



UN Joint Programme to Enhance Inter-Ethnic
Dialogue and Collaboration



PRESS RELEASE

Kumanovo progresses as a true multi-ethnic city

Kumanovo, 15 November, 2011 –Kumanovo, the country's biggest municipality - and one of its most ethnically diverse celebrated its day on Friday. And, there is a lot to celebrate in Kumanovo. For over ten years since the signing of the 2001 peace agreement (Ohrid Framework Agreement, OFA), Kumanovo's leaders and civil society have worked hard to improve inter-ethnic relations and now the city has become one of the role models for others in the country. Local leaders say a key ingredient for success was empowering the local Commission for Inter-Community Relations (CICR).

"Three years ago our meetings were always very tense," said President of the Kumanovo Commission, Bogdan Tanevski. "Our 12 members were all coming from different backgrounds and perspectives and we didn't have a clear understanding of our role and responsibilities," he said. There was also no proper place for the Commission to hold its meetings and there was little collaboration with the City Council.

These challenges are common among the nation's Commissions - according to an assessment conducted by the UN Programme to Enhance Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration, together with the Secretariat for the Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The Commissions are non-formal bodies and were established by the legislative changes that followed the Ohrid Framework Agreement, to advise municipal councils on ways to achieve good inter-ethnic relations. One of the key assessment findings was that, while the Commissions were considered an important way for communities to resolve and inform on inter-ethnic issues, they were generally inactive and unsupported.

In 2010, the Kumanovo Commission began working with the UN to improve their management skills and to understand their role better. The UN is working with the national Government, but also with civil society and local authorities in three municipalities: Kumanovo, Struga and Kicevo. In all three municipalities, training ranges from practical skills like project cycle management to dispute resolution and leadership.

"As members of the Commission we were unprepared to face some problems, but with our involvement in many activities and trainings, I can say that we feel more prepared, as a team, to take actions and work now," Bogdan Tanevski said.

"Last year, for the first time, we started an annual programme of activities together with the City Council. All the representatives of the ethnicities proposed activities, and this year, as a community, we celebrated different, culturally significant events, like Saint Sava Holiday, Gjurgjeven, Vasilica and



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Easter,” said Tanevski. “These activities promote the different cultures and traditions of ethnic groups and we all learn about each other”, concludes Tanevski.

Apart from organizing events, the Commission is now also much more active in advising the Kumanovo City Council on potential inter-ethnic flashpoints. Recently the Commission carried out research and made recommendations to help resolve inter-ethnic tensions in local high schools. This kind of insight and advice is invaluable, says City Council Member, Aleksandra Georgievska.

“In the past we generally did not have any collaboration with the Commission,” says Georgievska. “But, this has changed over the past year. Now we have talk about the problems and challenges that different ethnicities are facing in Kumanovo and are able to take action on it,” she said.

Notes to the editor:

About the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations

The Commissions for Inter-Community Relations are non-formal bodies, established with the *Law on Local Self-Government* to advise municipal councils on ways to achieve good inter-ethnic relations.

About the UN Programme to enhance Inter-Ethnic Dialogue and Collaboration

The United Nations seeks to advance what the country has achieved in inter-ethnic relations by promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and collaboration. It does this by supporting the efforts of central Government, relevant local bodies and civil society in Kicevo, Kumanovo and Struga. The focus is on: support to improve national systems and capacities for inter-ethnic cohesion; reinforcing the education system’s ability to promote diversity; promoting tolerance and respect between different groups. The programme is implemented by UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO with financial support from the Government of Spain under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund.

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