

# Speech by Pieter Feith, European Union Special Representative Civil Society Debate – University of Pristina

**Tuesday 18 March 2008**

## **1. Introduction**

- Thanks for warm welcome here at the University of Pristina. The University is anchoring itself in the Bologna process (European higher education area) which of course I welcome. Tonight, glad to have opportunity to reach out beyond immediate world of politics.
- Events of past few days in Mitrovica are of course much on our minds. Clearly violence, a red line of the international community, is not going to lead us anywhere. Rather we need to look for dialogue and contacts and to continue to work on this.
- But our main purpose in being here is an issue for the medium and long term – building the bridges between civil society, government and international community; and then building bridges across Kosovo and ultimately to the EU in the months and years to come. I know there is a lot of demand out there for information particularly about my office. Right that we get to know each other tonight.
- I was last here in 2001. As a NATO official, I worked to stabilize a still volatile situation in Preshevo and in Macedonia. Then you were emerging from a dark period of individual and national suffering. What a difference we now see. Congratulate your desire to look to the future.
- So now we are at the beginning of a long road, a road that I hope will ultimately lead to an open society, integrated with Europe.
- So tonight I want to talk about the possibilities for civil society in all of Kosovo on that journey; to explain more about my mandates; and to talk a little about the implications of Kosovo's EU perspective. I am also looking forward to hearing your questions, views and ideas.

## 2. The role of civil society

- **Civil society is the heart of society.** It has its own power that comes from its freedom of manoeuvre and its closeness to people in their communities – relationships of trust
- You are influential people in Kosovo. Many of you here have been involved in social and economic research, often starting from nothing. This has been immensely valuable in rebuilding understanding of society here. Clearly much more remains to be done – this is an important task of great assistance to all authorities here.
- Commend your role along with that played by DPM Kuçi in the Constitutional consultation process in past months – a sign of responsible democratic engagement. This has shown the difference you can make and should continue making in society here. Especially at this time when international eyes are on Kosovo.
- In coming weeks the ICO/EUSR will welcome on our staff a contact point for civil society in my office who will be a valuable contact alongside your existing relationships in ICO/EUSR.
- You have a capacity to mobilize/inform citizens, your families and friends – your actions and projects bring people together. I would suggest that there is an important role for you to play in building consensus in Kosovo for European integration. I invite you to play an active role in the process, connecting communities.
- In many cases there is a need to “open the windows” for people. Maybe it is civil society representatives who have the ability to build trust. To encourage fellow citizens to look over the fence and see how their neighbours are living. Building understanding between people who may have become isolated from each other. Many good examples of this already eg Community Building Mitrovica who provide neutral space for people from different communities to meet and be together. Congratulate Community Building Mitrovica leader Valdete Idrizi, whose colleagues are here tonight, on her Woman of Courage award.
- Some specific areas where you can add real value. The Government supported by the ICO will be taking forward new arrangements for local self-government, for the protection of minority community rights and for the protection of cultural and religious heritage – they and

we need your input and participation as those processes move forward. I invite you to be full partners in implementing these measures.

- Civil society has a crucial role to play in embedding public trust in public institutions and in the rule of law. One example is oversight of the public security sector, such as the Kosovo Police. Civil society organizations complement the role of Parliament and Government in ensuring accountability and diversity of membership in all organizations whose role is to protect Kosovo and its people. Members of civil society provide indispensable vigilance and expertise that guides our elected politicians in reaching higher levels of governance. In so doing, you ensure a healthy balance of state powers.
- Would welcome your full support for a flourishing third sector – not private, not governmental but democratic, self sustaining and active. **A force in society** that holds to account those with power and makes itself known for doing that. This will take perseverance and patience of course.
- Long term benefit of your activity is the development of Kosovo itself. I welcome the role you can play alongside the authorities and the international community in improving governance, establishing the rule of law and fighting crime and corruption.
- Together we must work together to achieve a paradigm shift. From headlines and heightened emotions to the quiet, continuing day to day work of building a sustainable, peaceful future.
- So my main call to you today: to discern your place in that effort and seize it with both hands.

### **3. Mandates**

- The ICO and the new EU presences now building up in Kosovo.
- In both cases, a supporting role. Key part of our philosophy that Kosovo government institutions are in the lead, with the responsibility, accountable to the people. We are not

here to administer Kosovo or to do everything. Essentially it's up to you. We are here to support and advise.

- December 2007 Heads of State and Government meeting made political decision that EU would take a greater supporting role.
- 3 arms of EU presence. 1. My office includes the **European Union Special Representative** – about the politics of European integration. As EUSR, I offer advice to the Kosovo Government on the political process that makes Kosovo's strategic agenda a European agenda.
- 2. The **European Commission Liaison office** drives reform through its activities including very significant funding programmes – to 2011, Commission has earmarked nearly 400 million euros in pre-accession assistance. First set of projects announced by Renzo Daviddi last week – hope you seize these opportunities.
- **3. EULEX** mission headed by Yves de Kermabon. The one you are most likely to see day to day. An operational, rule of law mission – 1900 international police officers and judicial experts and 1100 national staff. This is truly vital. Without effective rule of law quality of life is diminished. We would have painful inequality in society. Hallmark of every successful society is that it has full respect for rule of law.
- Accountability. EU presences not acting autonomously. High Representative Javier Solana and the 27 member states in charge of EUSR and EULEX through the Council in Brussels. Commission office reports back to the Commissioners. Intense scrutiny of our actions.
- Final international presence, also in my office and important for Kosovo's way forward through supervised independence – the **International Civilian Representative**. This is about laying a solid foundation for a multi-ethnic Kosovo. Mandated by the broad international community and accountable to the International Steering Group, a group of countries committed to regional stability. As ICR, I supervise and ensure implementation of the status plan by the Kosovo Government.

- One major point about this plan has often been missed. One that needs to be clearly heard especially given the events in Mitrovica. **There are very extensive protections and rights for minority communities especially Kosovo Serbs.** Local self-government, guaranteed representation, wide reaching community rights. Affirmative action, indeed, but action that is indispensable against the background of the past. These provisions are crucial for building a democratic and peaceful society in Kosovo and that's why we intend to explain them as often as possible and would value your support.

#### 4. European perspective for Kosovo

- Over past two years, countries of Western Balkans have moved closer to the EU. All 27 member states believe that. it is in the interest of the EU and Europe as a whole for the region to go through the political and economic reform and reconciliation necessary to progress towards the EU.
- Commissioner Rehn, at the beginning of this month, restated that the EU is mobilizing all its policy instruments to support the region. **We want to make the perspective a reality.**
- Clearly European living standards are popular for everyone here. But they are not a goal in themselves. So let's examine European values and their implications more closely.
- There is a need to make the civil and public services, at every level, more responsive. Capacity building is an important task ahead. These are questions that most European states have been working on in the past ten years. No surprise that it is an issue for Kosovo too.
- **Europe welcomes entrepreneurs!** Need to capitalise on evident entrepreneurial spirit here. Not by heading for profit any which way. But by ensuring **open and well regulated markets** that offer opportunities for all. Especially for start-up entrepreneurs. For its part government will need to work on a stable macroeconomic framework – maintaining fiscal discipline and supporting the appropriate economic policy institutions. Again, political stability of a society is a necessary precondition for economic prosperity with an essential role to be filled by civil society.

- These principles are vital to encourage sustainable economic development – which in the end thrives on private investment/initiative. People must feel confident to invest in Kosovo. That will require **transparency and fairness** in economic and business activity.
- Fairness also towards the less privileged and vulnerable in society.
- No doubt there is a difficult road ahead. Reform rarely easy.
- Let's be clear: aid and IFI money will help. But it is not the whole story. Success here is ultimately down to your own efforts.
- Finally the European future calls us to be future focused. **No healthy society lives in the past.** Respect it, learn lessons from it, yes. Here in Kosovo that means reconciliation between individuals and between communities. This is not an overnight question. But in the medium to long term Kosovo will not be able to truly achieve its potential if there are sources of division that can and should be dealt with. This requires courage – opening arms to former opponents is not easy. But European integration was exactly built on that principle and now we in the EU owe much to those women and men who had, only sixty years ago, the courage to take the first steps on that path.

## 5. Conclusion

- In short I am here to provide **international support for a European future.** We are united in pursuing with the authorities here a viable, multi-ethnic Kosovo.
- In the long term, we are determined, together with you, to bring Kosovo closer to Europe. Tonight is not about headlines but about getting a headstart. Thanks for the opportunity.
- Let's build the role of civil society in Kosovo to the benefit of all its people and all its communities.