

SELF- GOVERNANCE REQUIRES A SELF- CONFIDENT MEDICAL PROFESSION



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One of the initiators and contributors to the establishment of the KDC

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When a small delegation of the German Medical Association (GMA) travelled to Kosovo for the first time in 2010, we did not know what the outcome would be. The initiative for the first visit was twofold. On the one hand, some dedicated members and organisations of the German medical profession, including the Hans Neuffer Foundation, which is closely affiliated with the GMA, asked the GMA's Department for International Affairs for information about how the medical profession in Kosovo was organised. On the other hand, there were increasing enquiries from our members about the basic medical education, specialty training, continuing medical education (CME) and continuing professional development (CPD) of migrating physicians from Kosovo, which made us realise that we did not have a contact in the medical profession in Kosovo with whom we could exchange information.

In Germany, the State Chambers of Physicians are responsible for issuing specialist medical diplomas. The German Medical Association, as the working group of the State Chambers of Physicians in Germany, helps provide its members with contacts and information about the various structures of the medical profession and healthcare systems abroad. The initial aim of our visit was therefore to find out more about the medical profession in Kosovo.

After reading an article in the GMA's main medical journal, the *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, about CME events from the University of Mannheim in Pristina, we contacted the co-organiser of the events, Dr Salih Berisha, and planned a visit to Kosovo together in 2010. Dr Berisha brought together a small group of physicians who met with us to explain the situation facing physicians in Kosovo and how the profession is organised. Initial discussions were also held with political decision-makers who were contacts of Dr Berisha. These discussions became more in-depth over time and were followed by a joint CME event for Kosovar physicians in Pristina in 2011, which drew around 300 participants. It was intended to show the broad spectrum of medical self-governance to the Kosovar medical profession.

Talking to political decision-makers was an important aspect, but it was even more crucial to win over physicians to the concept of medical self-governance and to demonstrate to them that it was and is up to them to take responsibility for their profession and their patients. Without dedicated physicians, medical self-governance cannot succeed. After the Ministry of Health officially requested support for setting up self-governance structures in Kosovo, part of our work involved motivating and advising the physicians who would be integral to the establishment of these structures. Together with Dr Berisha, the German Hans Neuffer Foundation and LuxDevelopment, which played a crucial role in develop-

ing the financial framework in consultation with the GMA, we were able to accomplish a lot.

One successful outcome, for example, were the training sessions held at the headquarters of the GMA in Berlin geared toward healthcare professionals and employees of the Ministry of Health in Kosovo and focused on the process of establishing the various health professionals' chambers. The programme included lectures by GMA's experts, as well as a visit to the Berlin Chamber of Physicians. The focus at the Berlin Chamber of Physicians was on the organisational requirements and the implementation of the tasks of a chamber of physicians. The contribution of the former Secretary General of the State Chamber of Physicians of Saxony, Dr Verena Diefenbach, and a representative of the chamber's legal department, who gave an overview of the experience of setting up the chamber structures in Saxony in the early 1990s, proved to be extremely valuable. The Saxony Health Professions Chamber Act was recommended as a template for the laws in Kosovo. Albanian translations of important German legal texts and other legal foundations of the State Chamber of Physicians of Saxony were also made available.

The joint tour of the country's regional hospitals with the Minister of Health of Kosovo, Prof. Ferid Agani, in that same year also served to strengthen the commitment of the physicians toward building their chamber. In a four-hour meeting with representatives of the health professions, we then discussed the next steps of this process.

We also met with the election committee before the first medical chamber election and were impressed by how professionally they carried out their work and how full of anticipation they were in the run-up to these elections. On the occasion of the first chamber assembly, we organised conference with international participants. It was overwhelming to see how many international representatives from the region expressed their support of the future work of the Medical Chamber in Kosovo. It was a solemn moment when the first president of the Medical Chamber of Kosovo, Dr Zylfije Hundozi, was elected, which we celebrated in a large gathering.

It was important to put the medical profession in the position to organise itself. Without this and the commitment of the leadership, including Dr Zylfije Hundozi and Dr Pleurat Sejdu, this would not have been possible. In the process, we observed that the resistance from the Ministry was quite strong once it was foreseen which tasks the medical chamber would take on. In the early years, a great deal of energy went into these disputes. In fact, they strongly impacted Dr Hundozi's term in office. Dr Hundozi was very committed and defended the idea of self-governance of the medical profession. However, the disputes played an important role in strengthen-

ing the chamber's will to shape its own fate and toward obtaining essential financial resources. Despite these challenges, the second chamber elections were carried out successfully and professionally after the four years term. This sign of continuity and the persistent commitment of Dr Pleurat Sejdu then led to a consolidation of the work of the medical chamber, the further delegation of tasks and increased professionalisation of the organisation. I was very impressed during a visit in 2019 at how much the team in the office has grown and specifically how young, committed and well-trained staff had been recruited for the work of the medical chamber. Certainly, the support of Dr Aferdita Ademi from LuxDevelopment and Dr Berisha must always be taken into account here.

There has also been a great focus on integrating the Medical Chamber of Kosovo into European and other international bodies. For example, representatives of the medical chamber have regularly been invited by the GMA to the annual German Medical Assemblies, as well as to the meetings of the Central and Eastern European Chambers of Physicians, known as the annual ZEVA Symposium. The Medical Chamber of Kosovo also achieved an important milestone when it was granted observer status in the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME).

Through the hard work of the dedicated physicians both inside and outside of the chamber's bodies, a strong medical chamber was thus established, which continues

to contribute its voice both domestically and at the European level. Over all these years, it has been remarkable to see how the commitment of physicians has grown since the structures were built. Mindful of the weaker structures of civil society they had experienced in the past, physicians and their leaders very quickly and sustainably understood the importance of forming an independent, self-confident organisation which represents physicians and advocates for patients. The physicians of Kosovo have seized their opportunity and established a strong voice, and I am sure that this will continue into the future. Congratulations on the 10th anniversary of the Medical Chamber of the Republic of Kosovo: You can be proud of your work.



The visit of the representative from the German Medical Association to the Kosovo Doctors Chamber



The president of the Kosovo Doctors Chamber, Dr. Pleurat Sejdu shares gratitude for the German Medical Chamber representative, Mr. Domen Podnar.