



YOUNG

Youth perspectives on the future of Kosovo

June 27th, 2019
Emerald Hotel

EULEX has a longstanding commitment in the promotion of increased effectiveness, sustainability and accountability of Kosovo institutions. Rule of law greatly relies upon the degree of inclusion of all members of society. If guaranteed systemically, inclusion and representation concur to the health and prosperity in a sustainable way of democratic institutions. As the youth undoubtedly represents the future of Kosovo, the desires, aspirations and projects of the youth are of paramount importance. As the young have specific needs and interests, they need targeted policies as well as institutions – first and foremost in the rule of law sector – that allow for their participation and respond to their requests. Indeed, Kosovo authorities have shown to espouse this perspective, by including the youth as one of the areas of intervention instrumental for the growth of Kosovo. EULEX is eager to further support this process, by creating fora of discussion among young Kosovar citizens, and energizing the debate over the demands and proposals of the Kosovar youth.

As in many other places around the world, when it comes to free and equal political and public participation, legal and dignified job opportunities, and full access to human rights and fundamental freedoms, Kosovar citizens are still faced with a number of challenges.

If this is true for the overall population, women additionally suffer secondary forms of discrimination. As they remain underrepresented at the local as well as the central political level, their level of representation in rule of law institutions – as for instance police, prosecutors and judges – should also be increased, following recent and commendable efforts in this direction from the part of Kosovar authorities. Women also own drastically less property than men, and are less likely to be employed or to own businesses. While their formal freedoms are sanctioned and protected in the Constitution and in a number of Kosovar laws, it remains essential to ensure that such legislation be implemented fully and systematically.

In this context, young people in general, and thus young women in particular, face a third layer of exclusion and discrimination. For instance, if the unemployment rate among women in Kosovo is 37%, it almost doubles for young women. With Kosovo having one of the youngest populations in Europe and still suffering from a complex legacy from its recent past, special attention must be urgently given to find ways to allow for more room for the youngest generations' meaningful engagement in public life and for more equal opportunities. All the more so considering that Kosovo seems to be following a wider continental trend of underrepresentation of youth from decision-making, and still limited ability to include fully and respond positively to young citizens' inputs and needs.

Oftentimes conflict somehow dilutes society, destabilizing traditional societal roles and loosening institutions, thus creating leeway for the simultaneous presence within a society of both conservative features and countering, modern narratives and paradigms. Youth is inevitably at the center, if not at the forefront, of this process – and Kosovo is no exception. However, as the international community supports local and regional authorities to follow a path of peace and negotiation, more attention should be dedicated to the role of youth, so as not to reinforce the idea that those who are better suited to solve current and future issues are only those who have currently access to political participation and the decision-making process. Yet, a strong and ongoing support from the part of the Kosovar youth to traditional institutions such as family and religion persists based on several factors, including long-held societal values but also socio-economic insecurity. This begs the question of how the young are experiencing, and potentially reinterpreting, these institutions, and how young conservatism and innovation combine to bring about a forward-looking political project for Kosovo.

If Kosovo is to promote the development of an inclusive, equal, multi-ethnic and modern society, those who will actually inhabit this very society and those who already live and experience first-hand this mix of innovative beliefs and more traditional societal paradigms must be fully engaged. Moreover, as the local and international community discusses Kosovo's role within the wider European community, and they work together on bringing into Kosovo European values and best practices, it is worth posing some key questions. What does it mean to be a Kosovar within Europe? As EU citizens themselves struggle to reconcile their national and European identities, can we talk of a European, Kosovar identity? What is the role of young people in advancing a modern, European understanding of their society? What can Europe bring as fruitful example of integration between national and European identities, as a way to foster an inclusive, egalitarian and modern understanding of society? In 2019, what does it mean to be a young, European, Kosovar (man or) woman?

The project will consist in a one-day event to be held in Pristina. It aims at fostering a free-flowing and constructive debate with a specific focus on the youth perspective. This event wants to be from the youth, with the youth, for the youth.

In the morning, two interactive panel discussions will be organized to address the above-mentioned questions. It will see the participation of local civil society representatives engaged in youth empowerment and youth representation, with a particular attention to women's empowerment. The participation of the Italian United Nations Youth Delegates will add an international perspective to the event. As UNSCR 1325 recognizes the importance of women in post-conflict societies for the re-establishment and maintenance of international peace and security, UNSCR 2250 acknowledges the crucial role of youth in the same area. Together, they lay the foundation for the structured, permanent inclusion of young women and men in fostering and consolidating a resilient society.

As a result of the panel discussion, participants – namely, young Kosovar citizens – will draft a set of findings and recommendations in concert with the hosts, to be circulated to the media and shared with the competent local and international authorities.

Overall, the one-day conference will see the participation of:

1. 45 young Kosovars, both male and female;
2. 10 panelists, including the two UN Youth Delegates of Italy.

The conference will be held in English, Albanian and Serbian, with simultaneous translation.