

## The role of civil society in security building

International conference report, 24 April 2014, Hotel Emerald, Prishtinë/Priština, Kosovo

### Introduction

On 24 April 2014, Saferworld in partnership with FIQ and AKTIV organised an international conference on ‘*Civil society’s role and contribution in security building*’ in Prishtinë/Priština, Kosovo. The conference aimed to share experiences, challenges, and lessons learned to help civil society maximise its contribution to security building. It brought together 48 participants representing civil society organisations (CSOs), institutions and experts from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and the UK, as well as representatives from Saferworld programmes and partners in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Yemen, and Bangladesh. It consisted of three moderated sessions focusing on: 1) Security issues addressed by CSOs; 2) Impact of CSO contribution in security building; and 3) Opportunities and challenges for effective cooperation between CSOs and authorities in security building.

### Opening remarks

**Ferdinand Nikolla**, Saferworld’s Project Coordinator for the Western Balkans, opened the conference by emphasising that the topics for the three conference sessions are part of a wider discussion on peace and security, and the critical role that civil society plays in contributing to peaceful societies in different contexts.

**Saša Rašić**, Kosovo Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, affirmed the important role of CSOs in providing support and expertise on drafting strategies and policy documents on security, including the important role that CSOs play through support and cooperation with institutions at local and national level in implementing policies. He highlighted the importance of institutions improving cooperation with the CSOs, while also acknowledging CSOs’ support to the government and to the strategies that the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) implements.

**Thomas Gnocchi**, Head of the Political Section at the European Union Office in Kosovo and EU Special

Representative, highlighted the critical role CSOs have holding institutions to account, something that is important to ensure sound policies are developed that result in responsive security provision. He emphasised that CSOs have a crucial role in fostering dialogue between the government and the population, and that CSOs can give voice to often marginalised communities to express their needs and concerns. Thus communities can actively engage through CSOs, ensuring that their priorities are taken into consideration. He went on to underline the importance of this type of conference to raise awareness and exchange lessons and best practice – and said the European Union would continue to support civil society in security building.



**Astrit Istrefi**, Head of Europe and Central Asia at Saferworld, argued that that Saferworld’s 10 years of engagement in Kosovo, in close collaboration with local partner organisations, has contributed to the development of security and small arms and light weapons (SALW) control policies that are accountable and responsive to the needs and priorities of Kosovo’s population. He stressed that participation from the Western Balkans, Asia and Central Asia, Caucasus and Middle East will enrich lessons and the discussion around how civil society can better or more effectively contribute to security building. Issues examined during the conference included:

- How do we respond to security trends and dynamics (not only in our own contexts but

regionally/internationally), including on issues around poor governance, poverty, marginalisation, inadequate security and justice provision, competition over natural resources?

- How do we continue to address the fundamental question around how security and justice is provided to the people and how do we ensure security and justice reaches local communities and those most marginalised sections of the society, including ethnic groups, women, and youth?
- Is there genuine interest from authorities to cooperate with civil society? Is there a commitment to move beyond rhetoric and establish mechanisms (including financial support) to meaningfully establish trusting relationships and cooperation with civil society and work together to achieve lasting, positive change?

## Summary of key discussions

### Session 1: Security issues addressed by CSOs

The Kosovan law-makers emphasised the importance of civil society involvement in policy development and implementation oversight. However, nowadays, there is fear that civil society is weakening due to political parties recruiting their staff.



Nevertheless, CSOs were strongly encouraged to further engage for the benefit of Kosovo's institutions. The Serbian situation was instead focused on efforts to bridge links between security institutions and civil society, in order to build trust in institutions, by holding to account those individuals responsible for violent policies in 1999. Due to a lack of transparency and the exclusion of civil society from security sector reform, CSOs are advocating for security reforms as well as participation in these discussions in Serbia.

The presentation of Alpha Centre in Montenegro focused on the challenges civil society face when engaging with institutions, as the term 'security' is regarded as an area for the army and the government. At the same time, the recent openness of the government is limited. This situation is made more difficult as skilled CSO staff have joined government or academia. It was felt that there is a need to have credible NGOs at the table to provide support to the institutions and work to build that trust between police, institutions and communities, provide

public advocacy, and influence laws as requested by the public.



From Yemen, Saferworld's representative explained the important role civil society is playing in advocacy campaigns and raising awareness on small arms control, a critical issue due to the 2011 uprising which led to many citizens arming themselves.

### Open discussion

It was felt that after 15 years of international actors and missions in Kosovo, there were benefits to their presence. Their primary role had been to provide security in order to support institutions; nowadays their role is advisory. However, it was recognised that Kosovars are dependent on international structures, even after the Kosovan declaration of independence.

It was noted by INDEP that Kosovan civic society was more efficient than formal institutions when it came to security issues; they also felt this had been the case during the time of United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). It was also acknowledged that civil society in Kosovo is even stronger now with better human resources, skills, and expertise, thus gaining ever greater credibility.



The picture from Serbia was more complicated and not as positive, as it was acknowledged that the complex issues from the 1990s still shape the situation today, with the government not considering security sector reform a priority. It was suggested that facilitation from the European Union would be required.

The view from Albania was that governments of the Western Balkans should coordinate more effectively with the international community so that they could decide on priorities, including on security issues. Such cooperation will push both governments and internationals to orchestrate priorities, and facilitate support for civil society in general.

However, there were also criticisms of civil society. A representative from the Ministry of Kosovo Security Force (MKSF) argued that civil society did not provide enough support for the Kosovo Security Force during the reformation phase, which could have led to a smoother transformation. The Serb community were not fully integrated within it, thus preventing KSF from becoming a truly multiethnic force. They felt that the KSF reached out to the Serb community without the help of CSOs, and that this was how they became a multiethnic force.



## Session 2: Impact of CSOs contribution to security building

Countries in transition, such as Macedonia, face capacity issues, which can lead to serious problems. One example was that where and public data were not differentiated – and thus important public security information was not shared. Also, in-depth analysis by academics is made difficult because they are not easily able to access public data. In addition, CSOs are faced with many issues, such as being under-resourced, politically affiliated, unable to access research data.

A constructive CSO engagement came from the Kyrgyz Republic, where a network of CSOs established in 2012, 'Civic Union for Reforms and Results', worked to develop alternative police reform concepts as earlier attempts lacked political will and had excluded key stakeholders. This was no easy task as at the beginning the network faced resistance from officials. One of the main strategic points promoted by the network is community policing, which was recognised by the Kyrgyz Government and was eventually formulated into law. In cooperation with Saferworld, a number of analytical documents on security issues were prepared. The team achieved significant results in two years as they have managed to become the main civil society actor in police reform in Kyrgyzstan and are very much engaged in implementing the reform.

The Executive Director of INDEP (member of Forum for Security, which brings together the main actors within security and justice and other relevant sectors and advocates influencing policy development) in his presentation referred to three top security challenges in Kosovo: economic development, stabilisation of

democracy, stagnation of society. The constructive involvement of civil society so far has led to the creation of safer environments and more influence on draft laws. Through a coalition of CSOs for sustainable development, many successful efforts have been made to change energy and mining policies, which were previously made without any CSO influence as most of the time they are excluded from high level policies. On the other hand, civil society has not made as much progress in other important areas, such as reconciliation between Kosovo and Serbia. On the whole, the credibility of CSOs has increased from the UNMIK period when they had to advocate with the international mission to persuade the government of reform, whereas nowadays CSOs receive increased requests by the government institutions to provide policy recommendations. However, while many policies are in place, they lack implementation.



## Open discussion

The EU accession talks for Serbia opened up space for civil society engagement with institutions, including providing recommendations for ministries (such as the Ministry of Justice), which are then reviewed and decided upon by the ministries. In Montenegro the EU talks have pushed the government to have a wider involvement with civil society.

North Kosovo remains a challenging context. Kosovo Police (KP) is understood to be the only legitimate Kosovo security institution operating in the north; however, due to the political situation, there is still significant mistrust of the KP by the citizens there. Therefore, the main aim of the KP in the north is to try to build citizens' trust; a positive relationship is crucial as citizens have a responsibility to assist the KP to ensure local security. Poverty and a lack of transparency are acknowledged as amongst the main reasons for dissatisfaction with institutions as was recognised between Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade during the Brussels agreement.

A perspective from the OSCE was that the community policing approach was the most democratic, enabling citizens to have a voice and be part of problem solving. Further, the lessons shared from Kyrgyz Republic on police reform point to research/public surveys to learn about the issues before tackling them. In order to institutionalise this approach in the

Kyrgyz Republic, community policing law is being drafted with contributions from civil society. Furthermore, civil society is succeeding in influencing the monitoring process, including establishing indicators for monitoring police performance, recruitment and accountability.

On the role of CSOs as a bridge between the institutions (i.e. police and authorities) and population, many attendees regarded this as a role CSOs play by default. However, there are cases such as north Kosovo where there is distrust of CSOs. Lessons from Albania in this regard show that civil society can act as interlocutor; however, trust from the people needs to be carefully earned and maintained. In Bangladesh, people are generally afraid to report crimes to the police because there is a fear of the police. In some places this led to dialogue between police, the local administration, and community members, raising awareness about the role of the police in the community and how they can help locals.



An important point was that one approach is not applicable to every context, and the approach depends on people's perceptions and attitudes. It was emphasised that effort and time should be used wisely in order to improve trust between police and the local population.

### Session 3: Opportunities and challenges for effective cooperation between CSOs and authorities in security building

A presentation from a CSO in Albania focused on community policing and the potential for cooperation between communities and police, where joint dialogue and partnership is applied in identifying issues, understanding the root causes of conflict and insecurity, and identifying solutions. CSOs have an important role in disseminating information and policies at the local level and taking up the concerns of the community to the policy level, whereas media has to ensure maximum exposure of the issues raised in order for there to be wider coverage and so that the work of CSOs is complemented. In addition, there needs to be further debate and awareness raising for both policy makers and the public. The role of CSOs in helping to disseminate information at local

level and effective monitoring to challenge or support government decisions are seen as crucial.



As an example of CSOs and authorities working well together on accountability issues, the Montenegro Parliament has a Memorandum of Understanding with the non-governmental sector in order for them to participate in parliamentary sessions and provide expertise.

Interethnic issues are seen as an important source of destabilisation. Saferworld's approach in Georgia focuses on building partnerships between communities, CSOs, and authorities. Greater public participation in security building creates more efficient and sustainable results. This is done by empowering communities to create demand through capacity building within communities, ultimately making interventions locally led.

A different approach to community security was highlighted with the case of Bangladesh. The country has no recent history of violent conflict or large scale armed violence, but weak rule of law, political divides, and poverty have led to a high level of insecurity with multiple dimensions and this requires a preventive approach from communities and CSOs.



In 2008, Saferworld and INGO BRAC jointly designed and implemented a community safety pilot project in Bangladesh with the aim of testing participatory approaches to community safety and security in order to create a base model replicable across Bangladesh. After successful piloting, the project scaled up to three rural sites based on the Saferworld nationwide survey of human security in Bangladesh. Important lessons drawn from the project were: equal participation of men and women to ensure positive outcome and sustainability; gender sensitisation of the community; consideration of different groups' views; involvement of youth and adolescents; and follow up work to maintain positive results.

## Open discussion

It was argued that donors needed to be persuaded of this approach. In Bangladesh, for example, the potential for violence was not initially seen. Work has been done from the bottom up to generate debates, and this needs to be flagged up for the donors. At times, material gain (quick wins) for communities are used as a motivation which may ensure sustainability in projects. However, it is crucial to focus on issues that impact daily lives and the security of communities.



## Conclusions

A key conclusion of the conference was that civil society has a critical role to play in influencing the quality of policy and decision-making discussions and ensuring that policies are not only good on paper but also translate effectively into practice on the ground and affect positive change. Policies must be informed by and respond to the needs and concerns of all communities, including marginalised sections of the society.

Other conclusions included:

- It is essential to build relationships, and most importantly trust, between security providers, CSOs, and local communities. Lack of trust has a profound impact on people's perceptions and attitudes towards authorities.
- External actors (primarily UN and EU missions) should ensure that they are accountable to local people in the countries in which they operate. Civil society oversight should not be restricted to focus on domestic institutions alone, but should also include internationally mandated missions such as the UN and EU.
- There is a need for more collective efforts among CSOs to set priorities and take action at local, national, and international levels.
- Awareness raising and improving information provision on the challenges that authorities, security providers, and communities of all backgrounds face is an important role for civil society.
- Representation is a very contentious issue that needs to be addressed. For example, how can we ensure that expert organisations represent the views of CSOs and local people?

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**List of acronyms**

<b>BIRN</b>	Balkan Investigative Regional Network
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EULEX</b>	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
<b>FIQ</b>	Forumi per Iniciativa Qytetare (Forum for Civic Initiative)
<b>FS</b>	Forum for Security
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>INDEP</b>	Institute for Development Policy
<b>KP</b>	Kosovo Police
<b>KSF</b>	Kosovo Security Force
<b>MKSF</b>	Ministry of Kosovo Security Force
<b>MIA</b>	Ministry of Internal Affairs
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>UNMIK</b>	United Nations Mission in Kosovo

## About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and Europe.

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