



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**  
**MISSION IN KOSOVO**

**Remarks of Ambassador Werner Wnendt,  
Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo,**

**At the Roundtable on Decentralization**

**Prishtinë / Priština, 20 June 2007**

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*This roundtable was organized by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and co-sponsored by the PISG Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM). It aimed to raise the key issues and awareness on what decentralization actually entails.*

Dear Guests,

This conference comes at the right time and deals with one of the key issues for the future of Kosovo.

As many of you well know, the OSCE has, for a number of years now, actively supported the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions, responsive to the needs of all of Kosovo's communities. Much of our work in this regard has been directed at strengthening local government and bringing it closer to those it serves.

In fact, these two elements constitute the most basic definition of decentralization. However, better services readily available to citizens are seldom associated with decentralization in public discourse in Kosovo. Rather, the process itself is often perceived solely as a political tool to establish and safeguard autonomy for non-majority communities.

This, however, is only part of the picture.

The driving idea behind decentralization in Kosovo is twofold: to protect the rights of local communities against infringement by the central government; and to improve overall government performance in terms of its effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability. This is not always clearly articulated or understood, but it is the standard to which the success of decentralization in Kosovo will be measured. Efforts of stakeholders must, therefore, be directed and co-ordinated accordingly.

We are likely to face a series of challenges as we continue along the path of strengthening local government. I will mention six of these challenges.

The first challenge is to maintain sufficient political will throughout the process – particularly, but not exclusively, of senior government leadership. Decentralization takes time and only leads to results for the citizens in the mid to long term. Maintaining adequate service levels in the near term will surely prove a challenge in affected areas and efforts will be needed by the central authorities to alleviate negative side-effects of transition. This will require extensive planning and communication between all involved parties.

Second, the experience of the Pilot Municipal Units has taught us that substantial resources, both human and financial, must be committed to the process if it is to succeed. This will require the government to work closely with prospective donors to ensure that the funds available are utilized to maximum effect with minimum wastage, and in line with the unique needs of individual local communities. Donor co-ordination has traditionally represented a problem in developing environments but it is encouraging to see the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) taking the lead role in managing international assistance.

The third challenge is to involve representatives of local governments as much as possible in discussions on the legal framework for local governments. Their input should ensure that the framework will be sufficiently responsive and tailor-made to needs of their communities.

The fourth challenge is to enhance the institutional capacity of the government to absorb and support the establishment of new structures, especially in regard to the key ministries, such as the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA), Ministry of Finance and Economy (MEF), and Ministry of Public Services (MPS). Decentralization is a complicated and lengthy process and will require highly qualified individuals to manage it. This is an area where international assistance will be crucial in providing ample capacity building opportunities and sharing best practices and lessons learned.

Fifth, public misconceptions and misgivings must also be addressed in an informed and timely fashion, as a survey recently conducted by the OSCE concludes that the majority of the citizens of Kosovo lack a basic conceptual understanding of the decentralization process. Benefits of the process need to be clearly illustrated to the public but in a realistic fashion, meaning that citizens should be warned that results should be expected in the mid to long term.

Finally, elaborate confidence building measures are needed to ensure that an adequate level of trust between the local communities and the central authorities exists as to allow the normal functioning of government and an adequate level of service delivery.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo has a vested interest in the development of effective and citizen-oriented public institutions. We will, therefore, continue to work closely with both our local counterparts and the international donor community in ensuring that the citizens of Kosovo are served by the best local government possible.

Thank you.