Albanian CSOs declared that in most of the cases funds are the only reason for this type of cooperation. In some calls for application, the cooperation between organizations between NGOs with different ethnic background is a must and in some cases the likelihood that the project will be approved when cooperation is in place are higher, hence this is an incentive for organizations to cooperate with each other. Therefore in most of the cases fundamental for cooperation are funds.

A good example is the cooperation among the Albanian and Serb Blind Associations.
One of the more sincere CSO representatives declared that they invited Serb CSOs in their events only when they needed them to make a tick to the donors that Serbian community was present in their activities. Opinions expressed in the focus group composed of Kosovo Serb participant, overwhelmingly stated that Albanian CSOs are rather serving the “national cause” then universal values such as equal application of rule of law for everyone. In their opinion, the international donors have contributed to such state of cooperation as they have provided support mainly to Albanian NGO’s at the beginning, which had created dis-balance of state of development between K. Serb and K. Albanian NGO’s.

In many cases, we have invited Serb participants in our events only to make a tick when reporting to the donor.
Circumstances do play a role in the cooperation. Big events, such as declaration of independence, the so called reciprocity measures, etc., had an impact to diminish cooperation not only between NGOs but in general between these two communities. Apart from that, there are other more consistent barriers. Language is mentioned as one of the main barriers toward a more substantive cooperation. However, there are some disagreements over the language barriers since the English language is widely used in cases when Albanian or Serbian is not spoken.

Another barrier that mainly derives from the first one is the lack of communication. Albanians and Serbs do not communicate with each other and as a result of distrust and ethnic distance, which in turn make cooperation more difficult. Findings show that the lack of information about the other organization is one of the main barriers for cooperation and this naturally comes from the lack of communication between the two groups. Generally, the civil society agrees that there is no knowledge about how to start this type of cooperation. Initially, after 1999, it was difficult since the interests between the two communities were different. The Albanians claim that there is no internal dialogue among the Serb NGOs.

The pressure from Belgrade to the local Serb population, which is not shown in the graph but came up in almost all the consultative meetings, is perceived as one of the barriers for the Albanian CSOs.

Albanians CSOs claim that there is not enough information and understandings on what Serbs want. Lack of freedom of movement is mentioned as another reason for the lack of cooperation. While Serbs still do not have full freedom of movement in south of Ibar/Iber, Albanians do not have it in the north of Ibar/Iber. Opinions expressed in the focus group composed of Kosovo Serb participants stated that Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian NGO representative have diametrically opposite views on the current social and political developments in Kosovo, which
negatively influence state of cooperation. According to several K. Serb participants in the focus groups, issues of importance for Kosovo Serbs such as human and minority rights, rule of law... etc are completely out of agenda of Albanian NGO’s. In opinion of K. Serb participants, Albanian NGO’s are focused only on internal development issues such as governance, EU integration processes, corruption and enhancing wider participation in the decision making.

Another issue raised by an Albanian CSO is that the University of Pristina/Prishtina does not offer lectures in the Serbian language, which prohibits further the communication between the Albanians and Serbs. Albanians also think that Serbs do not feel as part of today’s Kosovo.

Asymmetry—different realities, different agendas

One of the basic difficulties or gaps concerns the asymmetry of the current situation. The two sides face very different realities, and view the goals and value of cooperation differently. While the expectations of Albanians from highly developed organizations are focused on the development of Kosovo institutions the expectations of Kosovo Serbs are related to the political level, towards changing their unacceptable socio-political reality.

An additional point made by many Serbian NGO representatives concerned inequality of resources (such as trained human resources and equipment) between the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb organizations. “Kosovo Albanian organizations have received much more support from international donors throughout the period of time thus they are better developed and have more capacity. Therefore, in the cooperation activities their position always prevailed over that of the Kosovo Serbs.” A second aspect of asymmetry that emerged from the research concerns differences in agenda assigned to the project in general. Whereas the Kosovo Albanians views cooperation with Kosovo Serbs as important to present the multi-ethnic character of Kosovo and as donor’s requirement (viewing the specific project as a means to that end), the Kosovo Serbs were interested mainly in advancing their internal organizational or societal issues (in terms of the project’s possible benefits for developing or strengthening a organization or improving life conditions for its constituencies).

This discrepancy in agenda was once again attributed to the asymmetry of the social and political contexts in which Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanians operate, which generates different concerns in the two societies.

The abovementioned evaluation described the asymmetry between the groups with regard to both the political and intellectual levels, causing frustration on Kosovo Serb side. Kosovo Serb NGO members emphasized the political asymmetry as a point of departure for any discussion and possible action, expecting the Kosovo Albanians to admit this asymmetry and act accordingly, and they were frustrated with the other side’s indifference to, or denial of this situation.

There are different modules for dealing with the asymmetry; one of them is a paternalistic approach of helping out the weaker side. This involves taking control of the situation and assisting to the best of one’s ability and resources. To a certain extent this mechanism mirrors the external reality of development between K. Serb as the weaker partner and Kosovo Albanian organizations as stronger partner. This approach has been historically used and lately is being rejected by Kosovo Serb organizations as module that achieved results. One of NGO director said “We are not going to be puppets anymore; bare decoration that serves to Albanian NGO’s to imitate multi-ethnicity”.

Equal management and parity in all is another generally adopted coping mechanism. Budget management, decision-making, and so on are all done in unison by both partners. This module has not been practice so far due to unequal state of development of NGO’s and lack of such requirement by donor’s community.
A third mechanism is empowerment of the weaker side, encouraging them to take the lead so as to enable capacity building. Attempts at empowerment require acknowledgment of the lack of symmetry and attempting to amend the situation and enhance parity. This module is more favourable by Kosovo Serb organizations. However, one of the mechanisms that seem to be acceptable for all parties is continuous communication, consultation, and joint decision-making. It was recommended that an open, all-encompassing communication process be established as the working frame, from the onset of the project, thus making it possible to raise questions, cope with challenges, and evaluate and re-evaluate both the project goals and the actual cooperation process. Only projects in which the two sides constantly meet, discuss problems together, try and understand things together, and it isn’t a case of one side promoting suggestions and the other reacting, only then can cooperation be successful.
Factors to improve cooperation among CSO’s

Though there is cooperation among CSO’s of Serb and Albanian communities there is room for greater improvement and there are certain factors that could contribute towards achieving this. Therefore, CSO’s believe that the main priority should be given to sharing information (approximately 25% for both Albanians and Serbs) among them in order to enhance the cooperation, since by knowing each other’s activities, initiatives and interest common issues could come up.

This is followed by both Albanians and Serbs seeing the identification of joint causes as an important incentive to improve cooperation while slightly different results are seen when talking about engagement of media with more than 10% of Serbs seeing this factor as contributing to greater cooperation compared to less than 5% of Albanian respondents. Assessment of progress in cooperation is being viewed differently among members of two groups. Albanian respondents have viewed more positive progress among CSO’s thus 80% of respondents viewed cooperation between CSO’s improving and the Albanian stakeholders share similar optimistic view. On the other hand, Serbian CSO’s and stakeholders have more reserved standpoint with regard to the progress of cooperation thus 41.2% of respondent sees a progress in cooperation among CSO’s improving. The stakeholder’s group is even more reserved thus 31.5% of respondents stated that there is a progress in cooperation. Reluctance of Kosovo Serb CSO’s is understandable if these figures are compared with attitude of Kosovo Serbs when they are viewed current state of development in Kosovo.

Donor-organization relationships

Many organizations and some evaluation reports made remarks about the donor-driven agendas. Donors’ decisions have great influence on the field of action chosen by organizations but do not necessarily reflect needs on the ground. Another issue here is the difficulty of long-term planning. A few organizations mentioned the difficulty in providing a long-term plan given that the donors change their focus every few years. One interviewee confessed: “One could say there is no order in our work. I do not have a five-year plan. What we do is a result of needs, opportunities that come along, our understanding of the appropriate strategy, and sometimes in response to donors’ stated agenda.”
Another NGO interviewee voiced criticism of the donor community: “The donors are not coordinated enough. They decide every couple of years to put their effort into an area that is considered to be of acute importance; they are not united in their funding efforts.... They should not spread the money among numerous projects that have no cumulative impact, but rather decide jointly on an investment.”

DEALING WITH ASYMMETRY

The first step in dealing with the inevitable asymmetry is “being aware of it and addressing this issue as an issue that should be dealt with. More strategic attempts should be made towards empowerment of the Kosovo Serb NGOs. Some participants suggested that unilateral or parallel activities within the respective societies rather than full joint cooperation are the appropriate solution to the problem of asymmetry and inequality of power between Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian NGO's.

Promoting intra-communal dialogue

Few participants suggested that to promote cooperation between the sides in the current context of deep mistrust, it is necessary first to promote dialogue within each society and across the whole spectrum of social actors, including those marginalized in previous similar processes. Lack of critical thinking even within the civil society should be recognized and addressed as such. Although majority of NGOs stress commonalities, cooperation, and symmetrical visions of the future for all ethnic groups in Kosovo, nevertheless these organizations are more attuned to the current injustices and asymmetry in power relations. Failure in attempts to relate to the grievances, and acting together with the “other” against injustice, are one way of responding to the Kosovo Serb's criticism regarding the use of a political agenda and a lack of self-critical perspective among their Kosovo Albanian counterparts.

Providing that both sides face the criticism of their own societies regarding cooperation with the “enemy” and lack of patriotism and that the perception on both sides is that cooperation across the ethnic lines is unpatriotic demands proper rhetoric that could be listened by the mainstream societies. In this sense it may be recommended that NGO's that are cooperating with each other present themselves to their own societies as defenders of their national interests while at the same time stressing that these national interests should not contradict international civil human values. These NGO's may need to work within this tension – between particularism and universalism – in a creative manner, such as addressing their respective communities’ particularistic issues, while working to transform their opinions in a universalistic humanistic direction. In this sense, cooperation projects should be built on a vision of change; otherwise they risk resembling business projects promoting adaptation to current realities instead of working to change them.

Divisive percentages between Albanians and Serbs are also encountered with how these groups see familiarizing the citizens with the significance of the CSOs cooperation as a factor to aug-
menting inter-ethnic cooperation where Serb CSOs see this factor as a very important one while very few CSOs of the Albanian community gave importance to it. On the other hand, Albanian CSOs see networking and direct communication with citizens as important factor to improved cooperation a lot more than Serb CSOs.

Most importantly, this survey shows that even with different views on how various factors could contribute to increasing and making the cooperation between CSOs better, the respondents have the necessary good will and are considering ways on how to better engage with each other and with the communities they work in or they belong to.

Room for Improvement
Interest of two clusters of CSO’s segregated by the ethnical affiliation varies substantially. Comparable to Albanian CSO’s that have expressed interest in enhancing cooperation with the Serbian CSO’s Serbian CSO’s have exhibited considerably high level of skepticism. Figures show that out of 85 respondents, 17 stated that they are discouraged from future cooperation with Kosovo Albanians, 21 stated that they might not cooperate as much. More than one third of respondents demonstrated interest in keeping the same level of cooperation while only 17 stated that they are interested in working closer with their Albanian counterpart. Reluctance among Kosovo Serbian respondents can be supported by the focus group results among Kosovo Serb CSO’s “opinions expressed in the focus group composed of Kosovo Serb participant, overwhelmingly stated that Albanian CSO’s are rather serving the “national cause” then universal values such as equal application of rule of law for everyone”. This underlining fear among Kosovo Serb CSO’s that they could be “abused” if they cooperate with Albanian CSO’s and that the Serbian community shall face detrimental effect if the cooperation will improve need to be deconstructed by showing positive examples of cooperation of two equal sides. On the other hand, the Kosovo Albanian CSO’s should show interest in issues that the Serbian community is facing in nowadays Kosovo.

When it comes to interest to cooperate with Kosovo Serb CSO’s, results of the survey among Kosovo Albanians shows much higher interest in improving cooperation with the Serbian counterparts. Thus, 32 out of 54 respondents stated that they are interested in working closer with Serbian CSO’s, 17 respondents stated that they would like to keep the same level of cooperation while only 5 respondents stated that they are either interested in reducing current level of cooperation or they are discouraged from future cooperation. Comparable higher figures of interested in improving cooperation with Kosovo Serb CSO’s can be seen in the light of emerging strengthening of minority NGO sector and appearance on the strong network such as KPAN on the NGO horizon and interest of Albanian CSO’s in EU accession, which cannot happen without improving living conditions of minorities in Kosovo.
All CSO’s of both Albanian and Serb communities must address some challenges that are encountered in Kosovo that in most cases are common issues. It is interesting to note that Human Rights is the main challenge for both groups of CSO. More than one-in-three among Albanian CSOs and Albanian stakeholder identify this as the main challenge. Where as one-in-five Serb CSOs and one-in-seven Serb stakeholders identify human rights as the main challenge.

Protection of minority rights surprisingly shows a considerable discrepancy between the Albanian CSO and their stakeholders. The Albanian CSOs believe that it is quite easy to address this issue where as Albanian stakeholders, around 12.5%, see protection of human rights as a challenging area for Albanian civil society to tackle. Minority rights seem to be the greatest challenge for the Serb stakeholders (18%) compared to any other challenge they face, followed by socio-economic development (12.4%), legislation/advocacy/public policy and rule of law (9.5% each) etc.

Bearing in mind that there is still a great need for communities in Kosovo to cooperate and work towards better understanding and cooperation, and this is mostly expected by the Albanian community as a majority in Kosovo, the survey shows interesting results when talking about building peace in Kosovo that would contribute towards an increased cooperation. In this regard, the field of peace building, reconciliation and dealing with the past also shows unexpected results as it seems not to be considered at all as a challenge either by Albanian CSO’s or stakeholders while for the Serb CSOs it is seen as an issue that needs to be addressed by 6.3% meanwhile 8.8% of the Serb stakeholders see the process of reconciliation and dealing with the past as a challenge.
Our first general recommendation is to consider structural, political-social and cultural context in the design and implementation of cooperation programs. Acknowledgement of the different social-political structures, interest and agendas at the outset is useful both for understanding the different needs of each society and for structuring the project accordingly. Projects that disregard the different contexts, or assume equality in context on the two sides, will soon encounter difficulties due to varying expectations based on differentiated needs assessment and goals.

Agreement on some of the political problems by politicians will increase the level of cooperation between the NGOs with different background. Civil society actions should be depoliticized to increase the cooperation of this sector among the two ethnic groups (participants mentioned reactions of KPAN which are perceived as merely political). Direct meetings and communications between youth from two communities are seen as crucial in this regard.

Kosovo Albanian CSO’s suggested that the new reality should be accepted by both communities. Fields of human rights, civil society development, gender issues, youth, culture (especially theater) are seen as the most appropriate fields for cooperation. Cooperation in the local level is seen as more doable since the more sensitive national politics will not be faced as much. Several organizations stated that cooperation between organizations was usually enhanced when the topic chosen addressed a common interest. Evaluations of several projects suggest that research and projects addressing regional needs may promote cooperation and enhance support of officials, therefore gaining support necessary for conducting the project. The term “the usual suspects” was used many times, by organizations and participants of projects. It seems that not enough effort is invested in recruiting other players thus this area is an issue that should be addressed in the work of NGO’s from both communities. Organizations should focus its work in a wider community circle rather than reaching those who are easiest. Legitimacy from its constituency is a central asset to the work of any organization, and to cooperation. In particular Kosovo Serb NGO’s are facing lack of support or legitimacy that can inhibit its impact on the wider society due to conflicting stances of donors/Albanians and reality in the fiend. For instance, in education work, this legitimacy may be gained by working through an institution (e.g., the Kosovo Ministry of Education), which actually have no legitimate authority in Kosovo Serb inhabited municipality, which consequently hinders any activity in education sector. Majority of international donors do not recognize Serbian educational system in Kosovo and do not support any cooperation with the only educational institution that functions in Serbian populated municipalities. Overcoming this issue shall open door for cooperation both across the ethnic groups and it will bridge institutional gap. Organizations face a challenge in gaining legitimacy when they promote an oppositional or critical perspective towards mainstream political and social dogmas. Therefore, critical thinking should be supported and NGO’s that are on the forefront of alternative thinking should be sheltered from political and societal pressure. Individuals and organizations from both sides, who will be working on breaking social and political taboos, should gain proper media attention.
Many interviewed people indicated that trust building between organizations was an essential initial stage in the cooperation process. It may be worth addressing this topic in the initial stages of design rather than letting it develop naturally during the implementation process. Quite often, organizations assume that cooperation requires no investment. They go straight to the project subject matter. The first thing is to build a relationship and to prepare and teach people working in NGO’s skills necessary to talk across the divide.

One of the problems mentioned regarding the work of NGOs is the lack of structural knowledge that remains within organizations. The knowledge tends to exist within people and organizations but not in a format that can be passed on from one to another or that can assist a process of professionalization in this field. Therefore, both organizations and donors should integrate in its working plans strategy for supporting institutional strengthening of individual NGO’s, in particular Kosovo Serb NGO’s that have potential to grow and adapt into changing social and political environment. Several participants noted that many organizations lack long-term strategic planning. This may be the result of numerous factors, including: a constantly changing reality that demands continual adjustment; funding that is generally given to support short, limited rather than long-term projects; difficulty in focusing and defining goals and suitable strategies. Only several organizations are exempt from this and they are all managed by Kosovo Albanians.

Efforts should be made to support Kosovo Serb organizations to receive institutional funding. There is a clear need for Kosovo Serb think tank that will in social researches reflect standpoints and interest of its constituencies. Providing that most cooperation efforts are based on equal use of resources and equal shares, this fifty-fifty model does not take asymmetry into account. Since, Kosovo Serb organizations are generally the weaker partner; there should be extra investment in the Kosovo Serb side by capacity building, training, mentoring, and so forth. Creating symmetry requires empowering the weaker partner, for which the fifty-fifty model is not suitable. New model for facilitating partnership between K. Serb and K. Albanian organizations should be created not only to support implementation of projects but also to serve as a tool for lasting development of weaker partners.