



OPEN SOCIETY FUND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

EAST-EAST PROGRAM STRATEGY 2010

1. Issue

Broadly speaking, main obstacles to open society in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) lie in its structural constraints - constitutional and institutional set-up - along with the high level of ethnic division and distrust, political irresponsibility and low level of civic engagement.

Thus, the main issues that OSF BH EEP plans to address in 2010 are:

- a) empowering diverse groups of civil society organizations to take part in consensus building around shared set of values in education;
- b) exploiting legal remedies to hold government accountable and to combat corruption behavior of public authorities;
- c) building capacity of NGOs, different civic groups and individuals aimed at advancing government accountability and opening space for critical dialogue and citizen participation in public policy creation;
- d) assisting the local self-government in improving their democratic performance and decision-making processes and practices.

2. Context

BH society is deeply scarred by atrocities of the recent war as extreme as genocide. The Dayton Peace Agreement provided BH with both a resolution to end the war and a constitutional framework. According to this framework, BH is comprised of two loosely knit entities - the Federation of BH (FBH)

and Republika Srpska (RS) - with complicated institutional structure and decision making arrangements. Consequences of the war along with the constellation of power embedded in the constitution have effectively divided the country along ethnic lines. Despite of huge international aid efforts that have made BH probably the largest laboratory for social engineering in the world, it still confronts numerous threats in transition to functional democracy.

BH is not the only Western Balkan country that is going through difficulties. Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia have all run into different obstacles on their long road towards democracy. But BH may be the most troubled of all. And Western Balkans matters to BH in many different ways – whatever happens in the neighborhood reflects on BH. For example, Kosovo independence created major crisis in BH. Or, free visa regime that is going to be granted to Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia but not to BH due to poor reforms, created now a certain leverage to advocate for reforms.

Why BH is the most troubled in the Western Balkans? The Dayton constitution does not affirm citizenship but rather membership in one of the three major ethnic groups, and on the other hand, it commits to international human rights standards and non-discrimination. The power-sharing mechanisms built into the constitution have put in place a system in which all decisions and important positions have to be decided and allocated equally between the three constituent peoples.

Since people are forced to identify themselves with one of the three ethnic groups in order to be politically represented, political parties in BH cultivate popular support solely on ethnic sentiments. By permanent reproduction of ethnic confrontation and political discourse about “them” and “us” political elites deliberately and efficiently channel dissatisfaction of citizens toward other ethnic groups. They purposefully make ethnicity the main political cleavage in the country while almost completely blurring social reality. In such atmosphere informal decision-making structures, which fall outside the processes and methods of democratic verification and transparency, are flourishing. Undermining and eroding institutions and democratic procedures are perfect match for widespread corruption and rent-seeking.

Ruling nationalist elites use education as one of the main tools to effectively divide society at large. 'Official' knowledge taught in schools is translated into separate and antagonistic ethnic literatures and histories, while geography texts serve to legitimize genocide and ethnic cleansing. Religious education provides for further distinction of “us” and “the others”, with stereotypical descriptions of different

religions in BH and glorification of war and sacrifice as the strongest proof of affiliation to a particular ethnic group. In the long run, such education is destructive for the whole BH society, as well as for individual ethnic groups, whose members will thus base their main identity on their affiliation to a self-contained community isolated from others, without the basic conditions for the full participation in a multi-ethnic democratic society. On a societal level, the discrimination experienced in schools can prevent the process of inter-ethnic reconciliation, trust-building and cooperation, and potentially lead to new conflicts.

Around half of BH citizens is eager to “collaborate” with political elites either out of conviction or for the personal gain. For others, the consistent pressure and reduction of political space to ethnic issues make political participation pointless. Therefore, instead of assuming an active role in society, these citizens instinctively move out of the social mainstream in quest of a personal refuge.

There are many root causes for this lack of civic mobilization. “Ethno-political” and “civic” concepts are hardly compatible. The *ethnic* approach to politics manipulates the attitudes of ordinary citizens and thus creates impersonal “believers” unaware of the fact that they serve “leaders” as mere voting machines. Granting civil society the right to action is a risky business for ethnic elites, who fear that this will jeopardize their control over the economy, the media, and the general public.

Central authorities, both state and entity, formally responsible for development on a local level are still preoccupied with the creation and functioning of sustainable state institutions. In doing this they have opted for a ‘win-lose’ strategy in which local self-governance is almost always on the ‘lose’ end. As a result, BH local governments sit within a massive and often dysfunctional administrative system that is highly politicized and weakly coordinated. This leads to the paradoxical situation that citizens finance an extremely large administration in return for low quality services.

Work in the area of local governance is crucial to democratization and increasing political stability in BH. This is not merely because local services have the ability to directly affect the life

choices and opportunities of citizens, but because BH municipalities have an enormous potential for affecting more fundamental change. The genuine change in political culture can take place at the local level much more rapidly. As is already seen in some parts of the country,

committed local leaders have succeeded in building citizen commitment and customer-oriented local services. These innovations have frequently transformed the political space suggesting that local governance can play a leading role in the process of creating a new political culture and practices in BH.

BH will soon enter the process of a renewed debate over constitutional reform which raises different expectations and concerns throughout the country. Recent experience with the Dayton constitutional arrangements, which, at the expense of local governance, favored the entity/cantonal levels, clearly indicates frustrations with which the local level is expecting from these events. Local self-governance is one of those social and political resources in BH which needs to be fully engaged in this process. To that end it is necessary to replace the existing approach to development in BH, which is based on a dominant role of state and entity institutions, with the development option which considers all social sub-systems and where the role of local communities in development is particularly emphasized.

3. Activities

- a) Set of different activities (workshops, seminars, roundtables) on how to improve history education in the Western Balkans in order to promote peace and tolerance;
- b) Regional (WB) round table on status and practice in application of the Law on Freedom of Information;
- c) Seminar for NGOs focused on public accountability and methodology for civil society monitoring in cooperation with the Institute of Public Finance from Croatia;
- d) Regional round-table designed to enable transfer of specific experiences and solutions in managing municipalities and cities within the environment of social and economic transformation in Western Balkans.

4. Outcomes and Results of Activities

The following specific outcomes are expected to be achieved:

- a) Regional network of history educators established, educational material and methodology developed;
- b) Comparative review of the best practices in FOI application;
- c) Trained civil society actors on budget monitoring;
- d) Guide on the best practices in managing municipalities developed.

5. Anticipated Impact

It is envisioned that activities, undertaken under OSF BH EEP, will contribute to:

- a) reaching consensus on shared set of values in education, in order to support the process of social reconstruction in BH;
- b) building of the effective legal system that will enable civil society to exercise control over public money;
- c) strengthening capacity of pro-democracy and good governance NGOs, different civic groups and individuals aimed at advancing public accountability.
- d) improving local governments leadership and management capacities, thus bringing policy-making closer to citizens and improving its inclusiveness.

Indicators of success in achieving anticipated results are:

- a) number of history teachers involved and actively engaged; number of stakeholders involved and actively engaged; number history teachers willing to use material and methodology developed,
- b) number of effective usage of the FOI act to keep the government accountable;
- c) number of NGOs involved into budget monitoring activities at different level of government;
- d) relative satisfaction of citizens with local governance in public opinion polls.