

UNIVERSITY OF MACEDONIA



Department of Balkan, Slavic & Oriental Studies

MA in Politics and Economics of Contemporary Eastern & South-Eastern Europe

Mapping politics and society of Serb community in Kosovo after
the independence of Kosovo:
*Decentralization plan as an essence for stabilizing and sustaining the Serb
community in Kosovo*

Supervisor:
Ioannis Armakolas

Thessaloniki, 2011

Student:
Milena Radovic

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

I INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.1. Background Information.....	4
1.2. Literature Review.....	5
II GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SERB COMMUNITY: Demographics, surroundings and types of enclaves.....	6
III INTRODUCING THE PROCESS OF DECENTRALIZATION.....	15
3.1. Ahtisaari’s Decentralization Plan	15
3.2. Legal Framework for Decentralization.....	15
3.3. Decentralization Process in Kosovo: the acceptance.....	16
3.4. Kosovo Community Acceptance.....	17
3.5. Belgrade’s Acceptance.....	19
IV CREATION OF NEW MUNICIPALITIES.....	21
4.1. Local Elections 2009.....	22
4.2. Turnout of Local Elections, Facts and Figures.....	23
4.3. Serb Majority Municipalities.....	25
4.3.1. Municipality of Gracanica.....	25
4.3.2. Municipality of Klokot- Vrbovac.....	26
4.3.3. Municipality of Ranilug.....	26
4.3.4. Municipality of Partes.....	27
4.3.5. Municipality of Strpce.....	28
4.3.6. Municipality of Novo Brdo.....	29
4.3.7. Municipality of Mitrovica North.....	29
V PARALLEL STRUCTURES.....	31
5.1. South of Ibar River.....	31
5.2. Parallel Elections.....	32
5.3. Serbia- run Structures North of Ibar River.....	33
VI CONCLUSION.....	37
REFERENCES.....	39

I Introduction

Since the declaration of independence the overall atmosphere of inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo has been improving. For Kosovo as a new country the biggest problem was how to deal with the Serb community: even though it declared the independence, many of its citizens didn't recognize its legitimacy, claiming that they were still living under the rule of Serbia. Local Serbs have been rejecting for almost a decade to be integrated in Kosovo society, so the main challenge for new country was creating the right conditions for Serbs to integrate into the Kosovo society and to participate in Kosovo institutions. The process of decentralization directly connected the minority communities with the Kosovo institutions. While Kosovo Serbs south of the Ibar River unexpectedly changed strategy and participated and accepted the plan of decentralization, as long as that means non recognition of the independence, Serbs in the north of the Kosovo still hold the pre-conflict structures under the auspices of Serbia, remaining the biggest challenge for Kosovo to have full control over its territory and complete autonomy and rule over its citizens.

After more than a decade Kosovo Serbs turned towards more moderate politics, changing the path of their future. Finally they have effective representatives in Kosovo institutions that can deal with their concerns and problems. Even though the participation is gaining popularity among Serbs, the reason for involvement is not because they have accepted the Kosovo independence, but to preserve the Serb community of shrinking, to improve the everyday life, social and economic welfare and security, to prevent further displacement and migrations and to create conditions and give support for those who want to come back.

The main focus of this paper is on Kosovo Serb communities and process of stabilizing the relation among them and Albanian community. First part of the paper will present their location on the map, geopolitical analysis, surroundings and functionality of different enclaves together with demographic data and population, density and the statistics of villages and towns where are created conditions to sustainable return of internally displaced people. This data will help in better understanding the problem of integration of the community, catching the composition of, not only Serb community in Kosovo, but Kosovo as a whole and its complex inter community territorial picture.

Second part will explain process of integration of Kosovo Serb minority through the Ahtisaari decentralization plan. The policy of boycotting the Kosovo institutions, as a response to Kosovo's declaration of independence, is no longer considered effective and productive for Serbs south of Ibar¹ River. Even without Serb representatives in Kosovo's institutions, didn't prevent Kosovo Albanians to make decisions about Serbs without Serbs. In practice, Kosovo Serbs, rejecting the participation, left without representation in the Kosovo institutions, marginalizing themselves from the society. Being in a game

¹ This paper use Serb names; only in a case of big difference both, Serb and Albanian, name will be presented

between Serbia and Kosovo, Kosovo Serbs south of Ibar finally realized that decentralization could only better off their everyday life and even without accepting independence of Kosovo they showed their willingness to be included in institutions with first local elections that were organized in Kosovo after the independence in November 2009. Unexpected number of south Kosovo Serbs casted their ballots which gave a 'new impetus to multiethnic state building' (KIPRED, 2009a). Given that Kosovo Serb in the north part boycotted the elections, this created the division between Kosovo Serb community and those who were for participation in the elections and for those who were against.

The third part refers on parallel structures south of the Ibar that operate together with new elected Kosovo structures which will be great challenge for new locals in power to cut them off and make them participate in regular ones. Furthermore, this part will give attention to Serbian- run institutions in the north of Kosovo (also refer as 'the North') and dead lock of the conflict that culminated when Kosovo tried to impose the rule and officials over the custom in the north, over the borders with Serbia. Serbs opposed by setting the barricades on the main passes on borders Jarinje and Brnjak. Kosovo Serbs in the north says that barricades are means for the fight against imposing of Kosovo institutions in northern Kosovo and that they are ready to stay on the barricade as long as it needs. Possible solution of this conflict and the strategy what could be the less bad solution will be presented at the end of this part.

The end of this analysis will be concluding points and recommendations. After more than 10 years living in isolation south Kosovo Serb can finally be responsible for their own lives, in a frame of local municipality government they are fully in charge on basic socio-economic and political field. Participating, we could say, was the easier part, now the representatives have to fulfill their promises and keep up with the latest problems that Kosovo is facing. Better cooperation, promotion of cultural and other rights without rising a question of the status and partition, creation of good, strong Serb political leadership that will intermediate not only between Kosovo Serb community and Kosovo Government, but between Serbia and Kosovo can build a sustainable Serb community in Kosovo, stabilizing the region and move forward in solving the other socio- economic problems that Kosovo is facing on, where its citizens could have better standard of living and a decent life.

1.1 Background Information

The ethnic tension between Serb and Albanians in Kosovo reach far deeper in history than it is presented in this paper. While for Serbians Kosovo is a Holy ground, where the first Serbian state was made in the medieval ages under the Nemanjic family Kingdom, for Albanians Serbs are just people that settled the Balkans as South Slavs in the VI century and they claim their origins date from the period of Illyrian settlements.

The role and influence of the Serb community in Kosovo in the political and socio-economic landscape has changed significantly over the past 50 years. From playing a leading role during the early period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, when Kosovo Serbs had key positions in provincial administration, political and socio-cultural life to the present days when the Serbian community is scattered around the territory of Kosovo with its influence primarily confined to the municipalities where the community is in numerical majority with the local power.

After the 1999 conflict, the Serb community established local institutions of government and service provision with financial support from the Republic of Serbia in almost all municipalities where Kosovo Serbs resided. After many years of negotiating under the auspices of United Nation (UN) and International Community (IC), both sides, Kosovo and Serbia didn't reach any agreement over the status of Serbia's autonomous region of Kosovo that the in February in 2008 unilaterally declared independence. Many of its territorial citizens didn't recognize newborn state's institutions and legitimacy (Manning, 2010, pp.106-7). The majority of Kosovo Serb lived in isolated enclaves south of Ibar River run parallel institutional structures funded and supported by Serbia for the last decade. Many of them, especially in the north part of Kosovo, still ignore the independence of Kosovo and claim they live under the rule of Serbia proper. The fact that territorially they are directly connected with the south of Serbia makes their relation even stronger which consequently creates the deadlock in improvement and development of newly established Kosovo Republic and its possibility to have control over its whole territory. Recent changes in the local governmental pattern of Kosovo, following the decentralization framework, have begun to influence these parallel Serbian structures and to improve inter- ethnic relations within Kosovo, giving hope and power to people living there for peaceful and better future (OSCE, 2010a).

1.2. Literature Review

While dealing with the contemporary issues over the conflict, most of Serbian authors like Dusan T. Batakovic or Milos Lukovic, or other prestigious academics of Serbian Academy of Science and Art (SANU) almost always go back through the history calling Serbian right over the Kosovo based on medieval history and on famous battle of the Field of Blackbirds in 1389 where they were defeated from Ottomans. On the other side, Albanians don't go back so deep through the history claiming their right to get independence and to have their own country. They argue that during the period of Milosevic they suffered violence, discrimination and suppression that gives them right to set free from the 'occupation' and to live in a country where they make more than 90% of population.

After the 1999 war all eyes of the International Community were on Kosovo. Even after more than decade Kosovo's statehood remained an unfinished project. All international NGO's and think tanks assist in analysis and suggestions over the problems that Kosovo

bears. The topic of this paper describes and argues issues and problems of Kosovo Serb community from the declaration of independence of Kosovo onwards, their gradual integration in Kosovo system and participation in Kosovo institutions. My research for this paper was focusing on articles and reports of the latest dates of IC reports, mostly OSCE Mission in Kosovo reports that give neutral analysis on communities profile, the employment and socio-economic situation of minorities, their security and freedom of movement, education level, creation of municipalities in the decentralization process, etc. Different international think tanks and NGO's focus on various issues and problems that was Kosovo facing during the implementation of the decentralization plan. International Crisis Group brief reports give very deep analysis of problems of the north and parallel structures, explaining dual sovereignty in practice.

Many reports that analyze the topic were actually Kosovo think tanks that are on spot and most of their reports are based on interviews and direct involvement in the problem they are reporting on. KIPRED, KDI, IKS are some of many that assist in a great deal Kosovo Government, providing information, analysis and trainings for Kosovo administration, especially for newly created municipality's administration, fostering the minority communities. Most of the reports argue that the main problem for Kosovo is Serbia: Serbia's involvement to prevent recognition of UN and defeating policy over frozen conflict on the north of Kosovo, where Serbia run its own institutions and where Kosovo citizens answer directly to Serbia. They also conclude that parallel structures south of the Ibar that are funded by Serbia hinder Kosovo Serb participation and integration into the Kosovo state, creating inefficient, unproductive and non-protective conditions for Kosovo Serb community. Participation of Kosovo Serb community in the election was seen as a positive sign in improving the relation of Serbs and Albanians and one step forward towards multi ethnic Kosovo in almost all reports. The main fear remains north Kosovo: Albanians blame Serbia for supporting north Serbs and Serbs claim that Albanians don't put enough effort to integrate this part into the Kosovo and that they don't work enough on inter-ethnic relations.

II Geopolitical analysis of the Serb community: demographics, surroundings and types of enclaves

This part of paper will focus on deep geopolitical analysis of Serb community in Kosovo after the declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo in 2008; it will explain the types of enclaves with Serb-inhabited communities in five main regions of Kosovo, their surroundings and demographic characteristics. It will present the regions and all the villages and towns inhabited with Kosovo Serb population with approximate numbers of Serb population in each region distinguishing those with Serb majority from those with Serb minority. Furthermore, it is going to present the progress made by Kosovo municipalities of every region to develop and effectively implement strategies and programs for internally displaced persons and returnees and their willingness to assist and protect displaced persons and returnees. The statistics provided in this part of paper follows the OSCE report on Kosovo community profile from 2010, UN reports and various think tank articles and reports related to the subject.

After the war, the Serb community has been sparse in the territory of Kosovo in a form of small, characteristically diverse types of enclaves southern of the Ibar River. They are mostly scattered in the east part of Kosovo between the Gnjilane/ Gjilan town region and Priština/ Prishtinë region. Certain numbers of Serbian villages exist in the region of city Prizren in the south of Kosovo. Special type of Serbian community is situated northern of the Ibar River, consists of north part of the city of Mitrovica/ Mitrovicë and three the most northern Kosovo municipalities, Leposavic/ Leposaviq, Zvečan/ Zveçan and Zubin Potok. It is the largest Serb- dominated area in the Kosovo and unlike any other it is directly connected with Serbia. Of an extreme historical importance for Serbian community in Kosovo, but not only, are enclaves situated among the most significant cultural and religious sites of Serbian Orthodox heritage, the Patriarchate in Peć/ Pejë and the Visoki Dečani Monastery that are located in the western part of Kosovo, in the region of city Pec.

In the Gnjilane region, the demographic situation has changed greatly since the 1999 war with an estimated of 99 percent of Serb inhabitants who fled or inhabited other rural areas in the region. Approximately the Serbian community in this region makes 6.1%-9.4% of all inhabitants; apart from those who live in the town of Gnjilane, there are also those who live in the villages of Bilinica/ Bilincë, Gornje Kusce, Kmetovce/ Kmetoc, Koretište, Mozgovo, Paralovo, Poneš/ Ponesh, Malisevo/ Malishevë, Straža, Šilovo/ Shillovë, Cernica/ Cërnice, Dobričane/ Dobërçan, Donji Livoč/ Livoç i Ultë, Gornji Livoč/ Livoç i Epërm, Lipovica/ Lipovicë, Nosalje/ Nasalë, Prilepnica/ Perlepticë, Velekince/ Velekincë, Vlačica/ Vlashticë, Vrbica/ Vërbicë and Žegra/ Zhegër. The Kosovo Serb community constitutes a numerical minority in the municipalities of Uroševac/ Ferizaj, approximately 0.036%- 0.06% of the total municipal population, mostly returnees and they primarily live in villages of Babljak/ Bablak, Srpski Babuš/ Babushi Serb, Muhadžer Talinovac/ Talinoc i Muhaxherëve and Softovic/ Softaj. The number of Kosovo Serbs residing in the municipalities of Kamenica and Vitina has

decreased due to the establishment of two new Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities Ranilug and Klokot within their original territory. Kosovo Serbs living in the eastern part of the region Kosovsko Pomoravlje/ Anamorava have been culturally, administratively and logistically linked to Gnjilane town. The town of Štrpce/ Shtërpçë is purely Serbian, one of the Kosovo largest Serbian enclaves, with a small Roma community. It consists of sixteen villages including the town of Shtërpce. The population is 13 600, of which 9 100 are Serbs. The municipality also houses 700 to 1 000 displaced persons, mostly from Uroševac and Prizren. Albanian and Serbian communities both live in mono-ethnic villages, eight of the villages are Serb-inhabited, four are Albanian-inhabited and four are with ethnically mixed population. The Serb community lives in the villages of Brezovica/ Brezovicë, Jažince/ Jazhincë, Vrbeštica/ Vërbeshiticë, Sevc/ Sevcë, Beverc/ Berevce, Sušice/ Sushicë, Gornja Bitinja/ Biti e Epërme, Donja Bitinja/ Biti e Poshtme, Gotovuša/ Gotovushë and Drajkovce/ Drekoc. Inter-community relations in the Gnjilane region are stable and slightly better than in other parts of Kosovo (OSCE, 2010a; ICG 2009, ECMIK, 2011).

In the Gnjilane region, according to the OSCE (2010b) five out of eight municipalities adopted a returns strategy in 2009, Gnjilane, Uroševac, Novo Brdo, Vitina, Kamenica, while as of June 2010 only Novo Brdo has reviewed its strategy and endorsed a new one covering the period 2010-2013. The Novo Brdo strategy for 2010 includes the continuation of inter-ethnic dialogue activities in potential return sites in the municipality, such as the villages of Bostane/ Bostan, Prekovac/ Prekoc, Trnicevce/ Tërniqec and Izvor, as well as a second phase of returns to the village of Klobukar/ Kllobukar. In Štrpce, Kacanik and Đeneral Jankovic/ Hani i Elezit, no strategies have been developed to assist displaced persons or returnees in 2009 or 2010. In Štrpce municipality, the last municipal returns strategy was written and approved for 2008. The municipality now focuses on achieving a durable solution for the approximately 700 Kosovo Serb displaced persons and Serb refugees from Croatia living in several collective centers in the municipality. In Kacanik the last return strategy was written in 2006 and municipal officials have shown no willingness to engage in returns-related activities. Đeneral Jankovic has not yet engaged in drafting a returns strategy since its conversion from a pilot municipal unit into a fully fledged municipality in August 2008.

The municipalities of Gnjilane, Uroševac and Novo Brdo have been generally supportive of returns by Kosovo Serb, Roma and Ashkali displaced persons to different villages and urban areas. For instance, within the Return and Reintegration to Kosovo I project (RRKI), supported by UNDP, 15 houses were reconstructed for Kosovo Serb families in the villages of Gornje Kusce/ Kufcë e Epërme, Pasjane/ Pasjan and Parteš/ Partesh. In Uroševac, within the framework of the UNDP managed projects, 9 houses were constructed for Kosovo Serb families in the village of Softovic by April 2010, however although members of these families have taken possession of these houses their actual return is still pending. In the Novo Brdo municipality, returns-related activities have focused mainly on the implementation of the organized returns project to the village of Klobukar, funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and the municipality. In July 2009, 22 Kosovo Serb families returned to their newly reconstructed houses in the village. Municipal institutions, in particular officials of the newly established municipal department for communities and returns, are actively engaged in assisting the returnees

with civil registration procedures as well as other outstanding issues related to the returns project. In the municipalities of Vitina and Kamenica, only a few returns related initiatives were implemented during 2009 or 2010. In Štrpce, Kacanik, and Deneral Jankovic, there have been no significant returns-related activities in 2009 and 2010. In Štrpce, activities have been focused on finding a solution for displaced persons living in the Brezovica/ Brezovicë collective centers. In June 2010, the municipality allocated municipal land and issued a tender for the construction of three apartment buildings to accommodate displaced persons currently living in the collective centers and other socially vulnerable persons (OSCE, 2010b).

In the Prishtina region, according to the OSCE (2010a) Kosovo Serbs constitute a minority in four out of seven municipalities: Prishtina- approximately 0.4- 0.5% of the total population, Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë 1.6-2%, Lipljane 2.63% and Obilic 10%. The establishment of the new Kosovo Serb-majority municipality of Gracanica has reduced the number of Kosovo Serbs in the three municipalities of Pristina, Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë and Lipljane, while it has not affected numbers in the Obilic, where currently reside about 3400 Serbs, primarily, in villages of Babin Most/ Babimoc, Miloševo/Milloshëve, Plemetina/ Plemetin- approximately 1000 Serbs, Crkvena Vodica/ Caravodicë, Janjina Voda and Obilic town. Kosovo Serbs also inhabit an area known as “Prishtina rural north”, in the village of Čaglavica/ Cagllavice, Gornja Brnica/ Bërnice e Eperme, Donja Brnica/ Bërnice të Poshtme, Slivovo/ Slivove, Devet Jugovica/ Nente Jugoviq, and Lebane/ Lebanë, while only a few remained in Prishtina city. The most important religious monument is the Serbian Orthodox Monastery in Gracanica, which is also the seat of the Archbishop. In Podujevo, in Medregovac/ Metergoc village there is a small Kosovo Serb community composed of 7 elderly people who live close to the border with Serbia, and one of them participates in the communities committee and municipal community safety council in Podujevo (KIPRED, 2009d; ECMIK, 2011).

In the Priština region, four out of seven municipalities, Kosovo Polje/ Fushë Kosovë, Lipljan/ Lipjan, Obilic/ Obiliq and Podujevo, adopted a returns strategy in 2009. Five municipalities, namely Kosovo Polje, Lipljan, Podujevo, Priština and Štimlje have endorsed a new strategy for 2010. The Obilic municipality has not yet endorsed a strategy for 2010 due to lack of support from the municipal leadership. The 2009 returns strategy focused on returnees in the Sharagan/Saragan mahalla (Obiliq/Obilic town), Plementin/ Plementina, Milloshevë/ Miloševo, Obiliq/ Obilic town, and Babin Most/Babimoc. In Prishtinë/ Priština, Fushë Kosovë/ Kosovo Polje, Obiliq/ Obilic, and Shtime/ Štimlje several initiatives aimed at supporting the return of Kosovo Serb, Roma and Ashkali displaced persons have been implemented in 2009 and 2010. In Prishtinë/Priština, the main returns initiative targeting Kosovo Serb families, displaced in Kosovo and within the region, is currently being implemented in the village of Laplje Selo/ Llapjeselle by the Ministry of Communities and Returns in co-operation with the municipality. In 2010, 33 apartments were handed over to project beneficiaries, including 19 families displaced outside Kosovo and 14 in different locations in Kosovo. The construction of apartments for an additional 88 displaced families is underway (OSCE, 2010b,)

The Pec region is part of the western area of Kosovo. In Serbian history it is known as “Metohija” which literally means “land of the Church”, illustrating the religious importance of the region for the Kosovo Serb community. Two of the most significant cultural and religious sites of Serbian Orthodox heritage, the Patriarchate in Pec and the Visoki Decani Monastery, are located in this region. The Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church is also the Archbishop of Pec. OSCE (2010a) finds that Kosovo Serbs live in five out of the six municipalities: Pec, Decane, Istok, Klina/ Klinë and Đakovica/ Gjakovë. In the Pec municipality, Kosovo Serbs constitute roughly 0.7% of the total population, with the biggest concentration in the village of Belo Polje/ Bellopolje, Sigal/ Cige, Brestovik and Goraždevac/ Gorazhdevc. This village represents the centre of the community’s life in the region, with about 900 Kosovo Serbs inhabited and some Kosovo Montenegrins. In Decane municipality, Kosovo Serbs were present in small numbers before the conflict. Today they constitute approximately 0.1% of the total population in the municipality. In the Istok municipality, Kosovo Serbs amount to between 2.3% and 3% of the total population. Prior to the conflict, many resided in the Istok town neighborhood of “Ljug” which was destroyed during the conflict, where now remain around 50 Kosovo Serbs. The hub of Kosovo Serb life has now shifted to Osojane/ Osojan, the largest return place and the base of services provided by the Republic of Serbia to the community. In the Klina municipality, Kosovo Serbs constitute approximately 1.9% of the total population and reside mostly in the north, bordering the Kosovo Serb inhabited areas of the municipality of Istok. Almost no Serb remained in a municipality of Djakovica, according to the Municipal Community Office only 4 Serbs live in this municipality (ECMIK, 2011).

In the Pec/ Pejë region, municipal returns strategies were in place in three out of six municipalities in 2009, the Pec, Istok and Klina municipalities. All municipalities in the region have yet to adopt new returns strategies for 2010. The Decane and Dakovica municipalities did not adopt a returns strategy for 2009. Finally, Junik municipality has not yet drafted a returns strategy since its conversion from a pilot municipal unit into a fully fledged municipality in August 2008 (OSCE, 2010b).

The municipalities of Pec, Istok and Klina have been generally supportive of the return of displaced persons belonging to the Kosovo Serb, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. A number of Kosovo Serb displaced families have been assisted with their return to several locations in the Pec municipality. The Istok municipality supported the return of Kosovo Serb displaced persons to the villages of Đurakovac, Osojane, Crkolez and other villages. Furthermore, the municipality co-operated directly with the Ministry of Communities and Returns and a local NGO’s to support the return of 20 Kosovo Serb families to the village of Sinaje in 2009. In 2010, the municipality further cooperated directly with the Ministry of Communities and Returns and other stakeholders in assisting Kosovo Serb families spontaneously returning to different locations within the municipality, including to Žac, Dragoljevac and Muževine. In Klina, 17 Kosovo Serb families have recently returned within the framework of the RRKII project implemented in partnership with the municipality, while a number of other families have been approved for return assistance. Furthermore, the municipality has supported the return of Kosovo Serb displaced persons to Pogradec, Rudice and Pjetric as well as Berkovo

villages. In Decane and Djakovica, only a few activities have been implemented to support the return of displaced persons. In Djakovica, no significant projects were implemented to support returns (OSCE, 2010b).

In the Prizren region, the Kosovo Serbs live in two municipalities. According to OSCE (2010a) in Prizren, where they constitute approximately 0.07% of the total population they reside mainly in the rural villages of Župa/Zhupë valley or Bistrica valley and Orahovac. In the former, the Serb villages include Sredcka/ Sreckë, Bogosevci/ Bogoshevcë, Racajci/ Racajcë, Pejcici, Milacici and Stajkovce/ Stajkovcë, while the ethnically mixed ones include Musnikovo/ Mushnikovë, Planjane, Gornje Selo, Nebregoste, Nebregoshtë, Manastirica, Manastiricë, Recane/ Recanë, Gornje Ljubinjë/ Ljubinja e Epërme, Dornje Ljubinjë/ Ljubinja e Poshtme, Drajcici and Lokvica/ Lokvicë. In the latter, they amount to about 1.3% of the total population, concentrating mostly in the upper part of Orahovac town, about 450 habitants and in the village of Velika Hoča/Hoçë e Madhe where reside 850 Kosovo Serb. Before the 1999 conflict, there were nine settlements in the municipality of Orahovac with a mixed Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian population. Prizren municipality and international organizations funded the construction of 32 housing facilities for Serb returnees in the village of Stajkovce. However, just two former residents returned. Several Serb houses were reconstructed in the villages of Sredcka/ Sreckë, Musnikovo/ Mushnikovë and Gornje Selo. The ethnically mixed village of Musnikovo is the biggest of all. Some 70 Serbs have never left the village, with its Albanian and Bosniak majority. As for the other ethnically mixed villages, 11 Serb families with 20 members live in Sredcka, 20 families with 36 members in Drajcici, one family of two members in Stajkovce, two 3-member families in Planjane, two 2-member families in Lokvica, and 9 families in Gornje Selo. All of these are mostly elderly people. The Kosovo Serb community has been an integral part of Prizren's multi-cultural and tolerant traditions, and Prizren town remains an important cultural and historical centre for the community. Many religious and cultural heritage sites of significant importance for Kosovo Serbs, protected through the applied law on Special Protective Zones, are located in the region. The aging community and ongoing departures from the region account for the slight decrease since June 2009 in number of Kosovo Serbs residing in Prizren (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, 2008)

In the Prizren region, all municipalities but Mamuša adopted a returns strategy in 2009. As of June 2010, only Suva Reka and Dragaš had reviewed their strategies and endorsed a new policy document for 2010. In the Orahovac municipality, main areas of focus in 2009 included the start of a returns project to the Zocište village, the identification of new possible returns locations, and the gradual integration process of non-majority returnees. Prizren municipality has been actively engaged in providing returns assistance during 2009 and 2010. Amongst the main initiatives is the return project to the village of Sërbica e Poshtme/ Donja Srbica, for which the municipality has held several meetings with international stakeholders and the receiving community. Furthermore, preparations for the reconstruction of ten Kosovo Serb houses in the centre of Prizren town initiated and funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and international donors are underway (OSCE, 2010b).

Suva Reka and Orahovac are generally supportive of returns and take ownership of the process. The Suva Reka municipal returns officer, with logistical support from UNHCR, participated in a two-day visit to Belgrade, where he and Ministry of Communities and Returns representatives met with displaced Kosovo Serbs from the villages of Mushutishtë/ Mušutište, Rečan/ Recane, Leshan/ Lešane, and Mohlan/ Movljane to encourage their return and to inform them about the current situation in the municipality. In March 2010, the municipal returns officer, representatives of the Ministry of Communities and Returns, the Danish Refugee Council and UNHCR took part in an assessment visit, where they met 50 potential Kosovo Serb beneficiaries. In addition, during 2009 and 2010, one visit to Orahovac town for 12 displaced Kosovo Serbs and one visit to Zociste village for 30 displaced Kosovo Serbs were organized with the active involvement of municipal officials, including the mayor and other senior officials. Land allocation has been promised several times by the mayor and other senior municipal officials, but has not yet been achieved. The Dragaš municipality continues to encourage the return of displaced persons to the municipality, and regularly provides potential returnees with advice and guidance on assistance available upon return. Finally, in Mališevo and Mamuša, no assistance projects for displaced persons have recently been undertaken (OSCE, 2010b).

In the Mitrovica region, the Kosovo Serb community resides in the municipalities of Vučitrn/ Vushtrri, constituting approximately 3.4% of the total municipal population, Srbica/ Skenderaj, where it is roughly 0.4%, while a small number is set in the urban and rural areas in southern Mitrovica (OSCE, 2010a). Before the 1999 conflict, between 4,000 to 4,500 Kosovo Serbs lived in the southern Mitrovica town. Most of them were displaced during and after the conflict to the northern Mitrovica town and central Serbia. In the Vucitrn municipality, Kosovo Serbs live in the mono- ethnic village of Priluzhje/ Prelluzhë and small number of them live in Gojbulja/Gojbulë, Grace/Gracë and Banjska/ Banjskë where real or perceived limited freedom of movement continues to affect access to services. While attempts have been made to facilitate the return process for Serbs in this region, especially to the Banjska village, most returns have not been sustainable and almost no Serbs have settled in this village. In the Srbica municipality, the approximately 300 Kosovo Serbs live in the villages of Suvo Grlo /Syriganë and Banje /Bajë, where they constitute very isolated communities that experience freedom of movement restrictions due to security concerns and lack of transport (ECMIK, 2011). Forces of International Community maintain the check point over the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Devič situated 5 km southern of Srbica (www.kosovo.net/devic.html).

In the Mitrovica region, only two out of six municipalities have adopted a returns strategy or action plan for 2009 and 2010, Vucitrn and Srbica municipalities, even though UNHCR (2011) estimated that there are 6,990 Kosovo Serbs displaced from south Mitrovica and other municipalities to north Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Leposaviq/ Leposavic and Zveqan/ Zvecan. There are also 7,317 Kosovo Albanian IDPs, mainly in south Mitrovica originating from the northern part of town, Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic municipalities. In the case of Vushtrri/ Vucitrn, the 2010 strategy includes the continuation of municipal support for returns to villages of Dalak/ Doljak and Shitaricë/

Štitarica, including activities such as road reconstruction. A similar project is planned for the Kosovo Serb inhabited village of Prilužje/ Prelluzhë and the settlement of Banjskë/ Banjska. The municipality adopted a municipal returns action plan focused on returns to Runik/ Rudnik and infrastructure projects in the Kosovo Serbinhabited villages of Banja/ Bajë and Suvo Grlo/ Syrganë. In the three northern municipalities of Leposavic/ Leposaviq, Zubin Potok and Zvečan/ Zvečan, no municipal returns strategies are currently in place. The Mitrovica municipality has never had a written policy or strategy on returns (OSCE, 2010b).

In the municipalities of Vucitrn and Srbica, only a few initiatives targeting displaced persons were implemented in 2009 and 2010. For instance, a returns project funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns was implemented in the villages of Doljak/ Dalak/ and Stitarica/ Shitaricë in partnership with the Vucitrn municipality. The project included the reconstruction of 15 houses, 13 houses for Kosovo Serb families and 2 for Kosovo Albanian vulnerable cases. Little and irregular assistance comes from municipal institutions or international organizations to support displaced persons in the northern municipalities of Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic. In Zubin Potok, UNHCR is seeking funding to support Croatian Serb and Kosovo Serb displaced persons. A housing rehabilitation project foresees the construction of twenty houses in Zupce/ Zupç and Jagnjenica/ Jagnjenicë villages (OSCE, 2010b).

Northern Kosovo, including the municipalities of Leposavic, Zubin Potok, Zvečan and a small part of Mitrovica municipality north of the Ibar River, is about one-tenth of Kosovo's territory, 3 % of its population, mostly settled by Serb community (ICG, 2011). Since the 1999 conflict, the municipality has been *de facto* divided in two: Mitrovica North with a Serb majority and Mitrovica South with an Albanian majority. With no census since 1991, it is estimated that between 55 000 and 65 000 Serbs and 6 000 to 10 000 non-Serbs, mainly Albanians and Bosniaks, live there, with the latter predominantly set along the north bank of the Ibar River in Mitrovica, in one large village Čabra/ Çabër in Zubin Potok and in a few small settlements in Leposavic (ICG, 2011). There are a few Serbian families living in the Albanian majority south, in particular in the village of Svinjare. Many Serbs displaced from other areas of Kosova have settled in north Mitrovica, including those displaced from the southern part of the city. In the northern part of town, according to the IKS (2009), there are approximately 20 000 inhabitants, 17 000 of whom are Kosovo Serbs (5 000 to 7 000 are displaced persons). The remaining 3 000 include Kosovo Albanians, Bosniaks, Turks, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian and a small Gorani community. In the north lies the ethnically mixed village of Suvi Do/Suhodoll, as well as other ethnically mixed neighborhoods. Consequently, north Mitrovica has become an urban centre for Kosovo Serbs. While some Serbs have attempted to return to the south, so far only one family has succeeded. Yet, according to a report by the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) in September 2009 there is a modest increase in the number of IDPs that have returned, compared to the same period the year before. Zvečan (once part of Mitrovica municipality), is still largely a suburb of that city. In Zubin Potok, administratively part of Montenegro at times in the twentieth century, Montenegrin dialects are still common, and society is clan based. Most of northern Leposavic

municipality was part of the neighboring Serbian municipality of Raška until 1956, when it was incorporated into Kosovo to increase the number of Serbs there. It is pastoral and relaxed municipality, long time without having any close contact with Albanians (ECMIK, 2011; www.osce.org/kosovo/38678)

III Introducing the process of decentralization

3.1 Ahtisaari's Decentralization Plan

Martti Ahtisaari was a UN Special Envoy at the Kosovo status process negotiations who created a specific frame for Kosovo's decentralization. The Ahtisaari Plan establishes six new or expanded municipalities that have a Kosovo Serb majority. According to this plan, these municipalities should enjoy high degree of local self government with the right to inter-municipal and cross-border cooperation in the areas of their own and extended competencies. Municipalities are responsible for their respective citizens' problems and concerns for daily life and in a long-term progress. Local governance includes decisions on education at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels; public primary health care; local economic development; urban and rural planning; public housing; naming of roads, streets and other public places; right to create and use media on their own language; the provision of public services and utilities and many others. One of the most significant responsibilities is the entitlement to individual budgets and financial resources. To ensure "greater municipal autonomy in the allocation and expenditure of central funds," Kosovo should establish an equal and transparent block grant system (Ahtisaari, 2007, pp.6-18). Additionally, relations with Belgrade will not have to be strict and municipalities still have the right to receive financial assistance from Serbia, as long as the Ministry of Local Government Administration monitors the arrangements. The Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo (SOC), including its clergy and their affiliates, activities and property is afforded additional security and other protections for the full enjoyment of its rights, privileges and immunities, with the right to remain the sole owner of its property in Kosovo. Decentralization would put an end to the confusion of parallel structures and the unnecessary harm they bring to Kosovo Serbs. This plan is a strong option for preserving the territorial integrity of Kosovo while also providing autonomy and rights to significant groups (Manning, 2010, pp.113-4)

3.2 Legal Framework for decentralization plan

Municipalities are the basic units of self-government in Kosovo that execute their exclusive and delegated powers. The Law on Local Self Government has extended the areas where municipalities have exclusive competences. This law, together with the Law on Administrative Municipal Borders and Law on Local Government Finances, regulate the local governance in Kosovo. This legal framework determines that municipalities shall exercise their exclusive and delegated competences. The Government of Kosovo cannot annul municipal acts - legislative or executive – even if they don't correspond with Kosovo law or with the Constitution. In such cases, the Government may request that the municipality re-examines such decisions or acts. The request shall state the

grounds of the alleged violation of the constitution or law and shall not suspend the execution of the municipal decision or other act at issue. Municipalities are then, obliged to respond to such requests for re-examination within 30 days of notification. If municipalities do not respond within the given timeline, or respond negatively regarding reconsideration of a particular act, the Government can only bring the issue to a competent court or to the Constitutional Court. This lack of possibility for governmental intervention is the single factor behind the central government's fear for fully functionalizing new municipalities. The central government fears that in a few years time the new municipalities will take act in violation of Kosovo's Constitution and other laws. However, this fear is groundless. The Government has the full legal authority to dissolve municipal assemblies and to call for new municipal elections. This irrational fear has become a "political driver" for slowing down the overall decentralization process (KIPRED, 2010; Law on Local Self Government of Republic of Kosovo, Law Nr. 03/L-040).

3.3 Decentralization process in Kosovo: the acceptance

Following Kosovo's declaration of independence on February 17 2008, the new country faces a number of challenges. One of the most sensitive issues is treatment of the Kosovo Serb community. The independence of Kosovo has directly affected the Albanians and Serbs and their delicate and fragile relations, which is why the priority of international community in Kosovo became a decentralization plan. At the central level provisions of the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement guarantee rights of communities and their members, and they are also reflected in the Kosovo Constitution, as a separate chapter on the rights of communities and their members, and a special Law on the Rights and Interests of Communities and their Members, establish the highest norms and guarantees for protection of communities and their rights (KIPRED, 2008b). Complementary to this, the plan also envisaged special measures aimed at encouraging and ensuring active participation of non-majority communities, mainly Kosovo Serbs, in public life, as well as good governance and more efficient delivery of public services through an enhanced and sustainable system of local self-government, through decentralization *framework* and *creation of new municipalities*. The key element of political dimension of decentralization was "creating independent political entities, municipalities, with their elected autonomous politicians" (KDI, 2009). The whole result of the process of negotiations about decentralization, within negotiations about the status, reflected on the *Ahtisaari's Comprehensive Proposal for Kosovo Status Settlement*, which gave a whole chapter to this process. The model for this framework has been specified in the Law on Local Self Government (LLSG), where Kosovo Serbs would constitute majority, enhanced competences of the new Serb-majority municipalities include local policing and judiciary, health care, education, social services, local economic development, financial and human assistance from Serbia, and other features. The provisions of the plan became an essential part of legal framework of Kosovo and institutions of Kosovo (KLG, 2009).

The process of reformation of local government and decentralization is a very complex process that incorporates in it political, socio-economic and governance elements. Politically speaking, it offers voters the opportunity to elect local leadership and establish closer link between them and local community, thought to serve as a good basis to keep them more accountable. However, at the governance level, maintaining local-level political representation efficient demands paying due attention to ensuring continuous development and sustainability of mechanisms and institutions capable of ensuring efficient and transparent governance, policies, administration, budget. This whole shift also requires gradual transfer of competencies from the central institutions to local government, whereas the latter, in turn, depends on increase of institutional capacities to ensure effective local self-governance, including reform of the local financial system. Basically, establishing and functioning of such complex system of governance requires creating a precise and sustainable legal framework that includes constitutional provisions, new laws and judicial proceedings, in order to effectively enforce the laws, whether are of central government or of municipalities, depending from circumstances and competencies of each of them. Creating a sustainable and effective system of local self-governance in all territory of Kosovo is expected to provide quicker and effective municipal services that would eventually improve life quality for all its citizens, by paying special attention to the needs and concerns of non-major communities (KDI, 2009).

The plan for decentralization also called for the creation of five new Serb-majority municipalities Gračanica/ Gračanice, Klokot-Vrbovac/ Klokot-Vërbovc, Ranilug/ Ranillug, Partes/ Partesh and Mitrovica North and the enlargement of one Novobërdo/ Novobërdë. Newly created municipalities carry emerging responsibilities and they are increasingly becoming the obligation of their citizens. The question and challenge that are facing the new structures of Kosovo's local government is whether or not each municipality is able to deliver its new responsibilities and whether the establishment of new municipalities in Serb-majority areas is feasible at all. Contrary to expectations, the proclamation of independence has diffused the Albanian nationalism that designated the right circumstances for full acceptance of Kosovo Serbs as an integral part of the society of Kosovo. Meanwhile, Kosovo Serbs aspire to have a dignified and predictable life in Kosovo, but live in fear from Kosovo's statehood and still very influential Belgrade's policies. However, the most important is that they are determined to stay and build their lives in Kosovo (KLG, 2009).

3.4. Kosovo Communities' acceptance

One of the greatest challenges for implementing the decentralization plan in Kosovo has been the level of acceptance from Kosovo communities. The decentralization process is directly linked to the local community and as such requires cooperation, acceptance and participation by all communities in Kosovo. Without support from the Kosovo communities, the time, the energy and the resources spent on the decentralization process

may run the risk of being wasted. Community acceptance of the decentralization process, of both Serbs and Albanians, has two dimensions: *a political dimension and a practical dimension*. The transferring of power from central to local government level can have positive outcomes for all communities of Kosovo. Under the existing laws, the Serb community is given a high level of enhanced competencies where they constitute the majority. They are given power to administer themselves and hold autonomy in areas of primary and secondary health, education, including at the university level, as well as in cultural and other affairs. These Serb-inhabited majority municipalities are allowed to cooperate with Belgrade and accept financial and technical support, a process that is required to be transparent and channeled through directly-elected local representatives and governments. Although this support should be channeled through the Ministry of Economy and Finance, its budgetary destination will not be changed (KLG, 2009).

Decentralization, however, had been taken on negative connotations for the Serb community when it is linked to, and understood as coming from, the package that helped along and encouraged the way for Kosovo Independence. Accepting a part of the independence package would mean accepting the independence of Kosovo, which the Serb community mostly refuses. This has predominately been the case with Serbs from the north of Ibar River and those in enclaves who have seen the outcome of decentralization as a blueprint for the independence of Kosovo. In this sense, decentralization has become 'politicized' and thus a sensitive issue that is difficult to push forward (KLG, 2009).

The Albanian community, on the other hand, can only be positively affected by the practical improvement of municipal services and service delivery through local institutions. However, decentralization for the Albanian community has also been politicized. Some parts of the Albanian population believe that the expansion of old and the creation of new municipalities with a Serb majority create and strengthen Serb controlled areas. This is ultimately viewed by some as preventing Kosovo from having full sovereignty over its entire territory. As such, parts of the Albanian population feel hesitant towards decentralization. As a result of the rising mistrust about what decentralization brings to Kosovo communities, the International Community has faced various difficulties when attempting to proceed with the implementation of new municipalities (KLG, 2009).

The Serb community was openly controlled and influenced from the Serbian Government in Belgrade. It rejected any form of decentralization unless it provided them full powers over the governance of the municipalities. After a while, the Kosovo Serb community has shown some willingness to accept decentralization only if the process is status-neutral, if the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA) and International Civilian Office (ICO) are not involved and if decentralization does not carry the Kosovo Republic flag. The majority of Serbs who were not familiar with the details of the Ahtisaari plan saw the process of decentralization with suspicion, wrongly believing that it will take them away even the most basic competences such as control of schools and hospitals (KLG, 2009).

Decentralization and the creation of the new Serb majority municipalities are essential for sustaining and stabilizing the Serb community in the new state and for breaking the status-quo in the north of Kosovo. The success of decentralization provides the strongest institutional and legal framework within which the Albanians and the Kosovo Serbs have a historic opportunity to cooperate and work together. This improves the opportunity for co-existence given two decades of institutional separation that followed the armed conflict. The unexpected participation in decentralization system was a turnout with a clear signal that Kosovo Serbs, especially those living south from the Iber River, have lost their confidence in Serbia's government and its parallel structures operating in Kosovo and that they are certain to stay and build new future in Kosovo. Although constitution of local governments did not end the existence of such structures, it is considered to be the major turn in political and social sentiment of the Serb population living in Kosovo (KIPRED, 2009b; KIPRED, 2010).

3.5. Belgrade's acceptance

Belgrade sees the process of decentralization not as a mechanism to strengthen the power and protection of the rights of Serbs in Kosovo but rather as a mechanism that legitimizes the independence of Kosovo. As such, with financial support and through its parallel structures, Belgrade has managed to isolate the Kosovo Serb community from the integration processes of Kosovo, and influenced it not to participate in the larger Kosovo society. In this way, Belgrade has managed to create and control parallel structures within the territory of Kosovo. These structures have become the strongest mechanisms for boycotting the decentralization process and for undermining the implementation of the Ahtisaari plan. There has been a recent weakening of Belgrade's hold on the Kosovo Serb community. The current global economic crisis has negatively affected Serbia, straining its budget and forcing the Belgrade government to decrease the amount of support to the Serb community. As a result, Belgrade's control over the Serb community in Kosovo has reduced. For example, despite Belgrade's call for boycotting Kosovo institutions, over 20 Serbs recently accepted to return to the Kosovo Police Services and many are currently applying for Kosovo documents and accepting Kosovo salaries. Lately, the Serb community, especially those from the south of Ibar River, appear to have taken a more long-term and pragmatic approach towards the decentralization process. In fact, about 300 Serbs have expressed their wish to be part of Municipal Preparation Team (MPT), which serve as the embryonic tool for establishing 5 new municipalities. This positive response also comes after a series of low-key meetings between the Minister of the MLGA and the Serbian community during the first year of implementation of decentralization process (KLGJ, 2009).

The interests of the Serbs north and south of Ibar River are increasingly diverging. The Serbs south of Ibar see the process of creation of new municipalities as the viable option which will provide them with perspectives for a sustainable, better life and development in Kosovo. They see the partition of Kosovo as a catastrophic outcome for their future

which would uproot them from their settlements. Therefore they are exploring opportunities to participate in the local elections. But before they take any further steps, a number of Serb community leaders want to ensure that Belgrade will not oppose them openly for such a move. Kosovo Serbs in the north are in a dubious position. A number of them are eager to participate in the Kosovo municipal elections in order to grasp formally the new municipality of Mitrovica North, while majority is fully dependent on public or silent instructions of Belgrade. If Kosovo Serbs do not get politically organized and boycott the elections, they are risking to lose a unique opportunity to decide about their fate, but if they decide to participate they know that they could gain representatives in Kosovo Government and power on local level (KIPRED, 2009b). Nevertheless, the leadership in Belgrade has cemented its strategic goal for partition of Kosovo after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issues an advisory opinion about the legality of declaration of Kosovo's independence in the first half of 2010. The leaders in Belgrade believe that the ICJ's opinion will favor Serbia's position, and that will open a door for a new round of negotiations with Kosovo's leadership which will ultimately result in a negotiated partition of Kosovo (KIPRED, 2009).

Kosovo's MLGA has made impressive efforts in outreach and establishing the trust with the Serb community for decentralization. However, the progress in creation of new municipalities has staled at the time when fundamental measures should have been taken for timely creation of the new municipalities. The MLGA and ICO have certified municipal preparatory team (MPT) for each new municipality. The main tasks of MPT were to evaluate and specify the priority needs of municipalities, including the local infrastructure, offer public services and carry out necessary trainings, to prepare the work plan for MPT and include the deadlines and reference points about the successes and reports for issues of municipal competencies, to coordinate with 'mother municipalities' about the expenditures and the reserved budget of the new municipality, and in coordination with the 'mother municipality' take the necessary steps to fulfill the objectives of the work plan. Furthermore, MPT proposes organizational structures for new municipalities, in accordance with the applicable law, inform the citizens of the new municipality about the developments and encourage the participation of citizens in the local elections and after local elections, assist the transfer of competencies to the elected officials (<http://www.ico-kos.org/ico/?id=25>).

IV Creation of new municipalities

As already mentioned above, the plan for decentralization envisaged the creation of new municipalities; after the number of laws that were passed by the Assembly of Kosovo in support of local governance reforms and after the creation of MPTs the assessing of community needs, developing budget and personnel requirements for the new municipalities had begun.

The establishment of the new municipalities requires not only a wide acceptance from their communities but it also seeks community participation and support throughout the establishment process. The structure of all new municipalities is the same, and according to this structure the new municipalities have specific functional departments since their establishment: Department of Administration and Personnel includes activities related to territorial organization, personnel training, translation in official languages, handling the human resources and dealing with the administration of the municipality; Department of Health and Social Welfare, includes activities related to primary health care, monitoring of the main center for family health care and other centers and issuing licenses, employment, pay and training of municipal social workers; Department of Education, Culture and Sport includes activities related to managing pre-school, primary, secondary schools, maintain the repair of buildings and educational equipment and institutions for people with disabilities; Department of Economics, Finance, Budget and Inspection includes activities related to development of municipal provision of finance and economics, monitoring procedures and budget execution system, maintenance of registers of the collected revenue from own sources and Department of Urban Planning, Cadastre and Geodesy includes activities related to monitoring and participating in the development of municipal plans of development and protection of forests, granting permission for the construction and their revocation, water management, public parks management (MLGA, 2007).

The most important point for Serb community that determines the political system and governance in Kosovo is plan of creating 5 new municipalities with Kosovo Serb majority: Gračanica/ Graçanica, Ranilug/ Ranillugu, Parteš/ Parteshi, Klokot- Vrbovac/ Kllokot/Verbovci, Mitrovica North and expansion of one municipality Novo Brdo/ Novobërda. Decentralization, including the creation of new municipalities, has been one of the most significant developments for local governance in Kosovo. Discussions of decentralization, particularly prior to the November 2009 elections, were characterized by a highly politicized debate centered on the creation of new Serb-majority municipalities, and misperceptions about decentralization have drawn more attention than its potential to improve local governance and public service delivery across Kosovo. The new municipalities were created or enlarged on a very short time line, and have begun the substantive work of governance relatively quickly. The performance of these municipalities has considerable implications for local governance in Kosovo, and it is therefore important to understand their functioning and progress in the initial months of their existence (IPOL, 2011).

4.1. Local Election 2009

In 15 November 2009, local elections were held across Kosovo, including in the new municipalities of Gračanica/ Gračanica, Ranilug/ Ranillugu and Klokot- Vrbovac/ Kllokot/Verbovci. In municipality of Parteš/ Parteshi elections were held in June 2010 and a date has not yet been set for northern Mitrovica. Kosovo completed one of the most challenging phases of Ahtisaari's Comprehensive Status Proposal of creation of new municipalities and the process of decentralization by holding the municipal elections in 2009. The municipal elections on November 15 were held to elect the new mayors and municipal assemblies. In municipalities where mayoral candidates did not receive sufficient votes, a runoff was held on December 13. The Kosovo Serb parties won on the first round the mayoral posts in three municipalities – Gračanica, Klokot/Vrbovac and Ranilug, while runoffs decided the mayors in Novo Brdo and Štrpce. Also, the Kosovo Serb parties won the majority in the assemblies of Gračanica, Klokot/ Vrbovac and Ranilug and while they lost in Novo Brdo (KIPRED, 2009a)

The Independent Liberal Party (SLS) played a crucial role to mobilize the Serbs in Gračanica, Klokot/ Vrbovac and Štrpce. They have developed a powerful party structure and have used their participation in the government of Kosovo to expand their influence. Rada Trajkovic and Randjel Nojkić also played a very important role in mobilizing the Serbs in Gračanica. The Office of Community Affairs (OCA) within the Office of Prime Minister played the decisive role to mobilize the turnout in Ranilug. The elections showed that the SLS which participates in the institutions of Kosovo emerged to be the most dominant Kosovo Serb political entity (KIPRED, 2009a).

KIPRED (2009a) reports that 22 Serb political entities certified for the elections participated in 17 Kosovo municipalities, including the three municipalities in northern Kosovo – Zvečan, Leposavic and Zubin Potok. There was no Serb turnout in the north, but it was the highest in most of areas south of Ibar/ Ibër River. In both rounds on November 15 and December 13, over 10,000 Serbs cast their ballots, up from roughly 1,300 in 2007. The SLS won victories in the most contested municipalities of Gračanica where Bojan Stojanovic was elected mayor and Štrpce where Bratislav Nikolic was elected mayor. In the more rural new municipalities, Klokot/ Vrbovec, Ranilug and Novo Brdo, there was less competition – the SLS had the only candidate in Klokot where Sasa Mirkovic was elected mayor, a local initiative was the only one on the ballot in Ranilug where Gradimir Mikic was elected mayor and Serb turnout in Novo Brdo was very low and resulted in an Albanian getting elected as mayor in the second round with 25.5% turnout. The overall Serb electoral body in Kosovo is estimated to be around 80,000 (EP, 2010).

These elections were crucial for Kosovo because they were the first ones organized after the declaration of independence and the Serb participation was fundamental to legitimize the creation of new municipalities. Kosovo showed the capability to organize autonomously elections, while the Serb participation was unexpectedly high. Kosovo Serbs constitute the numerical majority in nine municipalities of Kosovo. Before the

November 2009 Kosovo local elections, the community was a majority in Štrpce/ Shtërpçë (Gnjilane region), in Leposavić, Zubin Potok, Zvečan and the north of Mitrovica town (Mitrovica region). Following the ballot, new Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities Ranilug and Klokot, in the Gnjilane region, and Gračanica in the Priština region have been established. It also led to the enlargement of Novo Brdo/ Novobërdë (Gnjilane region) where Kosovo Serbs now constitute the numerical majority as well. Additionally, the new municipality of Parteš (Gnjilane region) was established in June 2010.

4.2. Turnout of local elections, facts and figures

KIPRED (2009a) estimates that in **Gračanica** out of 16,317 voters, there are roughly 14000 Kosovo Serbs, 3,854 (24%) turned out to vote out of which 3,723 Serbs and 131 Albanians. The SLS received 2,216 (61%) for the mayor and 2,139 (60%) for the local assembly. Vidovdan received 423 votes (12%), Serbian Resistance Movement (SPO) 393 (11%), Serb Democratic Party for Kosovo and Metohija (SDSKiM) 208 (6%), Serbian Kosovo-Metohija Party (SKMS) 135 (4%). In **Klokot/Vrbovac** out of 2,706 voters, 687 turned out (25,4%). Only two parties ran, the SLS and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The SLS won 510 (100%) votes for the mayor, and 401 votes (65%) for the municipal assembly. In **Ranilug** out of 4,822 voters, 670 (14%) turned out, where a civic independent list Civic List for Better Ranilug (GIZOR) lead by the local SPO president won both the contest for the mayor with 421 votes (71%) and the local assembly with 411 votes (73%). The SKMS received 153 votes. In **Novo Brdo** out of 7,939 voters, 2,035 (26%) voted; 585 Kosovo Serbs turned out and 1,450 Albanians. The Serbs lost dominance in both the local assembly and the mayoral contest, although they constitute 75% of the total population in the municipality. The Civic Initiative for Better Future (GIZBB) lead by Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) received 237 votes (13%), Union of Independent Social-Democrats (SNSD) 212 votes (11%), and SLS 103 votes (6%). The Kosovo Albanian parties received – LDK 619 votes (30%), Alliance of New Kosovo (AKR) 316 votes (16%), Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) 223 votes (11%) and Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) 132 votes (6%). Out of 15 members of the local assembly the Serb parties received 5 and the Albanian ones 10 members. In the mayoral runoff on December 13 in Novo Brdo 2541 voters turned out (33%) out of which the LDK candidate for mayor received 2,032 votes (81%), and the Serb candidate from SNSD received 479 votes (19%). It's very important to note that many Serbs voted for the LDK candidate, the current mayor. The Serbs claim that the mayor has done a lot for them, directly assisted the return of internally displaced persons in Klokubar, undertook infrastructural projects and most importantly visited them after every single incident. Even the NGOs claim that LDK has done more for them than the parallel municipality.

In **Shtërpce/Štrpce** out of 12,260 voters there are roughly 8,700 Kosovo Serbs, and 3,500 Kosovo Albanians; 3,789 (31%) turned out to vote, out of which 1,626 Serbs. In the mayoral runoff on December 13, 6,343 voters turned out (54,3%), out of which 4,345

Serbs and 2,344 Albanians. The SLS candidate won 65%. The Serb turnout was larger than in any previous elections, and much larger than in parallel elections organized by Serbia in 2008 when approximately 3,500 Serbs voted (KIPRED, 2009a).

Elections in the municipality of **Parteš** were organised in June 20, 2010, after the preparation for this newly created municipality were finished. KIPRED (2010) estimates that some 65% of the 3,508 registered voters casted their ballots, electing members of the municipal assembly and two candidates for a mayoral runoff. The runoff was held in July 18, 2010, where Nenad Cvetkovic from the Citizens' Initiative Zavicaj won 58% of the votes, beating his rival Todor Mirkovic of the United Serbian List. Cvetkovic had a great support of the Kosovo government, including financial support, whereas Mirkovic was supported by the Serbia government.

The Serbs won in five municipalities, boycotted in three in northern Kosovo, lost in one, while the elections for the new municipality of Mitrovica North are still pending. The overall Serb turnout was ten times higher in the elections in independent Kosovo than in November 2007, while Kosovo was still administered by UNMIK.

Kosovo is entering a new phase of development concerning inter-ethnic relations with the implementation of decentralization, which derives from the Comprehensive Status Proposal (CSP). The participation of Kosovo Serbs in the municipal elections on November 15, 2009 has created a convenient climate for co-existence between two main communities – Albanians and Serbs – sealing the success of the decentralization process in Kosovo (KIPRED, 2010). Creation of new municipalities across ethnic lines has brought the power closer to the communities living there. So far, four new Serb-majority municipalities were created. The fifth municipality, the one of Mitrovica North, remains to be created. In addition to this, Kosovo authorities have created two new municipalities in areas inhabited by Albanians, Junik and Djeneral Jankovic, and a municipal unit in Mamusa, a settlement inhabited by Kosovo Turks. The overall Serb turnout in these elections, which were the first to be organized in the independent Kosovo, was ten times higher than the turnout in November 2007 elections, which were organized by the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

Serb turnout was also higher than the turnout in Serbia-organized parallel elections of May 2008 and August 2009. Kosovo Serb majority municipalities have constituted municipal assemblies and local governments in these municipalities. The process of making these municipalities fully functional is ongoing, with a gradual transfer of powers from the central level and strengthening of capacities for execution of local powers. The new administrations are faced with high demand for services from their local population. This indicates a success of the decentralization process, showing that Serbs' are willing to integrate within the Kosovo legal and institutional framework. The success of decentralization provides the strongest institutional and legal framework within which the Albanians and the Serbs have a historic opportunity to work together. This improves the opportunity for co-existence given two decades of institutional separation that followed the armed conflict. This turnout was a clear signal that Kosovo Serbs, especially those

living south from Iber River, are ready to undertake all measures to improve their existence and welfare in Kosovo (KIPRED, 2010; Forum 2015, 2010)

4.3. Serb majority municipalities

4.3.1. Municipality of Gračanica

The municipality of Gračanica is the largest Serbian new municipality it is located in the central part of the Kosovo. The Gračanica municipality covers 219 square kilometers, and it has 30,000 inhabitants (IPOL, 2011).

The municipality of Gračanica held its election during the election for municipalities in November 2009, and met for the first time in its constitutive meeting on 29th of December 2009. Bojan Stojanović from the SLS was elected as Mayor (IPOL, 2011).

The municipality of Gračanica was the first municipality created from the process of decentralization. In the framework of this municipality there are seven departments, six departments are functioning, and the seventh department of inspectorate is not created yet. But there are a lot of inspectors that are working in the department of urbanization. There is a lack of the staff in this municipality. There is intended to work 307 employees, but actually there are only 155 people working in this municipality, and the call for application is open all the time. There is a lack of capacities to implement the policies and make this municipality functional. The political staff is mainly from SLS political party, but on the other hand the lack of capacities has made the mayor to call experts from other political parties in Gračanica in order to help and give their contribution (IPOL, 2011).

According to the OSCE (2010a) report approximately 35-40% of the Kosovo Serbs living in the newly established municipality of Gračanica are young people which make the community more sustainable than in other areas of Kosovo, where mostly the elderly have remained. According to Mr. Todorovic the biggest challenges in this municipality are: administration lack of capacities, budget and finances and creation of department of information and telecommunication (IT) which includes creation of the municipality web page where people can see all things about this municipality so every process will become more transparent. Another challenge is the statute of this municipality. The problem with budget and its implementation because this municipality was formed from three different municipalities: Prishtina, Lipljan and Fushe Kosova. The biggest challenge is economic development, and a clear strategy for economic development. According to the deputy mayor of municipality the strategy for economic and industrial development is almost ready. The implementation of this strategy is going to help citizens of Gračanica in reducing unemployment level in this municipality. Current priorities include infrastructure, culture, youth development, and education. The municipality is also working on repairing the main road and cleaning up the Gracanka River. Completed projects include social housing buildings and the road from Gračanica to Laplje Selo (IPOL, 2011).

The new municipality of Gračanica has its own draft action plan for the structure of Gračanica and this plan is going to be implemented with financial support from Kosovo's Government, UNDP Kosovo, European Commission, etc (IPOL, 2011).

4.3.2. Municipality of Klokot-Vrbovac

Municipality of Klokot-Vrbovac is located in Kosovsko Pomoravlje/ Anamorava region, before it became a municipality Klokot-Vrbovac was part of Vitina Municipality.

According to IPOL (2011) it has 2336 hectares. The process of decentralization has created the municipality of Klokot-Vrbovac which includes three villages: Mogila, Vrbovac and Grncar. This municipality was formed according to the Law on Administrative Municipal Boundaries of 20th February 2008. The Municipality of Klokot-Vrbovac started functioning with the inaugural session of its municipal assembly on 15th of January 2010. The mayor is Saša Mirković, from the Independent Liberal Party (SLS). SLS also won the majority of the seats in the assembly, ten out of 15. The municipality consists of four villages with 4500 inhabitants.

The creation of Klokot-Vrbovac municipality was seen with a skeptical eye, both from Serbian and Albanian community, but according to Mr. Mirkovic the municipal aim is to serve all citizens and break the ethnical barriers, then to make their life easier. And then to continue and face the biggest challenges for this municipality such as: economic development, fight the corruption, etc. The municipality of Klokot-Vrbovac have its own draft action plan which will be a development strategy in the future based on the resources that this municipality has. For example the Klokot-Vrbovac Spa which has two buildings (old building and the new building). The other resource is the export of the mineral carbonated water of the municipality. These resources are going to help the economic development of this municipality and will decrease the level of the unemployment. The main resource for economic development is agriculture based on the fact that Klokot-Vrbovac is a rural area. Current priorities include improvement of the sewer system, water and electricity infrastructure, and municipal roads -primarily the main road connecting the three villages of Klokot. This municipality was supported from Kosovo's Government, EU and various foreign investors (IPOL, 2011).

4.3.3. Municipality of Ranilug

Ranilug is a new municipality which includes villages: Bozevc, Ropotovo, Glogovac, Kormiran, Drenovo, Odevce, Pancelo, Rajonovac, and Tomance. Ranillug municipality was formed according to the Law on Administrative Municipal Boundaries of 20th February 2008, before that this municipality was part of the Kamenica municipality. This municipality has 77, 62 kilometers square. Municipality of Ranilug had two elections in 2007 and 2009. In 2007 elections there was no interest from citizens that now live in Ranilug municipality to participate in the local and central elections. In 2009 elections

were more positive because it was known that these elections are going to make a composition of the Municipal Assembly and will elect their own Mayor (IPOL, 2011).

The Municipality of Ranilug began to work on 05th of January 2010, when the Municipal Assembly held its constitutive meeting. The Assembly counts 15 members, including the Chairman of the Assembly. In the present composition of Assembly there are two political entities Civil Initiative for the Municipality of Ranilug- **GIZOR** which counts eleven (11) members, while Kosovo-Metohian Serbian Party- **SKMS** counts four (4) members in the current composition of the Municipal Assembly of Ranilug. The Mayor is Gradimir Mikić who ran as an independent candidate (IPOL, 2011).

Municipal Assembly has its own draft-plan for development policy of municipality, and this plan will be converted into a detailed strategy. The economic development and investments are going to be the main challenges of this municipality. A donation has been received from the Czech Republic for an environmental project: the cleaning of a river bed in one of the municipal villages, and there are plans to implement similar projects in other villages. Additional projects under consideration include: improvement of public lighting in one settlement, clean-up and removal of illegal dump sites and containers, a health care center that will serve four villages, and a road paving project. All projects are pending the commitment of international donors. The priorities of Ranilug municipality will be removal of the parallel structures in this municipality, hiring of the young people in this municipality, development of agriculture as the main potential resource for economic development, bringing new investments from abroad, activation of the Non-Governmental Organizations to help young people with different activities (IPOL, 2011).

4.3.4 Municipality of Parteš

The new Municipality of Parteš held its inaugural elections on 20th of June 2010 and the second round was held on 18th of July 2010. The very high turnout – over 62% – is an impressive demonstration of the success of establishing the new municipality in a majority Serbian inhabited region. Mayor of Parteš is elected Mr. Nenad Cvetković. The municipality is in the process of establishing the municipality structure (IPOL, 2011).

Originally Parteš was administrated by the Gnjilane municipality. After Parteš/ Partesh had been created the administration of Gnjilane handed over property, competencies and other assets to the new one without frictions. So the responsible local politicians and decision makers of Parteš had been in the position to develop well organized municipal administration and successful municipal transition since 2010. As an example of good relation between two municipalities, with regards to the security, presently Gnjilane Kosovo Police station is still responsible for Parteš/ Partesh municipality. However a local station is planned for Parteš/ Partesh because the population likes to have its policemen working near and making a good feeling of security in their proper neighborhood (NATO, 2011).

4.3.5. Municipality of Štrpce

Štrpce is a municipality in the south of Kosovo on the border with FYR of Macedonia. The majority of the population is Serbian and there is a significant Albanian community and a small Roma community. The town of Štrpce is purely Serbian, with a small Roma community. The Albanian and Serbian communities both live in mono-ethnic villages. The Serb community lives in the villages of Štrpce, Brezovica, Jažince, Vrbeštica, Sevc, Berevce, Sušice, Gornja Bitinja/ Biti e epërme, Donja Bitinja/ Biti e poshtme, Gotovuša/ Gotovushë and Drajkovce. The Albanian community lives in the villages of Brod, Izhancë/ Ižance, Kashtanjevë/ Kaštanjevo, Sushicë/ Sušice, Biti e epërme/ Gornja Bitinja, Biti e poshtme/ Donja Bitinja, Viçë/ Vica and Dre koc/ Drajkovce. The Roma community lives in the villages of Gotovuša, Štrpce and Berevce/ Beverc. It is home to the Brezovica/ Brezovicë ski resort, one of its kind in Kosovo. (OSCE, 2009; ECMIK, 2011)

The main problems the municipality is facing are the high unemployment rate, the difficult return and integration of the Albanian and Serb community, lack of infrastructure provisions, the damaging of the forest and the unregulated public transport local and inter- municipal (ECMIK, 2011).

The mayor of Štrpce is Bratislav Nikolic, represents SLS and he was elected in two mayoral election rounds with 64,5% percent of votes, according to ECMIK(2011) estimations. His party forms together with the Albanian PDK the governing coalition, SLS won 1258 votes, or 39,91% and PDK won 775 votes, or 24,59%. The Albanian and Serb community both represented in the Municipal Assembly and both communities have representatives in the Communities Committee. The Municipal Community Office has one officer (Ahmet Aliu), and there is a Municipal Returns Officer appointed (Tihomir Durlević). It has to be noted that because of a limited budget, the Municipal Communities Office and Municipal Returns Officer have to work with limited resources. In the Human Rights Unit work three officers, including an Officer for Gender Equality.

The Kosovo Police guarantees security in Štrpce. Since the municipal elections of 2009, the different communities feel safe and are free to travel around the municipality. The last year no incidents were reported concerning ethnic-motivated hostilities or threats, and the communities are satisfied with the services of the Kosovo Police (<http://kk.rks-gov.net/shterpce/News.aspx>).

The main sources of income in the municipality are employment in the public administration, public companies, private businesses, agriculture and the tourism sector. Most Serbs work in the market. Members of the Roma and Ashkali communities are mostly employed in seasonal agricultural work and private businesses, while many Albanians are employed in public institutions and corporations (OSCE, 2009).

4.3.6. The municipality of Novo Brdo

Although Novo Brdo was one of the largest cities in Europe during the middle ages, currently it is a particularly small and poor municipality southeast of Priština. The municipality consists of a number of villages and ‘mahallas’ and has no major urban centre. The population has been decreasing since the 1999 conflict and is currently estimated by OSCE at 3.900 people. While the population was thought to be evenly split between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, municipal officials from both communities estimate that the population currently residing in the municipality is now approximately 61 % Kosovo Albanian and 39 % Kosovo Serbian (OSCE, 2009). There are ten Roma families living in the village of Bostane. There is interaction between the different communities, as well formally as informally, and people feel free to move around. According to the Local Community Office the most important issues facing communities in Novo Brdo are the high rate of unemployment due to the non-existence of economic actors, the poor infrastructure (especially of the roads), and the lack of a decent information since there is not a single public media (ECMIK, 2011).

In Novo Brdo the Serbs lost dominance in both, the local assembly and the mayoral contest, although they constitute 75% of the total population in the this municipality. In the mayoral runoff on December 13 2541 voters turned out (33%) out of which the LDK candidate for mayor received 2,032 votes (81%) and the Serb candidate from SNSD received 479 votes (19%) (KIPRED,2009a). It’s very important to underline that many Serbs voted for the LDK candidate, the current mayor, Mr. Bajrush Ymeri because they say that the mayor has done a lot for them, directly assisted the return of internally displaced persons in Klokubar, undertook infrastructural projects and most importantly visited them and gave them support after every single incident that has happened. The Kosovo Police Services are responsible for guaranteeing the security in the municipality. According to OSCE polls people in the municipality are not satisfied with the services of the KPS. However, they feel safe to move and travel freely through the municipality (MLGA, 2009; ECMIK, 2011).

4.3.7. Future Municipality – Mitrovica North

According to the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement and presented decentralization plan two new municipalities of Mitrovica North and Mitrovica South should replace the single municipality of Mitrovica. While the municipality of Mitrovica South is governed by the Municipality of Mitrovica, which operates under the auspices of the Republic of Kosovo in accordance with the Law on Local Self-Governance from 2007, governance in north Mitrovica is more complex and the creation of the municipality envisaged by the decentralization plan is still pending. The Kosovo authorities attempt to introduce their own municipal structures and institutions in the North; a MPT is created and it is tasked to establish the foundations for a new municipality within the Kosovo system.

The MPT, however, immediately encountered much resistance from the local Serbian population, so the attempt of the Kosovo institutions to introduce a new municipal authority that will be loyal to the Kosovo institutions seems unsuccessful. Remained Serbian structures in the north Kosovo represent the main factor for delaying the establishing of the new municipalities (Baar, 2011). North part of Kosovo mostly populated with Kosovo Serbs never accepted the independence of Kosovo, so the north structures still remain under the Serbian authority and Serbia- run institutions that arose from the 2008 local elections in Serbia. They operate in accordance with the Serbian Law on Local Governance. These structures deliver financial benefits to the Kosovo Serbs, that cannot match with Kosovo ones. However, Kosovo Government believes that the role of these structures will diminish if the new municipalities begin providing economic development, improvement of the quality of life and security to the local Serbs.

Organizing the local elections and the creation of the municipality of Mitrovica North remains the biggest challenge for Kosovo authorities and the international community. The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and the ICO with the government of Kosovo should create a climate of safety, security and economic perspective for the Serbs in the north. Without gaining trust in Kosovo institutions and feeling secured any attempt to call on elections in the north will be unsuccessful.

V Parallel structures

5.1. South of Ibar River

Beside economical, social and infrastructural issues, one of the biggest problems and in the same time challenges for the new municipalities, but also for the existing ones, remains a question of political nature. Existence of parallel political and administrative structures driven by Serbia stays eyesore for the Kosovo Government.

Serbia's top leadership kept a distance from the Kosovo local elections in 2009. The Government in Belgrade left its Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija to deal with the matter, which did not have a unified position over this issue and was divided between the minister and the state secretary. While the minister Goran Bogdanović's public statements were mostly conciliatory, trying to put attention on human rights of Kosovo Serbs in enclaves and their better off, the state secretary Oliver Ivanović kept a hard line. Bogdanović claimed repeatedly that while Serbia could not support the Kosovo Serb participation in the elections, it was still a democratic right of the Serbs to vote and that there would be no consequences for those who participate. Ivanović on the other hand, used a threatening tone, claiming that there would be intra-Serb clash and that those who participate in the elections would carry consequences, penalties and lose the support of Belgrade, because by voting they would support the Kosovo independence (<http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Politika/Drzava-poziva-kosmetske-Srbe-da-ne-glasaju.It.html>).

The Serb Orthodox Church (SPC) got involved on the matter, too, issuing a statement of its Holy Synod by calling the Serbs not to participate in the elections organized by illegal institutions. The official SPC was elaborated by Bishop Artemije who claimed that any Serb who participated in the poll would recognize and legitimize the independence of Kosovo (<http://www.vesti.rs/Politika/Vladika-poziva-na-bojkot-izbora.html>).

The electoral process polarized the Serb community in Kosovo. There were two groups, those for and those against the participation of the Kosovo Serbs in the elections. The inconsistency of Belgrade was the target of Kosovo Serb radical forces led by Marko Jaksić and Milan Ivanović in northern Kosovo and parallel structures south of Ibar. Through their Assembly of the municipalities of Kosovo and Metohija, Jaksić and Ivanović involved themselves directly in the subject calling the Serbs to boycott the elections. However, not all radical Serbs opposed the elections. Members of the parallel structures and of Serb Radical Party (SRS) south of Ibar River especially in Gračanica, created civic lists or joined Serb political parties certified for the Kosovo local elections (KIPRED, 2009a).

The intimidation by the parallel structures in Novo Brdo and Štrpce was high, threatening the Serbs that they would lose the financial benefits from Belgrade or be arrested. But in central Kosovo, the parallel structures were not united – Rada Trajković director of the

healthcare house in Gračanica and one of the leaders of Serb National Council (SNV) and Randjel Nojkić director of parallel post service and the leader of Kosovo branch of Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) openly defied Belgrade. They actively participated, called and advocated for Serb participation in the elections. The Serbian National Council (SNV) located in Gračanica also split in two. While Rada Trajković lobbied and called for Serbs to accept the electoral process and to participate, Dragan Velić with a group of followers refused, and with a limited number of delegates compiled a statement for boycott. After November 15, the SNV expelled Rada Trajković from its ranks with her followers Goran Marinković and Boban Petrović (KIPRED, 2009a).

5.2. Parallel elections

In the midst of the confusion regarding the creation of the new municipalities, Belgrade went ahead and organized parallel elections on August 16, 2009 for municipality of Pristina- with the seat in Gračanica, and municipality of Peć – located in Goraždevac. In these elections, according to KIPRED (2009a) there were 26,090 registered voters, out of which 10,397 in the Kosovo Serb settlements in the municipality of Priština and 15,693 IDPs in Serbia. In Kosovo, 3,545 voters or 35% of Kosovo Serbs turned out to vote, with the following results: Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) 1,201 votes, SPS-PUPS-JS-“Vidovdan” 700 votes, DS 588 votes, SRS 528 votes, Citizen’s group “Opstanak” 367 votes, and DSS 161 votes. These elections marked the end of the dominance of the Serb Radical Party (SRS) among the Kosovo Serbs. SNS, DS and DSS formed a coalition to govern the parallel municipality. This move surprised many as such a coalition has been unexpected and is the first of the kind among the three political forces. The low participation of the Kosovo Serbs shocked Belgrade. Their aim was to discredit further the process of creation of new municipalities and participation of Kosovo Serbs and show that only Serbia can speak in the name of Kosovo Serbs.

However, the reality on the ground was quite different. A number of Kosovo Serb leaders in Gračanica worked towards discouraging the participation in Serbia’s elections preparing the ground for their own participation in Kosovo elections in November. Still, in Gračanica, at that time there were different municipal authorities of the parallel structures. Education and health institutions, as well as the parallel municipal administration, are financed and controlled by parallel municipalities of Priština, Lipljan and Kosovo Polje. In Klokot/ Vrbovac operates the parallel municipality of Vitina while in Ranilug the parallel municipality of Kamenica. These parallel municipalities control the parallel public administration and both health and education (KIPRED, 2009c).

On 16 January 2010, the newly elected mayor of Štrpce, Branislav Nikolić, expelled the parallel structures from the municipal premises. The parallel leadership of this municipality, elected in elections organized by Serbia, complied with this decision and did not create any problems. There were also no problems from the local Serb population.

Nikolic won against the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) candidate, and is considered the legitimate leader of the municipality by both the Albanians and the Serbs (KIPRED, 2010). Half of the Serb electorate in the municipality voted for him, which effectively delegitimized the parallel leadership which was a good chance for cutting off the ineffective institutions. The dissolution of Serbian illegal parallel structures in Štrpce marks the beginning of integration of Serb minority into Kosovo society which certainly enables them prosperity and bright future in Kosovo state. Mayor Branislav Nikolić said that Štrpce can be a good example of multiethnic life in Kosovo (<http://www.emportal.rs/en/news/serbia/110809.html>).

5.3. Serbia- run structures north of Ibar River

The Kosovo government and states that recognize it refer to the northern Kosovo municipalities as “parallel” structures. This can be misleading, given that both sides and the IC have different view of what these structures really are. The municipal governments were elected outside the framework of the UNMIK whose chief, Joachim Rucker, declared the May 2008 polls illegal but did not annul them. The Kosovo government also declared them illegal but extended the mandates of the elected officials, except in the newly formed Mitrovica municipality, since most of the same people who had operated under the UNMIK framework were re-elected. Since then, UNMIK administration has in effect ceased to operate throughout Kosovo, except in north Mitrovica, where it overlaps with the Serbian municipal administration (ICG, 2011). For Serbia there are no ‘parallel institutions’. Not that long ago, the president of Serbia Boris Tadic when asked to explain why Serbia is still keeping the parallel structures on Kosovo answered that for Serbia those are legitimate institutions, legally set up after the elections and they are in accordance with the law of Republic of Serbia. Indeed, the Serbian municipalities are the only authorities north of the Ibar, so nothing is truly parallel to them. They operate pretty much as if in Serbia, although with resident UNMIK officials, who mainly communicate with minorities and have no executive powers (<http://www.iiss.org/recent-key-addresses/boris-tadic>).

After UNMIK arrived in 1999, Kosovo Serbs continued to use pre-existing Serbian public services. For Serbs this was the only way to survive in the beginning since Albanians denied them access to main utilities. Having already experienced severe discrimination, they felt comfort by shrinking into isolation. Official Belgrade began distributing cash incentives in order to keep Kosovo Serbs under its influence. However, Belgrade governments since Milosević have employed different policies toward Kosovo Serbs, leading to equally varied relationships with the local administrative bodies established by UNMIK. The Coordination Centre for Kosovo and Metohija (CCK), headed by Deputy Prime Minister Nebojša Čović, was established in August 2001. The CCK temporarily became the main mechanism for supervising domestic institutional structures and interacting with the international community. After the March 2004 anti-Serb riots made the deputies and ministers withdraw from the Provisional Institutions for

Self- Government (PISG), while the majority of the Serb community boycotted elections from then on. At this point Serb enclaves became highly dependent on the Serbia- run structures (Manning, 2010, p.110).

In May 2008 Belgrade decided to hold Serbia proper's local elections in Kosovo as well, thus creating parallel municipalities and strengthening the relations with Kosovo Serbs. To Kosovo's recently proclaimed independence it was not only illegal, but many believe that these municipalities would be largely ineffective and that for Kosovo Serbs would be better to engage in regular Kosovo institutions. Belgrade continues to send funding for healthcare, education, social welfare and infrastructure to keep Serbs in Kosovo afloat and to maintain Serbs' problems through Serbia's CCK relocated to Gračanica on 17 September 2008. Most Serbs are unaware of the difficulties stemming from the parallel structures, instead they see it as prove that Serbia hasn't abandoned them (http://glassrbije.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19246&Itemid=148).

After the declaration of independence Kosovo's north entered a phase of completely lawlessness. This is a consequence of more than decade long disastrous failure of Pristina and the international community to implement basic rule of law and safety for people in this area. Instead, much of the focus has been in keeping the status quo and not tackling very sensitive issues of divided city of Mitrovica. During the time when the Serbs were fleeing and were being expelled from vast urban areas south of Ibar in Kosovo in 1999 and 2000, northern Mitrovica was considered as shelter for Kosovo Serbs and the majority of the Albanians were driven out from the northern part of the city. Kosovo Albanian leadership has been completely incapable to develop a vision and a strategy for the north for the last decade. They have preferred to use press-conferences at large to demand from international community to take actions in the north, instead of providing feasible policy options for dealing with these issues (KIPRED, 2008a).

According to KIPRED (2008a) at the municipal elections organized by Serbia on 11 May 2008 the Democratic Party (DS) of Boris Tadić won the elections in Serbia, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) won in Mitrovica, Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić. Before the DS-Social Party of Serbia (SPS) government was created in Belgrade, Koštunica and Samardžić pushed for the establishment of "Assembly of Association of Municipalities of Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija". Tadić initially objected to the creation of the Assembly, but later instructed the DS members to join it. While the SRS and DSS controlled the Assembly, Radovan Ničić (SRS) was elected the Assembly president, with Marko Jakšić (DSS) and Srđan Nikolić (SRS) as his deputies, the DS and G17 controlled the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija, with Goran Bogdanović as a minister, and Oliver Ivanović as the state secretary(http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politicsarticle.php?yyyy=2008&mm=06&dd=28&nav_id=51459).

Until the mid-2008 the North of Kosovo was dominated by the DSS whose prominent local leaders included: Marko Jakšić, member of Serbia's parliament and director of the Mitrovica medical centre; Milan Ivanović, deputy mayor of Zvečan and Vuko Antonijević, senior official of Belgrade's Kosovo and Metohija ministry. The Zvečan,

Zubin Potok and Leposavić mayors were all DSS members. DSS ideology is based on defending Serbia's territorial integrity. It rejects partition of Kosovo and accuses President Tadić and DS of secretly negotiating for that result with the U.S. The DSS lost the May 2008 Serbian elections. Eager to move EU accession forward, the new DS-led government in Belgrade favored a more relaxed Kosovo policy. Its strategy for the North was to secure EULEX deployment as a status-neutral mission under a UN umbrella and prevent a violent reaction from DSS structures. Radenko Nedeljković (DS), a Jakšić opponent, was appointed to head the Mitrovica District, imposing some control over the DSS-led municipalities. After a car carrying the new minister for Kosovo, Goran Bogdanović (DS), was stoned near Leposavić on June 2009, Jakšić was blamed and fired from his hospital position. As the DS controls Serbian funding, DSS mayors in Zubin Potok and Zvečan cooperate with it. When Leposavić and Mitrovica proved more difficult, Belgrade imposed "temporary measures" and forced new elections that the DS won in Leposavić in late 2009 and in Mitrovica in mid-2010. But the party's political cadres were weak and inexperienced, and the municipalities were in essence run by Nedeljković's Mitrovica District. Pristina felt the Serbia-run elections were a violation of its sovereignty, while Belgrade claimed they would reduce the influence of hardliners. By mid-2010, it was clear that Belgrade was not interested in prosecuting and removing the most prominent DSS officials in the North, who had long been identified by the international community as the biggest problem. Belgrade preferred to keep them in play to contrast with its own "moderate" policies and as a reminder of what the alternative could be. In the last quarter of 2010, however, the DSS took back control of the Mitrovica municipality, in coalition with the Serb Progressive Party (SNS) and two dissidents from the Social Democratic Party (SDP) (ICG, 2011).

In March 2011 Belgrade and Pristina started an EU facilitated dialogue to address the practical problems that have derived due to their disagreement over Kosovo's status. The North is not on the agenda of negotiations, yet progress in any area will produce change on this issue, too. For now, however, Belgrade, Pristina and Brussels have decided that tackling the North's governance or status is too difficult before more efforts are made to secure cooperation on improving the region's socioeconomic development, security and public order. For some time, the North will remain in effect under dual sovereignty: Kosovo's and Serbia's (ICG, 2011). Kosovo seeks to rid the region of Serbian institutions, integrate it and gain control of the border with Serbia. It is willing to provide substantial self rule and additional competencies as suggested under the Ahtisaari plan. But local Serbs see the North as their last stand and Mitrovica town as their centre of intellectual and urban life. Belgrade will continue to use its influence in the North to reach its primary goal, regaining the region as a limited victory to compensate for losing the rest of its former province. Serbia and Kosovo institutions intersect and overlap in the North without formal boundaries or rules. The majority Serb and minority Albanian communities there live within separate social, political and security structures (ICG, 2011).

Virtually all Northern Serbs reject integration into Kosovo and believe their institutions and services are far better than what is offered south of the Ibar River, especially in education and health care. Recent scandals in Pristina, such as alleged massive corruption in the governing PDK party and a December 2010 Council of Europe report claiming

implication of top Kosovo officials in organ trafficking, reinforce this view. Serbs distrust Pristina, believing that rights and protection promised now would be quickly subverted after integration. They are willing to cooperate with Pristina individually but not to accept its sovereignty (ICG, 2011).

In practice, Serbia and Kosovo both exercise partial sovereignty over the North. Civil administration, health, education, public services and land use regulation all run on Serbian rules, yet the police wear Kosovo uniforms, report ultimately to Priština and occasionally deliver Serb suspects to an Albanian judge sitting in Vučitrn, south of the Ibar. Serbian police, prosecutors and judges work, too, but out of uniform and without any coercive authority. Shops accept and give change in both euros (legal tender in Kosovo) and Serbian dinars. Kosovo and Serbian power companies provide electricity and try, without much success, to collect payments (ICG, 2011).

Like Kosovo as a whole, the North suffers from a reputation for anarchy and domination by gangsters and corrupt politicians. And as in the rest of Kosovo, the reputation is largely false. Crime rates are similar and within the European mainstream; urban Mitrovica has more than its share of offences, the rural municipalities much less. Well-established Albanian-Serb networks, nevertheless, smuggle goods, free of duty and tax – especially diesel fuel – from Serbia via the North to southern Kosovo. The trade supports by criminal elite that, while small in the regional context, is still large enough to dominate Northern Kosovo (ICG, 2011). Nowhere is the North's dual sovereignty as problematic as in law enforcement. Rival Kosovo and Serbian systems each have only partial access to the witnesses and official and community support they need. The Serbian parallel structures are a concern for the international community and Kosovo authorities for, at least, two important reasons. The first reason is related to sovereignty, territorial integrity and the constitutional system in Kosovo that have been impeded by the very existence of Serbian parallel courts in Kosovo, currently working based on the laws applicable in Serbia. And secondly, the Serbian parallel structure poses a general security problem in Kosovo (Beha, 2011).

The Kosovo police lack the community's trust and have a poor reputation. Not that long ago a young Kosovo Serb got killed in Mitrovica. While local Serbs insist that the gun shots were fired from the Albanian side of the neighborhood, police meanwhile are investigating the incident. No one has yet been arrested (<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/one-serb-dies-two-others-injured-in-interethnic-clashes>). The North suffers from a near-total absence of productive employment and depends on state subsidies for its survival; rule of law is weak. These problems are real but insignificant compared to the North's effect on Kosovo and Serbia. Neither can join the EU while the North's status is in dispute. Addressing local problems by improving on pragmatic solutions already in place and finding a framework for criminal justice acceptable to the local population would likely perpetuate its uncertain status, by keeping it distinct from the rest of Kosovo (ICG, 2011)

VI Conclusion

The process of decentralization marks the one of the biggest steps in consolidation of coexistence between the Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs in an independent Kosovo. Decentralization is proving to be the most successful tool towards preserving and developing the multi-ethnic character of the country. The implementation of decentralization is projected to lead into a chain of positive improvements for Serbs, but not only, because the benefits are foreseen for all Kosovo communities.

Cooperation between municipalities would lead to a better sense of security and peace building. However, participation of the Serbs in Kosovo elections has been just the preliminary success. Kosovo authorities should go on with completion of the decentralization; new municipalities face challenges that need to be addressed in a shorter period, in order not to lose the political momentum and the support of the Serb communities in Kosovo.

A very positive step in this context is the high turnout of local Serbs in Kosovo organized election. This has shown that the Serb community is slowly shifting towards Pristina, especially when the Belgrade government is focusing in the north and pushing for eventual partition of Kosovo. Election of legal authorities in the municipalities was the strongest opposition to the parallel structures. The Serb satisfactory turnout in the elections, by which the new municipalities were legitimized, is a remarkable step which fundamentally changes the inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo. For the first time after two decades, Kosovo Serbs have turned towards moderate political forces, sending a signal for cooperation and inclusion within the institutional framework of Kosovo. This process is effectively showing that Kosovo Serb entered the new phase, where they are ready to undertake all the necessary steps to make decision on their everyday life and future.

For Kosovo Serbs it would be very important if Belgrade would actively involve them in the process of making policies on Kosovo. After all they are the one that live there and it is for their benefits. Even though Serbia doesn't recognize the independence of Kosovo it should agree to the integration of Serbs in Kosovo's institutions, at least in the local ones. Some stated that, unlike for the Serbs in the north, for the Serbs in the south cooperation with Kosovo's institutions is indispensable and in the long run inevitable. But the sooner it happens, the better.

While the internal engagement of Kosovo Serbs is a prerequisite for consolidating political leadership and strengthening institutions, political assistance from Belgrade remains crucial. Belgrade's role is indispensable especially in resolving the issue of the parallel institutions in Serb-majority municipalities in the south. The municipalities of Gračanica, Štrpce, and Parteš have two pairs of institutions, both claiming the legitimacy of the people. Long-term solution should reflect the interest of the people of these municipalities.

For ten years the existence of parallel worlds in Kosovo has not only caused the country's progress to stagnate, but has harmed many ethnic communities throughout Kosovo. There is no current alternative to Ahtisaari's plan of decentralization for the North and no other option but to act. Due to the history of the Albanian and Serbian conflict, it is clear that immediate cooperation cannot be expected. After years of violent conflict, the groups need to initiate communication and coexistence through a cautious, but clear and established process. In order to establish this system, parallel structures must be dissolved and pressing human rights issues addressed. Recent developments over the control of the last two points in the border between Kosovo with Serbia, makes us believe that dispute over the Kosovo territory may stay for a long time.

While the two countries have recently made significant progress during talks on issues like property registry and trade, freedom of movement and most recently customs stamps, the planned takeover of border control local Serb see as a imposition of the rule of state that they don't recognize. So they reacted by forming barricades on all the main roads that lead to then north.

Officials in Pristina are seeking to extend the nation's authority over all Kosovo territory 12 years after the war that drove Serbian forces from the province, and three years after declaring independence. But Kosovo north of the Ibar River remains de facto Serbian territory, populated mainly by Serbs who still live under the laws and institutions of Serbia. Local Serbs and the government of Serbia remain committed to perceive their influence in this part of Kosovo. There are more than a four mounts after the first barricade were put and the problem is still pending. Many incidents have happened in a clash between KFOR soldiers and local Serbs, but the solution still was not found. Maybe even worst, there is no any sign that one long-term solution will be found over the problem in the north.

REFERENCES

- Ahtisaari, Martti, 2007, *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement*
- Balkan Policy Institute (IPOL), 2011, '*Building new municipalities*', Prishtina
- Beha, Adem, 2011, '*Decentralisation in Kosovo: A Challenge to Deal With?*', Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development Issue 17, August 2011;
www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk
- Baar Thomas, 2011, '*The Division in Northern Kosovo*', Liberal Arts & Sciences: Conflict Studies & Political and Social Philosophy, Mitrovica
- ECMIK, Ethnopolitical Map: http://www.ecmi-map.com/map/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=3&Itemid=2&lang=en (accessed on November 2011)
- European Parliament, 2010, '*The Decentralization process in Kosovo and the creation of the new municipalities (a Kosovo Albanian and a Kosovo Serb minority view)*', EP Policy Department DG External Policies, Brussels
- Forum 2015, 2010, '*Decentralization – New Serb Municipalities, Ethnic Minorities-Challenges and Obstacles for a successful integration*', Radio KIM, Kosovo
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, 2008: '*A Forgotten World- The Serb Enclaves in Kosovo*', Serbia
- International Institute for Strategic Studies, Special address of President of Serbia Boris Tadic, Serbia and its Regional Role: Cooperation, Reconciliation, Integration, 2011, <http://www.iiss.org/recent-key-addresses/boris-tadic> (accessed 24 of November, 2011)
- International Crisis Group (ICG), 2009, '*Kosovo: Štrpce, a Model Serb Enclave*'; Europe Briefing N°56, Pristina/ Brussels, 15 October 2009
- International Crisis Group, 2011, '*North Kosovo: Dual Sovereignty in Practice*'; Europe Report N°211, Pristina/Brussels, 14 March 2011
- Kosovo Democratic Institute (KDI), 2009, '*Decentralization in Kosovo- experience from municipalities of Prizren region*', Prishtina, www.kdi-kosova.org
- International Civilian Office Kosovo/ ICR appointment decisions, <http://www.ico-kos.org/ico/?id=25> (accessed on November 2011)

- Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), 2008a, *'Looking beyond Mitrovica bridge: an Ahtisaari plus package proposal'*, Policy Brief Series, paper 9, Prishtina
- Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), 2008b, *'Kosovo Serbs after the declaration of independence: the right momentum for confidence building measures'*, Policy Brief #8, Prishtina
- Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), 2009a, *'Decentralization in Kosovo I: Municipal elections and the Serbs participation'*, Policy Brief #15, Prishtina
- Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), 2009b, *'Kosovo at the crossroad: Decentralization and the creation of new municipalities'*, Policy Brief #14, Prishtina
- Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), 2009c, *'Decentralization in Kosovo II: Challenges of Serb majority municipalities'*, Prishtina
- Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), 2009d, *'Local policies in multiethnic communities'*, Prishtina
- Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), 2010, *'Review of Decentralization – Functioning of Serb Majority Municipalities'*, Prishtina
- Kosovo Local Government Institute (KLG), 2009, *'Implementing decentralization in Kosovo: one year on'*, Prishtina
- Kosovar Stability Initiative (IKS), Policy Briefs, 2009: *'Mitrovica: One City, Two Realities'*; Prishtina, www.iksweb.org
- Law on Local Self Government of Republic of Kosovo, Law Nr. 03/L-040, <http://assembly-kosova.org/?cid=2,191,249>
- Manual for restructuring and reorganizing the municipalities of Kosovo, 2007, The Ministry of Local Government Administration of Republic of Kosovo, Prishtina
- Manning, Tess, 2010: *'Lost between parallel worlds: finding equality in Kosovo with decentralization'*; Journal of Politics & International Affairs, pp. 106-116
- Ministry of Local Administration (MLGA), 2009, *Ucinak Opstine Novo Brdo: Pogledi Gradjana*, Kosovo
- NATO/ KFOR, 2011, Public Affairs Office, press release, <http://www.nato.int/kfor/docu/pr/2011/07/20110712a-eng.pdf>

- OSCE, 2009a, Municipality Profile report, Novobrd/ Novobërdë, <http://www.osce.org/kosovo/13122>
- OSCE, 2009b, Municipality Profile report: Mitrovica/ Mitrovicë, www.osce.org/kosovo/38678 (accessed on November 2011)
- OSCE, 2009c, Municipality Profile report: Štrpce/ Shtërpçë, <http://www.osce.org/kosovo/13130>
- OSCE, 2010a, Kosovo Communities Profile, OSCE Mission in Kosovo
- OSCE, 2010b, 'Municipal responses to displacement and returns in Kosovo'; Department of Human Rights and Communities, OSCE Mission in Kosovo
- The Serbian Orthodox Monastery Devic: www.kosovo.net/devic.html (access on November 2011)
- UNHCR, 2011, Statistical overview; Prishtina
- Štrpce/ Shtërpçë Municipal official page <http://kk.rks-gov.net/shterpce/News.aspx>
- http://glassrbije.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19246&Itemid=148
 'Stevic: Koordinacioni centar ce resavati goruce probleme Srba na Kosovu', 18. September, 2008, (accessed on 27 of November, 2011)
- http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politicsarticle.php?yyyy=2008&mm=06&dd=28&nav_id=51459
 'K. Serb assembly de facto part of Serbia's authority', 28 June, 2008, RTV B92, Belgrade (accessed 27 of November, 2011)
- <http://www.vesti.rs/Politika/Vladika-poziva-na-bojkot-izbora.html> 'Vladika poziva na bojkot izbora', 02 Avgust, 2009 (accessed 27 of November, 2011)
- <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Politika/Drzava-poziva-kosmetske-Srbe-da-ne-glasaju.lt.html> (accessed on 28 November, 2011)
- <http://www.emportal.rs/en/news/serbia/110809.html> (accessed on 29 November, 2011)
- <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/one-serb-dies-two-others-injured-in-interethnic-clashes> (accessed on 29 November, 2011)