

Regional meeting at Kicevo

On 14 May 2008, in Kicevo, a regional meeting for the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations and the regional Ombudsman office representatives was held, organized by NGOSCs Kicevo, Struga and Debar. 11 representatives of NGOs and 21 representatives of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations from Kicevo, Drugovo, Vranestica, Struga, Debar and Centar Zhupa participated in the meeting. Commissions for inter-community relations have been established in all of these municipalities¹ even it is not obligation for Drugovo and Centar Zhupa according to the *Law on Local Self-Government*. 5 local journalists participated in the meeting, as well. Speakers were: Daut Selimi – Deputy Ombudsman from the regional office in Kicevo, Kamer Imeri – State Advisor of the Deputy Ombudsman from the regional office in Kicevo; Ardita Dema – Deputy Executive Manager of Association of the Local Self-Government Units (ZELS) and Suncica Kostovska Petrovska, project manager. Moderator was Sreten Koceski from *Institute for Community Development* – Tetovo.

Discussion held on the meeting was very constructive and stimulating. Participants discussed the jurisdiction of the Deputy Ombudsman, the role and the work of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations and the future activities of ZELS for support of the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations. The main problem that was presented by the Commissions was inexistent cooperation and non-recognition of their recommendations by Municipal Councils, especially in Struga, related to the issue with high schools students, as well as in Kicevo, Drugovo and Centar Zhupa. Meeting ended with the following recommendations: respect for the rights of the smaller ethnic communities; organization of meetings in each Municipality, with representatives from Municipal Councils and Mayors; establishment of regulations for the work of Commissions for Inter-Community Relations.

As a result of this meeting, the President of the Commission in Drugovo, has reported to a member of the local monitoring team that the cooperation between the Municipal Council and the Commission has been improved; two follow-up workshops requested by the Commissions for Inter-Community Relations with Municipal Councils were organized in Struga and Kicevo in order to improve their cooperation.

¹ Kicevo (30.53% Albanians), Drugovo (8.99% Turks, 4.77% Albanians), Vranestica (20.88% Turks), Struga (32.09% Macedonians), Debar (20.01% Macedonians), Centar Zhupa (12.49% Macedonians)