

**RICHARD HARGREAVE'S QUICK REPORT TO BPPP UK COMMITTEE**  
**on the**  
**BALKANS PEACE PARK COALITION**  
**REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

*Strategic cooperation between Civil Society, Local Authorities  
and International Institutions*  
15 – 16<sup>th</sup> November 2006  
Grand Hotel, Prishtina, Kosovo/a

1. With Ann Kennard and Howard Boyd, I was privileged to attend and take part in this conference, a real milestone on the road to the dream of the Balkans Peace Park.
2. The conference was organized by the new BPP Coalition, a group of 6 NGOs, two from each country, which met in Plav in October for a preliminary conference to prepare the way for this big event.
3. The founding members of the Coalition are:

Kosovo/a	AQUILA	Environmental Protection Association
«	ERA	Environmentally Responsible Action Group
Montenegro	TRITON	Mountaineering Club - Plav
«	HAJLA	Mountaineering and Skiing Assoc. - Rozaje
Albania	PFGE	Preservation of Forests and Green Env'ment
“	Q.M.V.	Environmental Centre – Valbona

4. Organization was largely in the hands of ERA members and Burim Leci who chaired the conference. Burim is also Head of Youth Policy in the Kosovan Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport. This Kosovan Government Ministry has taken a keen interest in the BPP, promoted the 'Long Walk for Peace' in 2005 and helped to fund this event.

5. Main focus: apart from inviting interest from individuals and NGOs locally and internationally the most important purpose was to inform key representatives from municipalities and communities from around and within the BPP area and to gain their commitment to the BPP. **The mayors or their deputies from:**

<b>Decan</b>	<b>Kosovo/a</b>
<b>Peja/Pec</b>	<b>Kosovo/a</b>
<b>Rozaje</b>	<b>Montenegro</b>
<b>Plav</b>	<b>Montenegro</b>
<b>Bajram Curri</b>	<b>Albania</b>

**presented glowing pictures of their own municipality, watched the latest version of Fatos' film, heard presentations from the UK Committee and local NGOs and, finally and most importantly, signed a LETTER OF INTENT, to demonstrate their support for the BPP.** A copy of the letter presented for signing is attached to this report.

The mayor of Shkodra's name was on the letter but he wasn't there. I heard later that he was on an official visit to Russia. Was he asked to send a deputy? I don't know.

6. There were 88 people attending the conference and I saw about another 20 labels on the table outside the room for people who were expected but didn't appear.
7. There was instantaneous interpretation between Albanian, Montenegrin and English throughout. I felt for the Albanian/English interpreter who worked all day, with only lunch for respite.
8. The UK Committee had been asked to give a 15 minute presentation, using Powerpoint. Ann and I covered our headings alternately: a short background – our aims - main activities since 2000 – our role – next steps. Our Powerpoint 'slides' had been prepared by Abbey Radis while in Hetton.
9. 'Congratulations on a hugely significant step'. In a short unscripted introduction to our presentation I stressed the great significance of this conference. Unlike many other peace parks in the world which were the brainchild of governments, a 'top down' model, the BPPP had been seen since the beginning as a 'bottom up' movement with individuals and NGOs at local level on the ground creating so much enthusiasm and desire that local and then

national governments would have to come on board. I congratulated the BPP Coalition on its formation and its launch of this conference as a major step on the way to the realization of the BPP dream.

10. This was the agenda and Burim as chair was able to keep reasonably close to it.

<b>AGENDA</b>	
<b>REGIONAL CONFERENCE</b>	
<b>Balkan Peace Park:</b>	
<i>Strategic Cooperation between Civil Society, Local Authorities and International Institutions</i>	
<b>15 – 16 November 2006</b>	
<b>Grand Hotel Prishtina – Kosova</b>	
<b>Day one (15 Nov.)</b>	
<b>10:00 – 10:45</b>	<b>Opening Remarks</b> - Representative from Government of Kosova - Representative from Municipalities/Districts Kosovo Albania Montenegro - Donator
<b>10:45 – 11:00</b>	<b>Documentary film for BPP</b>
<b>11:00 – 11:15</b>	<b>Role of UK Committee for BPP</b>
<b>11:15 – 11:40</b>	<b>Coffee break and exhibition</b>
<b>11:40 – 12:30</b>	<b>Presentations</b> - Coalition of Balkan Peace Park - Montenegro and BPP - Albania and BPP - Kosovo and BPP
<b>12:30 – 13:00</b>	<b>Ceremony of local authorities signing the Letter of Good Intent</b>
<b>13:00 – 14:30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>14:30 – 15:15</b>	<b>Seminars</b> - Good examples of cross border cooperation East West Institute - Environmental Regional Cooperation Mr. Zeqir Veselaj, REC Kosova - Need for Environmental Education Ms. Ellen Frank - Governmental Institutions Role for the Balkan Peace Park Mr. Skender Boshtrakaj - Community initiatives in cross border area of Balkan Peace Park Mr. Dritan Shala
<b>15:15 – 15:45</b>	<b>Discussions</b>
<b>15:45 – 16:00</b>	<b>Closing Remarks</b>
<b>Day two (15 Nov.)</b>	
<b>09:30 – 14:00</b>	<b>Planning and developing of the Strategic Plan for the Coalition</b> (Coalition of BPP workshop and other interested organizations for BPP)

I like to think that Ann and I kept pretty close to the 15 minutes we were allowed. Some other speakers didn't! We won't name and shame but the record for an 8 minute slot in the afternoon was a speech of 40 minutes, though someone else timed it at 45 minutes.

Other speakers, not on this agenda, were Jele na Beronja from the UNEP office in Vienna on 'Enhancing Transboundary Diversity' and a man, whose name I didn't catch, from the European Environment Agency on monitoring the environment in designated areas, which included Kosovo/a.

11. Day two.

The Thursday morning session was held in the Iliria Hotel and I counted about 30 people attending or, more accurately, coming and going. There was no formal agenda but the intention was to formulate an action plan for the Coalition's next steps. The session evolved into about 5 sections:

11.1 There were, I think, 8 NGOs queuing up to join the Coalition:

- Balkans Sunflower – Kosovo/a
  - Alpet Shqiptarë Montenegro
  - New Community Albania
  - Eco Radio Globi Kosovo/a, especially Mitrovica/Pec, anti-pollution
  - Rugova Experience Kosovo/a, Peja
  - Eko-Trepca Kosovo/a, monitoring river pollution between Rozaje and Mitrovica
  - Tourist Office – Peja
  - FARE VERDE Kosovo/a
- There was also a group of 5 Serbian students of Albanian Language and Literature from Belgrade University. They came as individuals but were thinking of forming a group. They said they were just observing.

Each NGO gave a short presentation of their activity. Most were concerned with environmental protection in one way or another, and Alpet Shqiptarë, after helping

Kosovar refugees to cross borders in the war, had become involved in cultural programmes and heritage issues.

11.2 Discussion about what to do with all these applications to join the Coalition. Did it want to expand? It was decided that this should be dealt with at the next meeting of the Coalition, looking at the need and the criteria for expansion.

11.3 For the UK Committee we said that our role was now changing with the development of the coalition. Based on needs identified on many visits to the BPP area and discussions with people living there, we were offering help to the Coalition in 3 ways:

- a) Provision of mountain guide training, either in the Balkans or at the National Mountaineering Centre in North Wales in the UK;
- b) Study visits to National Parks in the UK, especially the Yorkshire Dales, where some of us lived;
- c) Practical projects in the mountain valleys, identified as urgent needs by inhabitants, e.g. repair or rebuilding of bridges and repairs to the hydro electric plant in Theth.

11.4 Response to criticism of the UK Committee's previous role.

At this point, possibly echoing something said by another person, Burim, as chair, said that the UK Committee had spent too much of their funds on themselves and not in the Balkans and that it dealt too much with individuals, not organizations. I responded to this, forcefully, I hope, but politely. I explained that the committee consisted of 8 -10 people only, 'none of us young', who spent money from their own pockets on all meetings and activities connected with the BPPP for the first 4 years since the committee started in 2000. We had virtually no funds until we achieved the long and difficult step of becoming a registered charity in the UK in 2005. That enabled us to apply for funds; we got one grant last year which we spent on setting up a professional standard website, employing Ed Thatcher on a one day a week basis to do that. The funds we were successful in getting this year are available for helping the three offers we had just made to the coalition. I also told the story of the money donated to repairs to the Theth school, money which was raised by parents and children of a primary school in the Yorkshire Dales after a study visit there by representatives from the BPPP area.

In response to the second criticism, Ann asked to know who were the contact points in the Coalition itself and in the three countries it represented it. The answer was ERA.

11.5 Coalition website. It seems that the website given on the Coalition leaflet does not exist yet. Someone gave a long speech in general terms about the importance of having a website but I couldn't follow it all. At the end it was said that for the time being the Coalition would use ours. (Over to Ed?!)

11.6 Conclusions from the session. Burim summed up the morning's proceedings. The Coalition now had four tasks:

- i) To decide whether to expand, to consider the applications from the morning's NGOs and the East/West Institute;
- ii) To consider the offer of help from the UK committee in the three areas given above;
- iii) To set up links to our BPPP website and to work out how to set up their own;
- iv) To decide on essential contact points for communication between the UK Committee and the Coalition, both as a central organization and in the three countries or municipalities in them.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

### **Mountain guide training.**

As reported above, the UK Committee is offering help in the area of mountain guide training. We ask the Coalition to identify its needs, especially in Albania where there is no tradition of such training as there was in the former Yugoslavia.

I was very interested to hear from Semir of the Hajla Mountaineering and Skiing Association in Rozaje that he had completed mountain guide training at Lovcen with the Montenegrin Alpine Association and that he was active in a mountain rescue organization in Rozaje. It gets called out quite often, especially to people in trouble in a big river gorge nearby. I asked Fatos about the training which the guides in Kosovo/a had done in the past and what was provided now. People like Zia and Gjavit had full qualifications from the Yugoslavia days and he thought that there was a Kosovar club now doing such training.

My thoughts now are that I would prefer to see the mountain guide training being provided in the Balkans, for potential guides from all three countries. Perhaps the centre at Lovcen in Montenegro might be an appropriate place. Our National Centre in North Wales might be useful in future if there are specific skills or experience which it could provide to answer particular needs identified by the Coalition.

**Young people.** In Ellen's presentation to the conference for ERA, which focused particularly on environmental education projects for young people in the three countries, she mentioned a particular programme in Kosovo/a, a one week summer course in mountain activities for 14 – 16 year olds. Fatos also told me about this and that he had youngsters from a particular family lined up for it; I urged him to include youngsters from Albania itself, starting with Gjon Gjecaj's son Anton from Theth. This would help to bring on a new generation of mountain guides in the region.

### **MISSED OPPORTUNITY**

The organization of the conference itself was excellent but arrangements beyond that were less successful. Despite e-mails sent before, asking which hotel we had been booked into, we arrived in Prishtina not knowing where to go. It turned out to be the Hotel Iliria, but Howard, arriving at 11.00pm, didn't know that so he booked into the Grand. This meant that our hotel bills were considerably more than we had expected.

I was very disappointed that the promised 'intercultural evening' did not happen. I had gone to the length of bringing my precious flute with me and other materials to help in any music, singing or dancing which might have got going. A bit of intercultural sharing and fun during the evening after a meal together could have been a wonderful way of cementing relationships between the Coalition, ourselves and all the other interesting people in Prishtina that night. Had I known in the afternoon where we were supposed to be eating that evening and had I known then that no intercultural event had been organized I might have made an announcement to the conference in the hope of getting something going. I know that not everyone feels the same way as I do about this, but for me it was a real opportunity missed.

### **CONCLUSION**

1. This was an inspiring event and I would hate to have missed it. As I said to the conference, I am 'thrilled to bits' that the Coalition has come together and is taking the BPP project further, establishing these all-important links with municipalities. Congratulations again to all concerned!
2. **A summer trip.** I went to Prishtina trying to interest folk in my dream of a fully cross-border trek from Peja or Decan through to Theth. Having met Mensur, Skender and Semir from Montenegro I now think of a summer trip based in Plav, with day walks from there to Visitor, Grabaje, etc., then a 3 or 4 day mountain bike ride over Cakor to Peja and back via Decan and Hrid Lake, and finally a 4 or 5 day walk: Vusanje to Theth over Qafa e Pejës, Theth to Valbona, Valbona back to Gusinje. Only an idea at this stage. Anyone interested?!

*Richard Hargreaves*  
19/11/2006