

## WORKING FOR KOSOVO'S PATIENTS - A STRONG MEDICAL SELF - GOVERNANCE FOSTERS QUALITY IN HEALTHCARE



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Self-governance is based on a framework provided by the legislator. Those who are entrusted with establishing the system of self-governance – namely, the medical profession itself – shape and continuously develop the structures as deemed necessary and appropriate.

A legal framework for self-governance in Kosovo's health system was not a foregone conclusion. However, 10 years after the establishment of the medical chamber, there is undeniable proof that it is a success story. Granting health professionals a voice and assigning them important and relevant tasks disburdens the government and national administration of many organisational and educational tasks relating to the medical profession, strengthens medical professionalism and postgraduate medical education and enhances the quality of healthcare provision.

It is no easy task to bring people with different views and responsibilities together, and the struggle to find common solutions can also be tedious. Despite these challenges, self-governance has proven to be a very sustainable approach in Kosovo.

It was a forward-looking decision by the then Minister of Health to listen to many different voices, to take established European self-governance systems into consideration, and to entrust the committed stakeholders and service providers in the health sector with the management of certain tasks. It has not only strengthened the health professions, and indeed the health system as a whole, but also rendered a great service to Kosovar society. At the same time, the minister has embraced a concept for organising health professionals that had already proven to be effective in Germany, Poland, Austria, as well as in many closer neighbouring countries. Kosovo became part of a broader regional tradition.

In just a few years, the medical chamber has become a strong player in Kosovo, confidently representing the country's physicians and actively participating in European and international meetings.

At the start of the process, the then Minister of Health of Kosovo, Professor Ferid Agani, officially asked the German Medical Association to provide guidance and support through the process of establishing the medical chamber. From our perspective, the numerous discussions we had with the ministry formed a good basis for drafting a legal framework and the establishment of a system of medical self-governance in Kosovo.

During this same period, we were also in constant contact with various bodies in Kosovo and their representatives, such as the German ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo, representatives from the European Union Special Representative in Kosovo, members of the Kosovar parliament and representatives from the Faculty of Medicine at

the University of Pristina.

On every visit to Kosovo since 2010, there have been consultations with the Minister of Health and the responsible ministry staff on a variety of subjects, from the progress of implementation of the medical chamber, to the training of physicians and continuing medical education (CME) in Germany.

For example, in preparation for the establishment of the various chambers, the Ministry of Health organised a meeting with about 50 health professionals. The German Medical Association was privileged to attend the meeting as well and supported the 15 elected physicians' representatives in attendance in their future work. In 2012, Minister Ferid Agani also took us on an informative tour of Kosovo. We visited health facilities in Peja, Prizren, Pristina, Mitrovica and Gjilan to provide the medical profession and other health professionals with information about the system of medical self-governance and to respond to questions and concerns. Successful implementation of self-governance requires the full support and appreciation of its respective profession.

Therefore, it was not only a great honour for us to be part of this delegation but also a necessary step toward building trust in this system among medical professionals in Kosovo. We were also able to offer our expertise and support with regards to implementing the structures of medical self-governance and provide a line of communication to the Federal Ministry of Health in Germany.

In the end, however, it was the stakeholders in Kosovo who had to find their own way to establish an appropriate framework to meet the unique needs of their medical profession.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministers of Health Professor Ferid Agani, Imet Rrahmani and Uran Ismaili had all attended the German Medical Assembly. During these assemblies, we were able to organise meetings or meet-and-greets with the German Federal Ministers of Health, Hermann Gröhe and Jens Spahn. The official exchange certainly further strengthened the cooperation between us. From the beginning, the Ministry of Health and its leadership were very receptive to the idea of self-governance and to cooperating with the German Medical Association. We greatly appreciated this fruitful and trusting cooperation which permitted an open and honest dialogue.

This is not to say that it wasn't challenging for the ministry to manage the delegation of tasks. And it should not be forgotten that there were also preservationists within the system who were sceptical about such a transfer of power.

The process of self-governance is a constant work in progress. It requires a strong chamber

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to remain a relevant partner for the government and to advocate for the evolving interests and needs of physicians and most importantly our patients.



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