

## **Kosovo – 2000 – Municipal elections**

The October 28th, 2000 municipal elections in Kosovo marked the first step in the transition of the province into a state. The election, conducted under international supervision in partnership with Kosovars. The international supervision authority was established by a provision in the 1999 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 on Kosovo which stated that, among other mandates, the UN would have the following responsibility, “organizing and overseeing the development of provisional institutions for democratic and autonomous self government, pending a political settlement, including the holding of elections.” The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the OSCE, was delegated to prime responsibility for election supervision. My name is Jeff Fischer and I served as Director of Election Operations for the OSCE in that election and held a joint OSCE–UN appointment as head of the Joint Registration Task Force.

Organizing a founding election process is a considerable undertaking. It was necessary for us to draft an electoral code, establish an interim electoral infrastructure, define the electorate, and create an environment for participation, and devise a system of representation. And each step must be guided by international standards for inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and reconciliation. A combination of factors led to our decision to conduct municipal elections in the first round of voting. First, at the conclusion of the conflict, the Serb municipal authorities left their posts and re-establishing public services provided by municipal governments was important. Second, a municipal electoral cycle presented an opportunity to foster grassroots democracy, building individual participation in local governance. And third, the status of Kosovo as an independent entity had not been decided, so that a provincial governance election was premature.

Although transitional in nature, our electoral framework established several precedents that would contribute to the integrity of future elections. Such precedents included campaign finance and expense disclosure, a woman's quota for candidates, codes of conduct for political campaigns, sanctions for infractions of campaign rules, equitable access to the media, participation by those displaced by the conflict, outreach programmes to special needs constituents, personal identity restoration standards, fraud control and language sensitivity. Few elections at the time possessed this combination of integrity building components. The instruments of Security Council Resolution 1244, which were established to fulfil the election mandate, included the Central Election Commission, the CEC and its secretariat, the Department of Election Operations. Its complaints subcommission, the Election Complaints and Appeals Subcommission, ECAC, Municipal Election Commissions, MECs, and polling station committees at the local level. A Joint Registration Task Force was established to

conduct civil and voter registration as a single transaction for voters and undertook an unprecedented effort to restore individual identities and prevent the disenfranchisement of those unable to produce sufficient documentation at the registration centre. There were three support services in this regard. Hard copy document reconstruction service, electronic consolidation service and the review and inquiry process. Through these activities identified documents were reassembled at the municipal level. Databases were checked for residential claims. Profiles of groups for identity restoration requests were conducted in order to validate claims of voter identity of residents for the purposes of voter and civil registration.

In order to support women's participation in the elections, NGOs conducted a number of training sessions for women activists during the six weeks before the election. Over 1,000 women participated in these events. In addition, a two-phased special project entitled Women Preparing to Govern was conducted for women candidates. The programming consisted of 10 workshops offered in all 5 regions of Kosovo open to women candidates running in the municipal elections. The workshops were coordinated by the OSCE in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the National Democratic Institute for Political Affairs.

There were a number of populations in Kosovo which were at risk for not being included in the registration and elections process. Without being registered, these populations would not be afforded the opportunity to fully participate in civic life in Kosovo, nor would they be able to seek social services nor be eligible to vote or stand for public office. To prevent this from happening, we identified discrete groups of individuals who, for clear and convincing reasons, would be unable to vote at polling stations on Election Day and designed a special needs voting programme to serve these groups, which included homebound individuals, those hospitalized and Kosovars residing out of the province in 32 countries. For Serbs who did not feel safe going to a polling station, the CEC created a category of voter termed "homebound by fear" and allowed them to vote in their homes. Among ethnic Albanians and some minorities, there was an enthusiastic turnout for voter registration. Over 900,000 people 16 years of age and older registered to vote. However, the Serb community largely boycotted the election, which left a significant gap in political participation. The boycott occurred in part because of a pressure campaign from Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, who was still in power in Belgrade and did not support Kosovo's independence from Serbia. Ironically, Milosevic was forced from office through the loss of an early election, followed by street protests against him, labelled the Bulldozer Revolution and left office on October 6th just, 22 days before the Kosovo elections. The Serb community subsequently halted its boycott for the 2001 Kosovo Assembly election.

On Election Day over 1,000 international supervisors and 11,000 Kosovars worked side by side. These poll workers, the CEC election staff from the OSCE and UN, as well as NATO's Kosovo force or K4, UN police and Kosovar security forces, should all be recognized for their service in administering the election. The transparency of the process was supported by the presence of over 6,000 domestic election monitors and 200 international election monitors, led by the Council of Europe, and over 300 accredited news organizations and representatives.

Despite this planning and preparation, there were big problems on Election Day. Voters came to the polling stations early and in droves, overwhelming the management capacity to service them in a timely way. People had to wait for a considerable time to be processed and cast their ballot. We simply had not anticipated this early response and because of limited facilities available for polling centres, we were forced to assign too many voters per centre, overwhelming them. Nevertheless, through a combination of patience and frustration, voters were processed and were able to cast their ballots. In any case, this experience on Election Day did mar the overall conduct of the election, despite the extensive preparations. The final preliminary results were completed within six days of the close of polls and presented to the CEC 9 days after the election. These results were unanimously endorsed by the CEC and sent for certification to the UN Special Representative for the Secretary-General, Dr. Bernard Kouchner, who certified them on November 7th, 10 days after Election Day.

The voter turnout reflected a similar enthusiasm as the registration process with 79% of registered voters casting ballots. Despite the Election Day problems, the election received passing acceptance from election monitors with the Council of Europe and through statements of support read in the UN Security Council meeting on November 9th, from the United States, France the EU, Norway, the Czech Republic, Canada, Albania, Turkey, and Switzerland. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan also expressed his approval and appreciation to the OSCE in a letter that he sent to the OSCE's Chair-in Office. Thank you.