

## Library opens doors to every young reader

**"Books are a precious and wonderful thing, they have to be protected, read and shared"  
- says Ambassador Pascal Fieschi, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo -**

**By: Patrick Hoffman**

For the first time since the out-break of the conflict, a multi-ethnic library welcoming and providing for the children of each and every community in Lipjan/Lipljan has opened. "This has happened with co-operation - the Government of the Netherlands provided the funds through the OSCE administered Small Investment Minority Fund (SIMF), and the Municipality took responsibility for the building and administration of the library. This is a good example of how co-operation can bear fruits," said Ambassador Fieschi at the inauguration of the library.

Children are the future of Kosovo. With the young generation we hope to build a multi-ethnic society who can live together in peace and tolerance. "This library is an important investment," says Adil Rashiti, Director of Youth, Sports and Culture. "By providing books for our children we are investing in their future, and thus in the future of Kosovo."

Creating a neutral, alive and educational meeting place in the Cultural House library for all communities living in Lipjan/Lipljan helps bring the children together and encourages multi-ethnic reconciliation. "I hope now there will be many children running around together looking for books and reading them with pleasure," says Ambassador Fieschi.

In the past, not all ethnic communities would enter the Cultural House. Freedom of move-



*Ambassador Fieschi inaugurating the multi-ethnic library in Lipjan/Lipljane*

ment was a factor, as was fear and the expectation of not being welcomed. Indeed, books in the Serbian language lay inaccessible in a pile in a separate room in the Cultural House. Nenad Arsic, a citizen from Lipjan/Lipljan told us, "I think it's a good idea that they've opened the library because now, the children from Serb speaking ethnic communities also have access to books and can read them. Before, even if they wanted to read, they couldn't find the books. It's a wise move." Accessibility is no longer an issue.

Another notable development is that the Municipality has employed Mr. Ivica Djokić, a Kosovo Serb librarian to catalogue the new and until recently stored books, and to support and work with the Kosovo Albanian librarian. Mr Djokić told us, "I feel very comfortable working with my Kosovo Albanian colleagues. Since I started work both Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians have visited the library. I have not encountered any problems and like my work very much." At the library inauguration, Ambassador Fieschi expressed his satisfaction and appreciation of the Municipality hiring a Kosovo Serb member of staff, saying, "it is a positive step towards reconciliation in this municipality. Now the children will have two librarians to help them find books, one Kosovo Albanian and one Kosovo Serb."

Today children from all the ethnic communi-

ties in Lipjan/Lipljan meet and enjoy the books in two languages. A computer has also been installed along with reading desks and chairs, making the library a good place to relax and learn in. In addition adult poetry, literature, history and scientific books have been provided. There are more than 19,000 books in the library.

The 'SIMF' goal was to provide an equal amount of books in both languages, this has resulted in approximately 1,300 books in Serbian and 1,600 in Albanian being given to the library. In addition, Mr. Ahmet Karameta, the Kosovo Albanian librarian in the Cultural House told us, "many citizens are also willingly donating books, so the library is growing all the time."

"This is a very important step for all communities. Until now we did not have either a multi-ethnic library or one for children, now we have both. From today onwards, thanks to the initiative and support given by the OSCE, readers of different levels, including children can come and enjoy reading in our library," added Mr. Karameta.

Since Ambassador Fieschi officially inaugurated the library, its doors have been open to every child, man and woman, no matter who they are, to come and enjoy the books. Multi-ethnic co-operation has indeed brought fruits from which the entire community can benefit.

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EDITORIAL



**Ambassador Pascal Fieschi,  
Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo**

In societies round the world, ethnic communities often feel they are not given the consideration they deserve. Conflict tends to exacerbate this situation, as has been the case here in Kosovo.

Since the conflict and break in relations, reconciling Kosovo's communities, no matter who they are, has been one of our main areas of work. However, three and a half years on, attempts at reconciliation, led from the top down by leading figures here in Kosovo - no matter how intelligent and sensitive they are, or how sophisticated their techniques - are not fully producing the results we all hope for. One extreme declaration or act can ruin the most successful post-conflict reconciliation initiative.

There is no question that goals take time to achieve no matter who is striving for them.

Perhaps using a bottom up technique, where people work together at a local level to start the reconciliation process, may be a more fruitful strategy, particularly if used in conjunction with top down efforts. I do believe that a great deal can be achieved by concentrating on making small advances in coexistence, reconciliation and co-operation at a local level.

Ensuring a fair and prosperous future for all communities is a central goal of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. As part of this goal, and in order to help foster reconciliatory behaviour at a local level, we established the 'Small Investment Minority Fund' (SIMF) to encourage return, support the integration of smaller communities into society and promote reconciliation.

The Government of the Netherlands provided €1.2 million to the 'SIMF'. This support has enabled us to implement 47 small but effective projects throughout the Kosovo regions. A budget ceiling of €50,000 was set for any one project and each succeeded in producing a quick and genuine result in the community.

The 'SIMF' projects varied in scope, focusing on everything from education, media and social needs to infrastructure and finance. Among the many different ethnic communities in Kosovo, I have seen 'SIMF' libraries and ambulancias open, newsletters published, heating and water systems fitted, cultural and sporting activities enjoyed, and training in language and IT provided.

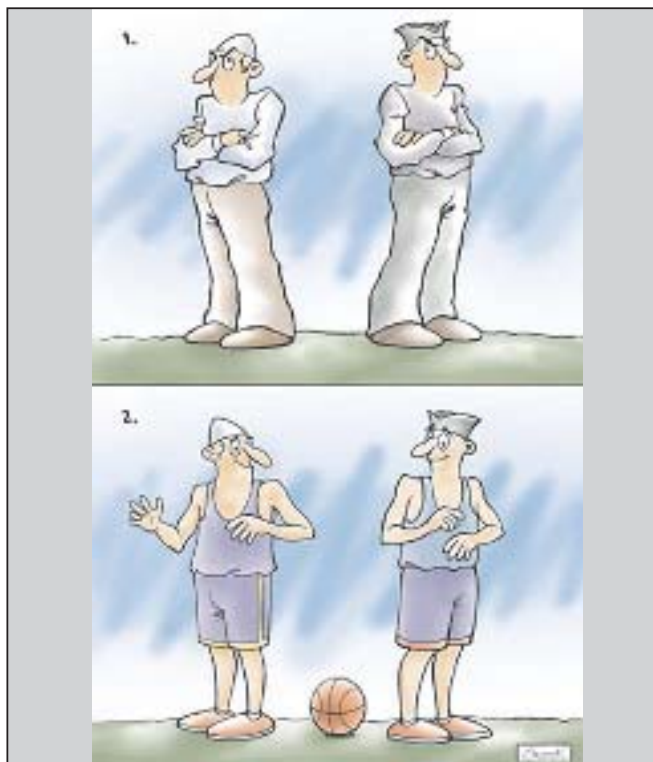
An important component of the 'SIMF' projects was that communities were actively involved in their implementation and realisation from the outset. This involvement took the form of either financial or in-kind labour donations and played a significant role, whilst also establishing local ownership.

Today, differences obviously still exist but should become less significant. As communities work with each other, the idea of an all-inclusive society based upon democratic principles will grow. I hope that ethnic communities will remain an integral part of Kosovo society within the European border context.

I still believe that reconciliation is practical and possible, and would like to see it continue. Full integration - especially in a society like Kosovo - may not be likely in the foreseeable future, but the right steps are definitely being made.

It is vital for organisations like the OSCE, who are working to promote a healthy society, to focus their activities at all levels: institutional, governmental and local. I firmly believe that reconciliation will only be possible if it is embraced in this way.

The 'SIMF' projects have successfully shown what can be achieved at a local level with community involvement and a small investment. These projects have encouraged contact between real people at a local level. This, in turn influences government and institutional levels to aim for the consensus vision for Kosovo.



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Mission in Kosovo

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Interview with Göran Stigmer

# Supporting Kosovo's communities

**“The idea behind the ‘SIMF’ project was for OMiK to further increase its involvement in the areas of return, remain and reconciliation at a grass-roots level throughout Kosovo”  
- says Mr. Göran Stigmer, Chairman of the ‘SIMF’ Advisory Board -**

**Interview By: Hasan Sopa**

**Details: What is the Small Investment Minority Fund (SIMF)?**

**Mr. Stigmer:** The OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK) established the ‘Small Investment Minority Fund’ in 2001. Its objective was to encourage returns and promote reconciliation. Also key was encouraging ethnic communities to remain in Kosovo by improving their living conditions. The project was supported by the Government of the Netherlands who pledged approximately €1.2 million over a period of two years.

**Details: What was the main focus for the projects?**

**Mr. Stigmer:** All the OSCE offices in Kosovo were asked to come up with project proposals that would improve the living conditions of ethnic groups, in particular, vulnerable groups. We felt that this was necessary in order to create confidence and to ensure security in the broader sense, by increasing the participation of ethnic communities in the democratic process. One way of doing this was with quick, high-impact support projects. During the two years, our officers in the field have, together with their local counterparts, implemented some 47 projects. I know that these projects have been very much appreciated by the local population.

I would also like to pay a tribute to my colleagues in the field as well as here in Headquarters that have been involved in the management of the projects. I know this has been hard work and long hours. But I know it has also been very rewarding for us all.

**Details: What were the criteria for projects and how did the process work?**

**Mr Stigmer:** In order to assess the project proposals from all angles, an Advisory Board (AB) was established with representatives from different organizations working in the areas of return, remain and reconciliation. The Board assessed the projects and determined whether they conformed to the agreed criteria. I must say the field was broad. Project proposals could encompass areas such as infrastructure, education, social support as well as communication, information and media. The AB assessed all the project proposals carefully. Many of the submitted proposals conformed to the criteria and were



*Mr. Göran Stigmer has been working in OMiK since 1999 when he started in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica as Regional Field Coordinator. In 2001 he worked in Prizren as Regional Director and from January 2002 as Field Director. His Balkan experience started in 1992 when he worked for the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM), now European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Croatia, followed by assignments in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina for OSCE, the UN and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.*

thus approved. It was hard work, but it was worth the time.

**Details: What kind of impact did the projects have? Can you give us some examples?**

**Mr. Stigmer:** First of all I must mention that all the projects had a very strong impact on the communities they were implemented in. One project that comes to mind was in the ethnically mixed village of Livoč/Livoç in the Gjilan/Gnjilane area. This village was in dire need of an ambulanta (health clinic) that could serve the population, in the village as well as the surrounding area, but there was no money available. After a lot of preparatory work by our staff and the local authorities in Gjilan/Gnjilane, a project proposal was designed and submitted to the AB and approved.

I went to Livoč/Livoç for the inauguration

of the ambulanta and I must say I was very impressed. From the very beginning of the project both Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs were involved. Furthermore, medical staff from both ethnic groups have been hired. This was important because the ambulanta aims to serve both the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb population. Whilst initially the municipality participated in the project implementation with ten percent of the costs, latterly, they took an even more active role by covering the main running costs associated with the ambulanta. I am therefore convinced that this is a sustainable project that will continue to serve the population in Livoč/Livoç.

Another interesting project was implemented in the financial sector. As we are all aware, the economic situation in Kosovo is not good and the need for micro-credit was, and still is very strong. This applies to the entire province, but especially to areas inhabited by ethnic communities. Therefore, representatives of the Government of the Netherlands approved a special loan fund proposal amounting to €255,646 in order to address this problem. Three NGOs (local and international) working in the micro-finance sector were chosen to implement the project which has had a positive impact for many in Kosovo.

I could go on talking about similar projects. But I think this gives you an idea of the impact the ‘SIMF’ projects have had in Kosovo. Let me add that I hope OMiK will be in a position to continue with similar activities in 2004.

**Details: What message would you like to give to future potential donors?**

**Mr. Stigmer:** My message to future potential donors would be to assist OMiK in supporting ethnic communities to remain in Kosovo by improving their living conditions. Funds would also be able to promote reconciliation and support the right to return. This would be accomplished by funding sustainable, small or medium scale, highly visible projects addressing vital needs in the community. All projects would, of course, be developed in co-operation with local ethnic communities and organizations working in the area of return, remain and reconciliation.



# Hard court hopes

**In February 2003, 30 Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian youth from the Štrpce/Shtërpçë and Prizren municipalities participated in a 'SIMF' multi-ethnic basketball camp. Co-operation and confidence were established, skills improved and fun was had by all. Indeed, such was the success of the project that it has led to subsequent multi-ethnic seminars and camps such as a recent trip to Poland.**

**By: Michael Kirby**

On their way to Koziëntice Poland, I caught up with Dragoslav Janiëevië, Miloš Nikolëevië, and Trifun Pecinoëevië - all members of the Štrpce/Shtërpçë Basketball Club. Tall, lanky Kosovo Serb teenagers, they were filled with that youthful buoyancy of boys their ages.

Although knowing the trio from pick-up games at 'Jovan Cvijë', the local secondary school or an occasional practice at the Narcis Hotel, I hadn't had the opportunity to actually sit down and become acquainted. Previous dialogue consisted mainly of, "Daj



*A winner celebrating his victory*

mi loptu" or expletives at missing an easy bucket. As I inquired initially about the 'SIMF' basketball camp in Brezovica/Brezovicë last February, Dragoslav, the oldest of the crew, rolled his eyes and with a sheepish look told me, "It was good to play with my Albanian team mates."

"Come on," I interrupted in broken Serbian, "I didn't come here yesterday." The smiles and light laughter signaled that I'd called their bluff. Even though four years have past since NATO's intervention, bringing Albanian and Serb youth together in Kosovo remains a difficult endeavor. However, by building on common interests in a sport, such as basketball, it is possible to begin the reconciliation process.

"How did you communicate?" I asked.

"A lot of people know Serbian, and when you're playing basketball you just communicate without words. When I'm playing

basketball I don't think about who I'm playing with, but about getting the ball in the hoop," Dragoslav responded.

Štrpce/Shtërpçë is a special place where people from all over Kosovo come to enjoy themselves in a friendly atmosphere. Indeed, the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities work co-operatively within one municipal structure here. So it was no surprise that young teenagers from mixed communities were happy to be together for the 'SIMF' multi-ethnic basketball camp in Štrpce/Shtërpçë.

Miloš and Trifun spoke freely about the camp highlights such as the 3-point shooting competition and the mixed team tournament. At 17 and 18 years old, respectively, Miloš and Trifun idealize NBA stars Michael Jordan and Allen Iverson. Although they've only been playing competitively for two years both intend to play basketball in the future, possibly in college.



*Team talk on the side lines*

"The 'SIMF' Brezovica/Brezovicë basketball camp opened doors for many of the boys," said player/coach Saša Davidovië. "The players established positive relationships and the camp's success has allowed the Štrpce/Shtërpçë Basketball Club, together with the Ministry of Sport, to organize other activities like the two weeks camp in Poland. I think what's been achieved is great, and I think everyone in Kosovo, especially the leaders and politicians, could learn a lot from these boys."



*Group picture of the team and the main actors at the camp*



# One small loan means much more than just money

**“A loan means hope, it means a future, it means educated children and a better life for borrowers and their employees,” explains Mr. Yuriy Shulhan, Country Director of the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) Kosovo.**

**By: Charlotte Granville-Ross**

Demand for micro-credit is very strong throughout Kosovo. However, the need is particularly acute and unmet amongst ethnic communities in Kosovo. Freedom of movement remains an issue for many of these communities, preventing them from seeking credit unless it comes to them.

Three micro-finance institutions, covering most of Kosovo geographically, were selected through a competitive bid by the ‘SIMF’, to implement a micro-credit project worth €255,646 in ethnic communities. These micro-finance institutions were ‘Beselidhja/Zavet’, ‘FINCA Kosovo’ and ‘ADIE International’.

By focusing on economic infrastructure, including the rehabilitation or development of economic enterprises through the ‘SIMF’ micro-credit project, the institutions aimed



*Latif Mazrek and his employees at the flourmill*

to increase participation of ethnic communities in the democratic process, by providing a confidence and security building measure.

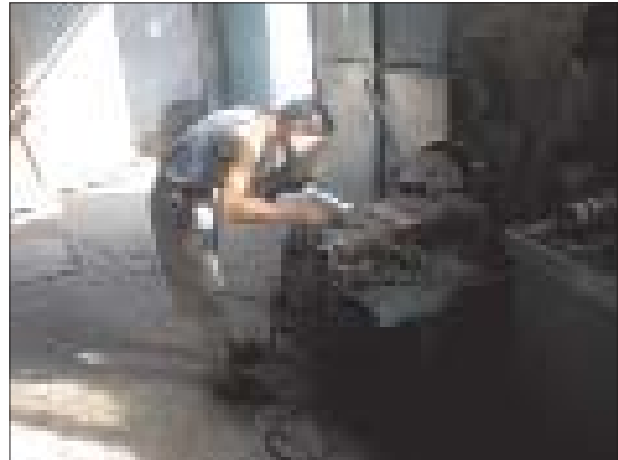
“This project is a great example of how much can be achieved with very little when it is carefully tailored to community needs,” says Mr. Shulhan of FINCA. The three micro-finance institutions worked mostly in their areas of expertise. FINCA providing 24 loans totalling €102,258 in the service, trade and production areas, ‘Beselidhja/Zavet’ disbursing €146,000 to 88 different ethnic community beneficiaries in agriculture, trade and services, and ADIE, 45 loans totalling €51,129 in agriculture.

Mr. Musa Caca is one of FINCA’s Roma clients. The loan of €10,000 enabled him to expand and develop his well-known three-generation family blacksmith business in Prizren. Mr Caca told us “I am very glad that I received the loan. It has helped me to increase the capacity of work. I invested the money in new supplies and now I have increased my business.” Mr. Caca intends to take a further loan when he has paid off this one, so perhaps now, when his son is old enough, it will become a four-generation family business.

Another of FINCA’s clients is Mr. Latif Mazrek, a member of the Turkish community in Mamushë/Mamuša village near Prizren. Mr. Mazrek has a flourmill where he employs 7 family members and 3 additional employees. A €12,000 loan from FINCA helped Mr. Mazrek to purchase wheat in large bulk, thus increasing his profit margin. This profit then enabled him to invest €5,000 of his own revenue in new machinery and €2,500 in reconstructing the flourmill, in order to develop his business further.

Initially, providing ethnic communities with more resources to develop their economic activity often helps create employment and thus security and confidence, but ultimately, as businesses expand over the long term, an entire community can benefit.

Mr. Milorad Filipović, a pig farmer living in the Kosovo Serb enclave of Gračanica, received a loan of €1,000 from ‘Beselidhja/Zavet’. Mr. Choi, Director of ‘Beselidhja/Zavet’ told us, “This loan enabled Mr. Filipović to



*Busy in his workshop - Mr. Musa Caca, Blacksmith*

expand his pig farm from 9 to 19 pigs and 40 piglets, thus utilising more of his land and securing work for his sons.” He added, “In the future, when Mr. Filipović has 40 full size pigs, he will be able to utilise all four hectares of his land and perhaps even employ others.”

Mr. Shulhan told us that, “After such a successful start, it is now even more important to continue to develop the ‘SIMF’ micro-credit project in order to multiply the impact, and to achieve sustainable improvements in the immediate and long-term. Indeed, since it is a loan fund, upon repayment, the same money can continue to give further hope to new families and businesses, thus benefiting the entire community.”

*A Roma client sells shoes at markets around the region*



# Oasis of peace and children's paintings

Ugljare/Uglar village is a small Kosovo Serb enclave in the Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje municipality. Ugljare/Uglar looks like any other village in central Kosovo, but has one exceptional difference - an extraordinary painting school. The 'SIMF' has supported the painting school since June 2001. It was implemented through the OSCE Democratization Department and is run by a talented painter from Uglare village, Mr. Zoran Zivković.

**By: Ivana Petrović**

Walking through a large gate into the yard of Mr. Zoran Zivković's family house, a sense of co-habitation and goodwill prevail. Zoran and his wife Verica come to welcome us. In the shadow of an old tall chestnut tree, with branches and limbs artistically shaped, we drink a Turkish coffee and talk about the history of the painting school.

"The school was established when the situation was very bad for the Kosovo Serb and Roma communities living here in Ugljare/Uglar," says Zoran. "They were totally disassociated from cultural life in Kosovo as there was no freedom of movement. The lack of hope was particularly visible among the young who had no access to any entertainment. I wondered how to improve their lives, and how to protect them from the tense environment and predominately negative emotions they were living in. I also wanted to encourage parents to remain, instead of leaving to an uncertain life somewhere else as IDPs, and others to return. Art proved to be a perfect tool for my intentions," adds Zoran.

He continues with uncovered pride, "You

will see immediately how successful this painting school project is. Nothing can show you this better than the paintings themselves. Here we have real masterpieces."

Amidst the array of beautiful paintings, so beautiful that you can't help but enjoy them, we ask Zoran how the painting school began. "We started with a three-month pilot project in July 2000. The group consisted of 35 young people between 10 and 16 years of age. In June 2001 the OSCE and 'SIMF' started supporting the school, turning it from a temporary pilot project into a permanent school. Since then many young artists have painted an outstanding 537 paintings. To date



*Zoran Zivković, Art teacher*



*Mr. Zivkovic and his students*

two of my students have joined the Academy of Art in Belgrade, and one is in secondary handicraft school in Niš. All this is proof that our work was not a waste of time, quite the opposite."

We were interested in finding out what the atmosphere was like during one class. Zoran explains, "I am fully aware that I work with children who live in an unusual situation, still suffering from strong post-war syndrome and traumas, and whose freedom of movement is still limited. I am trying to teach them to use all techniques of painting, drawing and colour to express themselves without shame or fear. I also try to include an element of fun and release, at times even playing. The children really enjoy the work and learning, and I, as their teacher have good reason to be really proud of them."

Ms. Galina Rizova, an OSCE Democratization Officer, joins us and we ask how the Mission itself became interested in a project dedicated to art. “Just look at this yard, this oasis of peace, beauty and art and you will understand. I first met Mr. Zivković when he exhibited at an official opening of the NGO Resource Centre in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje with a Kosovo Albanian painter colleague. Later Zoran was selected as the local partner and teacher for this painting school here in Ugljare/Uglar.”

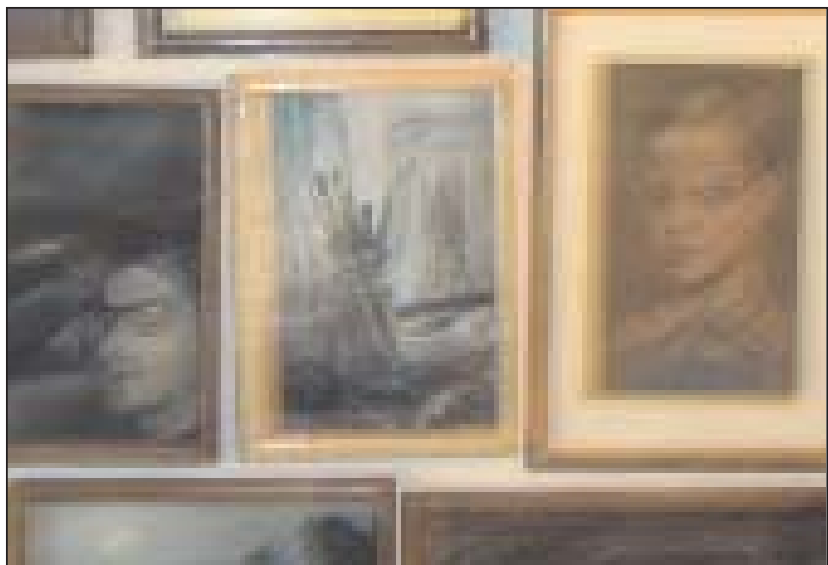
Ms. Rizova explains the importance of this project for the local community. “When we launched this project, there wasn’t a strong trust between the Kosovo Serb community and international organizations.” This project has changed views and established a bridge of trust enabling the OSCE and Kosovo Serb community to work together to realize this project and thus benefit many people.

“I can conclude,” says Ms. Rizova, “that the painting school caused a calming down of the socio-political situation and this is recognized both by the residents, representatives of the local community and the Municipality. That is the main achievement of this project. Art is an excellent tool for getting over misunderstandings.”

“The children now have a new and brighter sense of life. We had an interim exhibition and the best participants had a chance to participate in regional exhibitions in Gračanica and Štrpce/Shtërpçë. Right now, we are waiting for the brochures to be finalized and for the main exhibition, where people from all the communities around will attend,” Ms. Rizova added.

The painting school project has been so successful that a similar school will be launched in the Community Centre in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje. Young Kosovo Serb, Roma, Kosovo Albanian and Ashkali painters will attend the school together.

“Nothing in the world can bring people together like art” believes Zoran, and Ms Rizova agrees. “The success is quite understandable considering the fact that this project is dedicated to two of the most beautiful things - children and art. It is also dedicated to the idea that peace and tolerance should be promoted in the best possible way, using the language of colors, which does not recognize barriers and borders among people.”



*A collection of art work by the students*



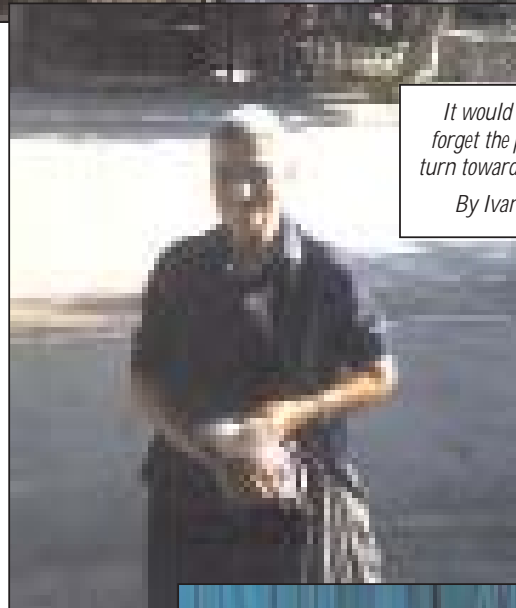
## 'SIMF' project reflections



*There is a place for all of us in Kosovo, for Serbs, Albanians and all other ethnicities.*  
By Dušica Milenković



*It would be nice to forget the past and to turn towards the future.*  
By Ivana Sugić



*All of the projects undertaken made a considerable impact on the quality of life for the ethnic communities.*  
By Brian Jupp



*Kosovo is our land. I would like people to reconcile and to live like the rest of the world in it.*  
By Milena Pešić





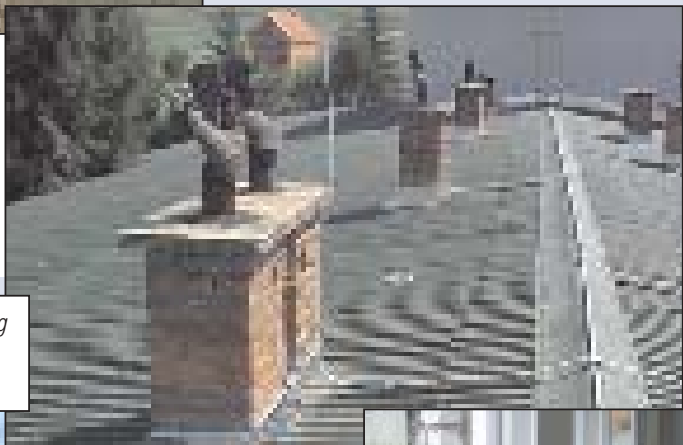


*The micro-finance projects have provided financial services to help families create their own jobs, raise household incomes, and improve their standard of living which is important in Kosovo.*  
By Yuriy Shulhan



*I hope that the efforts of the young newsletter journalists will not only make them feel pleased and creative, but help to inspire other kids to contribute to society.*  
By Nota Sarafoudi

*The 'SIMF' projects have proved how people from all the different communities in Kosovo can work together for mutual benefit.*  
By Laura Vai



*I think a key 'SIMF' project success has been the building of executive capacity in the Municipalities.*  
By Katherine Green



*I wish for peace and freedom for Kosovo, and for all the people to live in harmony.*  
By Milena Pesić



# Raising standards of living and infrastructure

The 'SIMF' encourages returns, promotes reconciliation and aids minorities to remain in Kosovo by improving their living conditions.

**By: Hasan Sopa**

Any conflict causes great suffering and human loss. It also causes a lot of physical destruction. The Kosovo conflict was not different. Infrastructure suffered a great deal before and during the conflict, particularly buildings and roads.

A key goal of the Small Investment Minority Fund (SIMF) was to generate confidence while increasing social, medical and financial security. A good percentage of this fund was dedicated to improving infrastructure. Schools, health clinics, water supply networks and sewage systems were some of the vital projects funded by the 'SIMF'.

Many schools throughout Kosovo need rehabilitating. One such school was the school in Vrbovac/Vrboc, in the Viti/Vitina municipality whose roof was in dire need of repair. This project aimed to promote return and remain amongst the Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Roma communities by improving conditions for education. Over 367 students directly benefit but many other members of the communities also profit when using the facility for different community and cultural events.

Another school to have benefited from the 'SIMF' is the 'Vuk Karadžić' primary



*The new school roof in Vrbovac/Vrboc*

school in the Zvečan/Zvečan municipality. This school had no functioning heating system. It is one of the principal primary education institutes in the area and currently has an enrolment of 792 children. In addition, 225 Faculty of Arts university students use one part of the building. "By upgrading and replacing the heating system of the school, the project aimed to improve conditions for teaching and learning considerably. The project is highly appreciated by the members

of the community," said Nota Sarafoudi, the Project Manager.

On the 26th of October 2002, after more than three years of local political turmoil, ethnic hostility and parallel municipal institutions in Štrpce/Shtërpçë Municipality, the Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian communities turned out to vote. They elected one Municipal Assembly that represented all communities living in the municipality. "This was a fundamental pre-condition to establishing an official



*Stara Kolonija/Kolonia e Vjetër new water supply system*



*Digging channels for the water system*

forum for multi-ethnic co-operation,” says Oliver McCoy the ‘SIMF’ Project Manager in Štrpce/Shtërpçë.

In the early days after the election the Štrpce/Shtërpçë Municipal Assembly members performed their duties as elected representatives, in an assembly hall in much need of repair. According to Mr. McCoy, “The cramped seating arrangement resembled a children’s classroom. Certainly it was not conducive to facilitating inter-ethnic dialogue or open discussions on municipal affairs. Thus, a project was initiated to repair the facility, restructure the seating arrangement and ultimately support the capacity of the Štrpce/Shtërpçë Municipal Assembly.”

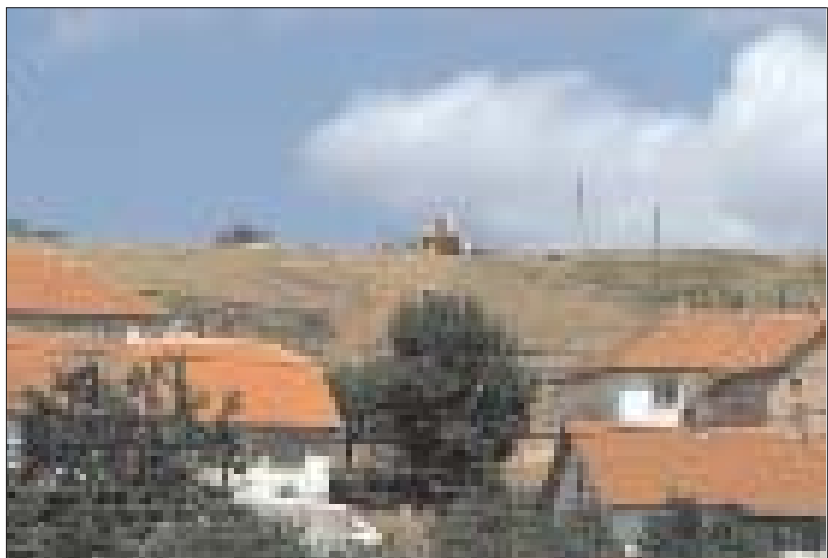
When we asked Mr. McCoy how the Municipal Assembly hall looks now, he smiled and said, “Now it is completely different, remodeled and equipped according to acceptable standards.”

Novobërdë/Novo Brdo is one of the smallest municipalities in Kosovo with nearly 3,000 Kosovo Serb, Albanian and Roma inhabitants. The majority of its population lives off subsistence farming. Unemployment is very high and there are few job prospects. Its infrastructure, like many municipalities in Kosovo, is generally poor. Earlier this year the local administration and the UN Mission in Kosovo started looking for vital funding to improve infrastructure in the area and quickly combined forces with the OSCE through ‘SIMF’. One resulting project was the construction of a new sewage system. Another project was the fitting of a new water supply network. Both projects were vital for raising the standard of living and incentive to remain in the village of Stara Kolonija/Kolonija e Vjetër.

According to the Project Manager, Mr. Ljubiša Simić, “The aim of the project was to provide residents of the village with a proper and adequate sewage system and safe drinking water, and thus to improve living standards for all the villagers in this ethnically mixed area.”

Mr. Blagoje Stević, a returnee to Stara Kolonija/Kolonija e Vjetër told us, “We are really glad that we have been given the two systems. It really makes our lives much easier and better. The work on the system was done well.”

Overall, €407,739 from the ‘SIMF’ was dedicated to 14 different infrastructure projects. In many cases, these projects have made a dramatic difference to the standard of living in the communities.



*Stara Kolonija/Kolonija e Vjetër, the new sewage system*



# How the other side live

**“Guaranteeing basic freedom of expression for young Kosovans is vital.”  
-says Ewa Sitkowska, Democratization Minorities Officer, OSCE Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.**

**By: Hysen Pelaj and Slavica Staletović**

Freedom of expression is important in facilitating reconciliation and understanding amongst mixed communities here in Kosovo. Two ‘SIMF’ youth newsletter projects have made great headway in this area. The first project, in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, resulted in the production and distribution of the ‘Nestašne Godine’ (Mischievous Ages) and ‘Future’ newsletters. The second project team in the Pejë/Peć area created the ‘Krug’ (Circle) youth newsletter.

Dusan Radakovic, a young Kosovo Serb journalist for the ‘Future’ newsletter told us, “ I think that this is a vital project in Kosovo, bringing together Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanians to work openly in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.”

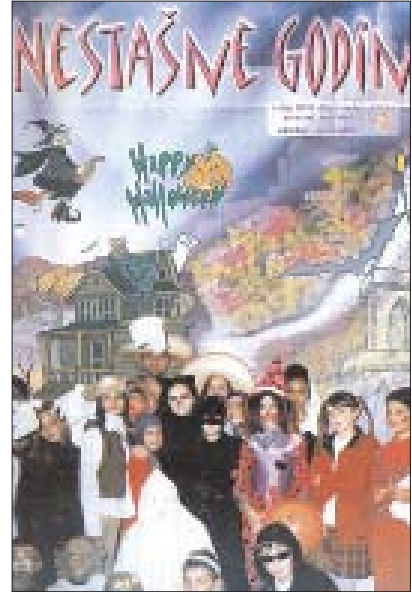
Both of the ‘SIMF’ youth newsletter projects aimed, and have succeeded in connecting young people, bringing them together to express themselves, build new friendships and to convey how others live. At the same time, the young have benefited from learning new skills in journalism and computers, through training and workshops, meetings and on the job experience.

In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the mixed Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian ‘Future’

newsletter team, showed great courage in crossing the bridge and divide, in order to participate together in regular weekly and monthly editorial meetings in the Cultural Centre. These meetings allowed the 17 young multi-ethnic participants to talk freely about the situation and problems in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and also to provide a glimpse on how the other side live.

Overcoming barriers to allow free and truthful journalism was a challenge that all the ‘Future’ participants faced. However, by focusing on common areas of interest for any young girl or boy, such as fashion and film, they succeeded in overcoming this issue. Miranda Hochberg, Head Co-ordinator in the Multi-ethnic Children and Youth Peace Center (MCYPC), explains that weekly youth forums have also played a role in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, “A trainer would lead group discussions on such issues as gender or other relevant issues. Interviews would then be conducted by the forum, and broadcast by radio stations in south Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and 12 other radio stations around Kosovo.”

“I still write for the ‘Future’ newsletter,” Edona Zhuri, a young journalist told us, “it became independent after the first



*A front page of the newsletter  
‘Mischievous Ages’*

issue and still operates successfully. Writing for ‘Future’ gives me great satisfaction. It is here that I made my first steps in journalism and I’m still learning a great deal. Indeed, everything I have learnt in this past year makes me want to continue with journalism.”

In Goraždevac/Gorazhdac and Osojane/Osojan, in the Pejë/Peć region, many of the ‘Krug’ newsletter participants live in difficult circumstances within enclave villages, where freedom of movement is an issue. The ‘Krug’ newsletter has enabled these children to communicate together for the first time and in an open and pluralistic manner. “The newsletter offers an opportunity for the Kosovo Serb youth to raise issues of concern and to share project development ideas for their own communities,” the project officer told us.

Developing six editions of ‘Krug’ has strengthened many of the participants writing skills with the help of training and workshops given by the OSCE and other international organisations. Three co-ordinators also worked with the participants to help develop their articles on sport, educational and religious activities and social and infrastructure issues.

“It was a really good feeling when people asked when we would have the new



*Newsletter staff during an editorial meeting in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica*



issue of Krug,” one participant told us. For many, ‘Krug’ is the only source available to learn more about events and the way of life in other villages. ‘Krug’, in combination with some other activities, has undoubtedly helped break down existing barriers among the young in different communities, by changing strong pre-existing prejudices and stereotypes. As a result, many first friendships have been established.

Ms. Hochberg, explained to us what the ‘Future’ newsletter participants have achieved, “Today, we have nine of the original seventeen participants still working with MCYPC and eight of them have jobs with professional radio or television broadcasters like TV Most and RTK. So, they’ve learnt something and are really using the skills they have learnt. If they haven’t got jobs in journalism, they are studying journalism.”

“I’ve learned a lot about journalism and ‘Future’ was my starting point to become a journalist. I’m now working for Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK). I hope that the international community will continue to support and finance this unique, joint Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian project in Kosovo,” says Dušan Radaković.

The plan for ‘Future’ is to produce a



*Creating the newsletters*

smaller magazine in both languages. The young participants want to see what the social reaction will be to printing Albanian and Serbian together in one issue. Perhaps they can teach us all something. There can be little doubt that both news-

letter projects have not only encouraged the young participants to develop their skills and understand more about how the other side live, but also, to share in the development of their lives together in Kosovo.

## Small things can make a big difference

**In many parts of the world buses are common and a simple, cheap means of transport. In Kosovo, buses mean much more. Particularly when they are free.**

**By: Edita Buçaj**

In Dragash/Dragaš, a remote municipality in southern Kosovo inhabited mostly by the Kosovo Gorani community, buses mean life. Dragash/Dragaš is a mountainous area known for early and wild winters. Combine the difficult weather with poor economic conditions and lack of jobs, and soon parents find it easy to justify not sending their children to school, particularly girls.

Luckily, a solution to this has been found. The ‘SIMF’ Kosovo Gorani bus service project provides transport to Gorani children and adults. Thus, a small contribution has led to a notable improvement in school attendance whilst also providing access to employment opportunities for adults. This small project has made a big difference.

A similar project was carried out in Zvečan/Zveçan, northern Kosovo. Thirty Kosovo Roma children displaced from the south of

Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and living in difficult conditions in Temporary Community Shelters (TCS), are being transported to school for free. Without this transport they would be unlikely to attend school at all, which would have a negative impact on their ability to re-integrate. Undoubtedly, the bus plays a vital role in improving school attendance. “I have never been driven to school before,” says Hamit, a student in second grade. “I’ve only seen something like this in the movies, now I too am picked up and can get to school. It’s a great feeling to be taken care of,” he added.

Rahovec/Orahovac is a multi-ethnic town in central Kosovo, with a sizeable Kosovo Serb population living in enclaves. During the conflict there was heavy fighting and human losses in Rahovec/Orahovac. Since then the ethnic communities have chosen to stay in mono-ethnic villages, fearing integration. However, slowly they are begin-

ning to put the past behind them and integrate themselves back into local society. One ‘SIMF’ bus project has been able to provide access to the centre of Rahovec/Orahovac for residents of neighbouring enclaves.

This free bus service in Rahovec/Orahovac has enabled civil servants amongst others to get to work. Before the bus service was available civil servants needed all their salary to pay transport to work, now they can also provide for their families. In addition, this bus service provides the community members living in enclaves with access to the town and public and municipal services, which has helped build confidence and integration between ethnic groups.

Buses may play a minor role in other parts of the world, but here in Kosovo, they are evidence that small things can make a big difference to people’s lives.



# Curing a health problem in Upper Livoč/Livoç

The joint efforts of village activists, the OSCE and Municipal Assembly resulted in the construction of an ambulanta in Livoč/Livoç funded by the 'Small Investment Minority Fund' (SIMF).

**By: Mevlyde Salihu**

The village of Upper Livoč/Livoç is located in western Gjilan/Gnjilane. A mixed population of approximately 3,500 Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbs live here. For a long time inhabitants of this village have lacked medical services. Finally, this severe health problem is cured.

Some time ago, activists in the village approached the Gjilan/Gnjilane Municipal Assembly and asked them for help in building a health house in their village. They found support from Fadil Osmani the Project Director in the Municipal Assembly. Mr. Osmani got in touch with the OSCE in Gjilan/Gnjilane, and together they began to work on this issue. A proposal was quickly submitted and approved by the 'SIMF' board, and construction work began. Now the ambulanta is completed and has been inaugurated, patients can be treated.

Ms. Lola Ansede from the OSCE Democratization Department in Gjilan/Gnjilane says that the OSCE is very pleased with the project. "The ambulanta will serve both the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities ensuring that people have better health assistance from now on," says Ms. Ansede. "The Municipality covered 10% of the costs, and the OSCE covered the other 90%, which is the desired level for 'SIMF' projects," she added. Moreover, the municipality's Chief Executive has confirmed in writing that the

Departments of Health, Property and Urbanism will continue their support by paying the salaries of the staff, and giving the necessary technical and professional supervision. Also, the Director of the Department of Health and Social Welfare, in a separate letter, has confirmed that his department will take responsibility for the hiring of employees, securing their salaries and purchasing medical equipment.

Not only will the ambulanta provide med-

ical services but it will also increase the number of employees in the village. Doctors will come from Gjilan/Gnjilane, since there are no graduated doctors in Livoč/Livoç, but nurses are hired from the village.

The Village Representative, Ramadan Kurteshi believes this is a vital project for Livoč/Livoç. "We were a village with a completely under-developed infrastructure. Now, with the hard work of village

activists, the OSCE and Municipal Assembly in Gjilan/Gnjilane we are fortunate to have a health house in the village," said Mr. Kurteshi.

The Project Director, Mr. Osmani feels the local residents did a tremendous job. "They overcame the barriers and divisions. The Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities agreed that solving the health assistance problem in their village was a priority."

The community's hard work has paid off. Halim Ramadani, a young man from Livoč/Livoç said that they are happy and relieved to be able to get medical treatment in their own village. Now the 3,500 inhabitants of Livoč/Livoç will not have to travel to their formerly nearest centre in Gjilan/Gnjilane, which is not near at all, to get medical treatment. This project has shown that when people agree between themselves, solutions that benefit everyone can be found quickly. The result is impressive.



*Ambulanta Livoč/Livoç - before and after*



# Encourage primary school reintegration and attendance

Scattered drawings, colours and toys, different languages, and beaming happy faces fill the room. This is the kindergarten for Kosovo Roma children in Gjilan/Gnjilane.

**By: Mevlyde Salihu**

It is here where Brenda Demiri, now seven years old and starting her second grade at primary school, enjoyed her days playing and learning. For two years she learnt songs, dances, culture and the Albanian language at kindergarten in preparation for primary school in Gjilan/Gnjilane.

The Kosovo Roma kindergarten opened as part of co-operative work between the OSCE, UNICEF, 'Balkan Sunflowers' and other international and local organisations. The aim was to improve life for the Kosovo Roma community and encourage them to remain in the municipality. The kindergarten hoped to prepare Kosovo

In 2002, twenty-five children on average attended the kindergarten. In September, all the children who were six years old started attending mixed group primary school. Indeed, Ms. Ansede believes that "the number of children will increase because we are encouraging more children from poor families, or with special needs to attend, as well as children who have parents with mental problems."

Learning and enjoyment together appear to encourage children like Brenda Demiri to attend first kindergarten and then primary school. "I think they really enjoy spending time here because they are interacting. If they weren't here, they would just be in the street playing. Here they play and learn," said Brenda Gallagher, from Balkan Sunflowers. Ms. Ansede added, "The children learn basic social skills, are very clean, and are learning to behave. They are also learning Albanian and a bit of English, drawing and singing."

The kindergarten helps reduce problems with school low attendance rates for the new generation of Kosovo Roma in Gjilan/Gnjilane. By encouraging primary school attendance it also fosters and encourages reintegration and the reconciliation process for the long term.

Brenda is now too old to go to kindergarten, but among the other children present we found her sister, Berkana, a sweet 5 years old girl with big dark eyes, drawing and enjoying herself.



*Roma children making the most of play-school*



*Brenda Demiri and her younger sister Berkana*

Roma children for successful entry and reintegration into mixed group primary school. It would teach them the Albanian language, and educational and social skills. This was believed to be important in encouraging the community to remain.

"Initially the kindergarten was paid for by the Democratization Department Minority budget, but in 2002 a proposal was submitted and approved by the Small Investment Minority Fund, so the whole of 2002 was funded by 'SIMF', said Lola Ansede, OSCE Project Manager.

The success of this 'SIMF' project is set to continue in the future as Mr. Lutfi Haziri, the President of Gjilan/Gnjilane municipality, signed a letter in February 2003, stating that the Municipality will take over on-going financial responsibility for the kindergarten in January 2004. This makes the kindergarten an official institution, a municipal institution.

"We hope that the kindergarten will be here forever and supported by the Municipality to continue to help Kosovo Roma children integrate into mixed primary school," concluded Ms. Ansede.



*Roma children enjoying a meal*

# Integrating with 'IT'

**Building civil society and supporting different ethnic communities living in the Pejë/Peć region is an OSCE and 'SIMF' priority.**

**By: Hysen Pelaj**

The Kosovo Egyptian community in Pejë/Peć faces difficulty in finding education for their children. The impact of this is that young Kosovo Egyptians find it hard to overcome a low level of education in the working environment, and thus difficult to be able to integrate into society in a professional manner. With this in mind, the local NGO 'Piramida-Dituria' (an Egyptian affiliated NGO), in close cooperation with the OSCE Department of Democratization designed and submitted a project proposal to the 'SIMF' Advisory Board, which was approved in June 2002.

The project focused on reconciliation and long-term integration of the Kosovo Egyp-

tian youth network 'Piramida-Dituria' within a multi-ethnic youth network in Pejë/Peć, as well as with the Kosovo Albanian and other communities. There were three main components to the project: Internet stations, Information Technology (IT) & English language courses. Community and network development were key to each component.

For six months the Youth Centre "Haxhi Zeka" looked like a beehive with 60 young adults from the Pejë/Peć and Istog/Istok Kosovo Egyptian communities attending English language and 'IT' courses. Some eager young Kosovo Egyptians waited to stand in front of a computer for the first time and learn basic programmes. Many of the girls had had to overcome strong

prejudices regarding girls' education in their rural communities, in order to attend courses. For them in particular, this opportunity to learn was momentous. The same eager sentiment was present in the English courses, where children competed to learn more words than each other, or one more expression or a whole dialogue in English. In many cases the girls, determined to make the most of their learning opportunity, learnt more quickly than the boys.

Located in the office of the local NGO 'Piramida-Dituria', the centre allowed young Kosovo Egyptians as well as young adults from other communities (Kosovo Albanians, Bosniak and Roma) to use the Internet services free of charge. Indeed, the coordinator of the NGO held mixed group "how to use the internet" training sessions. For much of the time young from different communities with varying levels of education mixed and learned together, either by consulting or borrowing books from the now well equipped library. The library is supplied with the latest editions of books in three languages (Albanian, Serbian and English) in the fields of Information Technology (the best one in town) and English language (course and grammar books, encyclopaedias and others).

Supporting Kosovo Egyptians and other ethnic communities is the best way to encourage reintegration and thus is vital for a better future for all Kosovo citizens. In a short period of time this youth project has been very effective.



*Mixed community youth 'IT' training*

## Play to overcome barriers

**The reconstruction of a playground presents opportunities for integration and inter-ethnic activities.**

**By: Nderim Pasuli**

Reconstructing houses, infrastructure and economic development are important factors for Kosovo's communities. But most vital is an approach for building peaceful and prosperous neighbourhoods for the future. Thus, the reconstruction of a playground in Smac, bordering both a Kosovo Serb return location and Kosovo Albanian villages, was deemed necessary and crucial. "The playground will encourage young people to overcome ethnic barriers and to socialise with each other," says Project Manager, Kreshnik Basha.

Sporting activities are a very simple and effective tool to initiate open communication between communities. These kinds of activ-

ities can build bridges, create relationships and increase confidence between separated ethnic groups. Indeed, the 'SIMF'-supported project was implemented with continuous co-operation and the joint efforts of the OSCE, German KFOR, community leaders, the Municipality and local football club 'Drita'.

The Smac playground project aims to build trust and connect different communities through sport and leisure activities. Indeed, the Prizren Municipality and 'Drita' Football Club are planning a football tournament for different communities living in surrounding villages and from other regions as well. Much anticipation exists amongst the communities about this welcome event. Neigh-

bouring villages will also be encouraged to set up their own football clubs.

"This playground will have an enormous impact on our daily lives as mixed communities living in this region. Through play and sport we shall try to build trust, confidence and new relationships. We shall try to forget the past, create a new friendship and peaceful environment" believe the Community Leaders and 'Drita' representatives.

The future, both maintenance and financing, of the Smac playground is guaranteed with the Drita club's support. Now, there is plenty of opportunity for young people to play, reconcile differences and overcome barriers together. Without the reconstruction work this would not have been the case.