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## **International Workshop**

**Shaping the Future in Bosnia and Herzegovina:  
Civil Society's Questions and Answers to Current Issues**

**Niederpoecking / Germany, 4-5 December, 2009**

### **Background**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ever since the Dayton Agreement, debates have been held and proposals floated for its fundamental revision. It is generally assumed that many of the current dysfunctions of the Bosnian state are direct consequences of the arrangements fixed in the Dayton Agreement. Political energy is sapped by fundamental issues of the state arrangement and the pivoting of the societal and political debate on the question whether and how to revise, implement or renege this arrangement. The perception is widespread that political actors feel more comfortable restating their position on the highly mobilising but irresolvable state arrangements rather than to take responsibility for arduous and unpopular reform processes in various policy areas.

In this situation, civil-society organisations in the widest sense have a crucial role to play in refocusing political attention on urgent and tangible reform issues and societal needs. Indeed, much depends on a limited number of small organisations and determined individuals. More often than not the formal framework and practical conditions for civil-society activities and the transfer for civil-society initiatives into politics are suboptimal.

The purpose of this (series of) workshop(s) is to contribute to communicating civil-society issues and concerns into the political realm. To this end, the workshops bring together civil-society representatives to discuss priority issues on the agenda and ways to redirect political attention. Apart from civil-society activists, think-tank analysts, NGO representatives, journalists, the workshops also encompass younger politicians and international experts. Younger decision makers who have not had

their political careers and biographies determined by the traumatic experiences of the (civil) wars of the 1990s are more likely to have an open mind for civil-society concerns and alternative agendas for the future of their country. The ultimate objective of the workshops is to make a modest contribution to the medium-term redefinition of politics and the political agenda in the region of Southeast Europe.

The workshops take place under Chatham House Rules in Germany in order to facilitate an unhampered exchange of views and ideas.

### **Issues for Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The final list of relevant issues for the workshop depends on the participants and reflects the current preferences and priorities in the activities of their organisations.

Preliminary list of issues:

1. **Conflicts past and present** (transitional justice, the Hague Tribunal, history-writing and education, reconciliation, ethnic stereotypes, citizenship and local ethnic conflicts)
2. **State and society** (transparency and accountability of police and judiciary, fight against corruption)
3. **Civil society independence** (societal cohesion, educational work and institutions, freedom of media and association, NGO work, universities and political education, youth work and projects for disadvantaged groups in society)

Whereas the themes of the workshop panels relate to (parts) of these issues or other issues raised by the invited participants, a “future panel” concludes the workshop and addresses the nexus between the issues discussed and the ongoing debate on statehood arrangements.