

**Speech by Mahir Yağcılar, Representative of the Turkish Community  
of Kosovo, for the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,  
Working Session 1 on National Minorities, 24 September 2007**

His Excellency the High Commissioner,  
Esteemed Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin my words by expressing my great pleasure for having the opportunity to address to such a distinguished audience while thanking to organizers.

In my brief speech, I will touch upon the issues related to the Turkish community in Kosovo.

Turkish Community of Kosovo constitutes one of the traditional minorities in this region that has endured for decades with its own language, education and culture. Mostly an urban group, Turks make up 1 to 2 percent of the 2.3 million strong Kosovar population.

Turkish language gained its official status in 1951 and, with the 1974 Constitution, the official use of the Turkish language was further broadened. However, in the first year of the UNMIK Administration this official status was not recognized. Turkish community showed its reaction by not making civil registration and not attending municipal elections. Upon the continuation of protests during the preparation process of the Framework Constitution, the official status of the Turkish language was returned to a limited extent through the legislation adopted by the Kosova Parliament. Following the enacting of the Law on Languages, Turkish language was accepted as official language in Prizren Municipality without any condition. The law also foresaw the status of “language in official use” for Turkish in municipalities where it is traditionally spoken. Furthermore, according to the Law on Identity Documents, Kosovo identity documents may include Turkish language, besides other languages of official status. At the central government level, Turkish members of parliament frequently use their right to speak Turkish and submit and demand documents in Turkish. Moreover, the Official Gazette has an edition in Turkish.

Education in Turkish language also restarted in 1951. Today, there is education in Turkish from kindergarten to high school level. Besides there are two departments in the University of Prishtina in Turkish language. We can say that these issues are well regulated under the set of laws adopted by the Kosovo Parliament. But we should admit that we face some difficulties in finding enough pupils to form new classes at the cities where the Turkish population is reduced. Situation gets worse when the problems related to the lack of adequate number of teachers, dismal classroom conditions and the failure in the provision of the required books are taken into consideration. We believe, with the traditional role it plays and the positive contribution it puts into the cultural life of Kosovo, the education in Turkish language more than deserves a special attention and support.

Turkish community has numerous associations which have an important place in the preservation of the Turkish tradition and customs. Unfortunately, enough effort is not shown to support these associations which continue their work despite scarcities.

Failure in the protection of the Ottoman Turkish cultural heritage, which we see as the common heritage of all the Kosovars is deplorable. We find the recent attack on the Bayraktar Turbe in Prishtina, where historical tombs were destroyed as a most appalling act of vandalism, and a direct attack on the idea of Kosovo as a tolerant and multi-ethnic society. The negative perspective about the Ottoman period presented in the history textbooks in education should also be mentioned.

Turkish Community is represented in Kosovo Parliament with two set aside seats and one seat won by votes. The joint parliamentary group we have together with the Bosniac Community is represented in the government as coalition partner by the Minister of Health, the Deputy Minister of Justice and the Deputy Minister of Culture. The Turkish Community is also a coalition partner in the Municipality of Prizren with albanian party LDK.

Still the Turkish Community is quite far from what could be achieved vis-a-vis the position of its members in the Kosovar society. The asymmetrically high ratios of unemployment among Kosovar Turks is a prime indicator. If one element leading to this result is the insufficient knowledge of the Albanian language. We are willing to work together with the authorities to strengthen the knowledge of the Albanian language our

youth gets, but it must be clear to all that we will never accept a trade off with the education in Turkish language.

Even the Proposal of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General Martti Ahtisaari, which we support in principle as non-Serbian communities of Kosovo, hardly meets our needs and expectations. Non-Serbian minorities could take part in the status process to a very limited level and mostly indirectly.

We expect the OSCE Mission in Kosovo to continue its engagement to enhance the role minority communities play in Kosovo. Institutional endorsement for the pilot municipalities like “Mamuşa” will be crucial in the period ahead.

We need more support from the international community. We see the priority areas as;

- adoption of common strategies for the support of minority communities,
- positions in administration set aside for minority representation,
- material and financial support for the education in minority languages with a special emphasis on the provision of adequate books,
- support for the founding of cultural and youth centers that can also be used by the minority associations,
- founding of language centers for minority communities,
- provision of minority community rights in the future Constitution of Kosovo,
- implementation of Laws concerning minority communities in full,
- support for the minority community media.

I would like to conclude my speech by stating that we as the Kosovar Turks, are looking forward to the future status of Kosovo, defined by the Ahtisaari plan as supervised independence. And despite all the shortcomings, we are willing to exert every effort to improve the social, economical and political status of the Kosovar Turks in that future.

Thank you very much.