



**SÜDOSTEUROPA-
GESELLSCHAFT**

International Workshop
Shaping the Future
in Bosnia and Herzegovina:
Civil Society's Questions and Answers to Current Issues
Niederpoecking / Germany, 4-5 December, 2009

sponsored by



Stabilitätspakt für Südosteuropa
Gefördert durch Deutschland
Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe
Sponsored by Germany

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Conference Report

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Background

On December 4-5, 2009, the Southeast Europe Association (Suedosteuropa-Gesellschaft / SOG) organized an international workshop entitled “Shaping the Future in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Civil Society’s Questions and Answers to Current Issues” in Niederpoecking (near Munich).

Ever since the Dayton Agreement, debates have been held in Bosnia and Herzegovina and proposals floated for the agreement’s fundamental revision. It is generally assumed that many of the current dysfunctions of the Bosnian state are direct consequences of the arrangements defined in the Dayton Agreement. Fundamental issues of state architecture and the recurring societal and political debates on the question as to whether and how to revise, implement or renege the agreement sap political energy. It is widely assumed that political actors feel more comfortable restating their position on the highly mobilising but irresolvable issues of statehood rather than shouldering responsibility for arduous and unpopular reform processes in various policy fields.

In the present stalemate, civil-society organisations in the widest sense have a crucial role to play in redirecting political attention to urgent and tangible reform issues and societal needs. Indeed, much depends on a limited number of small organisations and determined individuals currently. More often than not the legal framework and practical conditions for civil-society activity as well as for the projection of civil-society initiatives into politics are suboptimal.

The workshop was part of a series of similar events covering a wider range of countries in the region. The purpose of this particular workshop and the series in general 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 and journalists, the workshops also include young politicians and international experts. Young 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 in Germany under Chatham House Rules in order to facilitate an unhampered exchange of views and ideas.

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

For Bosnia and Herzegovina the following clusters of topics were identified and subsequently discussed:

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

A “future panel” concluded the workshop and addressed the nexus between the issues discussed and the ongoing debate on statehood arrangements.

State and Society

The panel offered a first opportunity for an exchange of views to the participants from different sectors; civil society (CS) and the media, members of parliament from the two entities as well as representatives of the international community. As several civil-society representatives stated that this actually was a unique opportunity which does not exist in every-day political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “I had to come to Munich to speak with our politicians from Bosnia

and Herzegovina,” an NGO activist remarked, torn between hope and frustration.

Shortly before the workshop, the so-called Butmir Talks and their follow-up meetings had taken place in Sarajevo. These debates initiated by Washington and Brussels aims at a reform of BiH’s constitution, which has been part of the 1995 Dayton Agreement. The Workshop’s participants highlighted some of the most controversial aspects of the existing constitution, such as the regulation of entity voting with veto powers concerning state-level decisions, national

The Butmir Process, a joint EU-US initiative which provided for a dialogue between leading Bosnian politicians, was launched in October 2009 in a bid to break the long-standing political stalemate in BiH that has blocked the reform process and accession progress. International officials participating in the negotiations included EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn and High Representative Valentin Inzko, who also serves as the EU’s Special Representative (EUSR) in BiH. The talks which were held at Camp Butmir, the EUFOR headquarters on the outskirts of Sarajevo, focused on crucial constitutional changes that would pave the way for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s (BiH) eventual EU and NATO membership. BiH signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2008, making its first major step towards eventual membership in the 27-nation bloc, but constitutional reform is a key precondition for further progress.

(i.e., Bosnian, Serb or Croat) affiliation as precondition for running for political office, the size and composition of the state-level parliament and the presidency as well as the structure of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the three-layered: entity-cantons-municipalities).

The discussion about the substance of constitutional reform was not the main focus of the panel’s participants. The process itself apparently evoked even stronger opinions: It was clearly stated by members of the NGO sector that the lack of transparency and the lack of civil society involvement in the constitutional reform were highly problematic: “The constitution is a public good,” an academic from Banja Luka stated. He was supported by representatives of an opposition party who also underlined that the Butmir process had already brought important improvements. According to them, in Butmir the language of maximalism, absolutism and nationalism had changed into some kind of pragmatism and constructiveness. Accordingly, “Butmir” constituted an important message of the international community, signaling that decision and discussion on constitutional reforms was up to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The process would be facilitated, but not shaped by external stakeholders, as a politician from Banja Luka concluded.

Besides, concerning the involvement of civil society in the constitutional reform process a member of a Sarajevo-based think tank pointed out that it was also important that civil society clearly articulates its own role, positions and the expertise which it could proffer to the political decision-making process. He thus opened a wider discussion on the generic role of civil society. It was pointed out that NGOs could offer a lot of working discipline, competencies and professional qualifications “which can’t be gained by diploma” that should be used as a

potential. Nevertheless, NGO members expressed their concern about politicians' unwillingness to involve and support civil society. The parliamentary representatives present at the workshop promised to undertake the necessary steps to improve the opportunities for participation. A member of the Federation parliament and some CS members pointed to a well-defined anti-corruption policy as a necessary precondition to this end. Additionally, a representative of the academic sector argued convincingly that for a fruitful climate of political participation and dialogue the implementation of norms such as freedom of speech and a corresponding political culture are crucial. Although hate speech is not as present as it had been some years ago, a feeling of anxiety concerning the future remains, resulting in bouts of nationalist and non-democratic rhetoric: "Proper political culture will only come with responsible behavior."

Accordingly, the participants discussed other obstacles to a stronger participation of civil society: The inclusion of civil society in the political decision-making process was not only obstructed by local politicians but sometimes also by the international community. NGO members admitted that the international community supports civil society in valuable ways; still the massive international involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina also meant an obstacle to the necessary ownership of the political process. In that respect the future role of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the Office of the High Representative, was discussed. Its closure is tied to the completion of five objectives and two conditions.

Political Directors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board (PIC SB) at their meeting in Brussels on 26 and 27 February 2008 set out the objectives that need to be achieved by the BiH authorities prior to the closure of the OHR and the transition to a European Union Special Representative (EUSR). These objectives are well established, approved by the PIC SB and have all been previously recognized by BiH authorities as obligations. The objectives that will need to be delivered by the BiH authorities prior to transition are: Acceptable and Sustainable Resolution of the Issue of Apportionment of Property between State and other levels of government; Acceptable and Sustainable Resolution of Defence Property Completion of the Brcko Final Award; Fiscal Sustainability (promoted through an Agreement on a Permanent ITA Co-efficient methodology and establishment of a National Fiscal Council); Entrenchment of the Rule of Law (demonstrated through Adoption of National War Crimes Strategy, passage of Law on Aliens and Asylum, and adoption of National Justice Sector Reform Strategy). In addition to these objectives, the PIC Steering Board agreed that two conditions need to be fulfilled: Signing of the SAA and a positive assessment of the situation in BiH by the PIC SB based on full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement.

While parliamentary representatives from the Republika Srpska pleaded for an immediate closure, of the OHR, MPs from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as members of the NGOs stressed the importance of a prior fulfillment of the conditions in order to create a secure environment for the political decision-making process and a strong civil society.

At the same time, the role of the EU is considered essential. The perspective of European integration was almost the

only issue on which a consensus could be reached amongst the different (political) parties, as pointed out by a politician from Republika Srpska. And as European integration could only be managed “in Sarajevo” (i.e., on the state level, not on the entity level), this fact also strengthens and legitimates the state-level institutions. Yet, the discussion showed a high degree of uncertainty concerning the EU’s criteria posed to the Western Balkan states within the EU’s conditionality policy. In the run-up to the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2008, certain criteria (police reform) were toned down, but when it came to the visa liberalization the EU strictly insisted on the criteria as contained in the visa roadmap and thus excluded Bosnia and Herzegovina from the lifting of the visa regime. The participants agreed that this decision was detrimental to the credibility of the EU’s accession policy and they pleaded the case of a more reliable and credible position.

Further attention was paid to the role of BiH’s neighbours. Croatia took an important step forward by telling the Bosnian Croats that their capital is Sarajevo, not Zagreb. It would be desirable for Serbia to follow this example of non-intervention with regard to the internal affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an opposition party member from Sarajevo declared.

The panel resulted in a plea for a real and open dialogue between civil society, political representatives and the international community to overcome the current deadlock in the decision-making and reform processes.

Conflicts Past and Present

The comparison between the process of coping with the past in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina (or former Yugoslavia as a whole), on the one hand, and post-Second World War Western Europe in general and Germany in particular played a prominent role in the discussions. The conclusions drawn from the contrastive comparison varied widely, however. Some argued that even today the priority of dealing with the past seems rather low in Bosnia. Bosnian society at large is only beginning to debate and to reflect on the traumatic past of the 1990s. Unlike Germany, no clear-cut division between victims and perpetrators exists in Bosnia. Consequently, all parties to the conflict claim victim status for themselves, while denying or downplaying the crimes committed in the name of the same (ethnic) community. Others underlined that the much-applauded process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany by and large became a comprehensive endeavor by the 1960s only. Acceptance of traumatic experiences and dark pages in history took even longer after the Second World War and considering the fact that many politicized debates are still ongoing in Europe suggests that the

Bosnian War will continue to preoccupy politicians and citizens for decades to come.

Participants and speakers agreed that civil society, including specialized international civil-society organizations, has a crucial role to play in this process of coping. Neither individual struggles with traumatic experiences that have had a strong impact on the entire society, nor state initiative would suffice to come to terms with the past in a constructive and conclusive manner. A representative of an international NGO underlined that not only many thousands of individuals but also Bosnian society as such had been traumatized, i.e. is dissociated from reality of experiences of existential threat without remedy or recourse. Typically, the first meetings on this topic organized by Wings of Hope for young civil-society activists more than a decade ago, took place in Germany. Only recently the first international workshops for representatives from traumatized societies (Iraq, Israel/Palestine, and former Yugoslavia) took place in Sarajevo. One of the key objectives of these workshops is to exchange experiences and best practices across ethnic delimitations and to enhance the networks of local organizations. More often than not, it takes a number of years before the extent of the societal traumatization becomes apparent. As civil-society representatives with experience in this field underlined, under a surface of normality tensions and traumas persist, causing manifold tensions and conflict risks in society. Post-conflict societies like Germany or Spain may have chosen not to discuss the past for some time, but most participants were convinced that their democracies and societal peace remained fragile until they had come to terms with the past and raised public awareness as a basis for true reconciliation. As more than one speaker noted, Europeans tend to forget that the Bosnian War and genocide are also an inherent part of European history that should not be forgotten – neither in Bosnia and Herzegovina nor elsewhere in Europe. Whereas some (international) observers had the impression that the intensity of preoccupation with the past is rather low in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, others tabled encouraging examples of individuals who defied ethnic taboos and threats to initiative bottom-up projects breaking the silence on the atrocities of the war and the ethnic divides.

The practical approaches to dealing with the past vary among civil-society organizations. Organizations such as the Research and Documentation Center Sarajevo founded in 2004 give priority to establishing a historical truth concerning the extent of human losses. Finding and identifying the remains of victims of the Bosnian conflict often allows surviving relatives to find peace. Counting victims and identifying perpetrators plays a prominent role in societal coping strategies, too. It is noteworthy that the Bosnian state has shunned away from the latter task. The

primary objective of the NGO initiatives to produce reliable accounts of the death toll is to prevent or at least to curtail the political use and abuse of manipulated figures. Currently, figures range for 25.000 to 250.000 victims, depending clearly on ethnic identity and political affiliation. (In the case of the Ustasha camp of Jasenovac, historical research in the 1980s challenged mythical exaggerated numbers). Thus far about 100.000 victims have been identified and described. The census planned for 2012 will hopefully establish a definitive correspondence between the war and demographic developments in Bosnia.

In the discussion, several participants pointed to potential risks of this laudable initiative. If broken down in ethnic categories, even more reliable figures risk reinforcing an ethnic reading of the 1992-1995 conflict and may thus be counterproductive vis-à-vis the ultimate objective, the reconstruction of a multicultural Bosnia and Herzegovina, and rather consolidate the Dayton principles, dividing Bosnia in two entities and three nations. Such an ethnicization would turn a blind eye on other conflict lines underpinning the war, e.g. divides *within* ethnic communities and the link with much broader processes of transition in Yugoslavia. One participant forcefully argued that all efforts of reconciliation are bound to fail without a courageous and unequivocal condemnation by politicians of the political projects that led to genocide and ethnic strife.

During the discussion, fundamental questions were raised not only concerning the responsibility of national politicians' role, but also concerning the fundamental principles informing international strategies, e.g., the projected duration of "transitional justice" and the international community's inclination to reduce reconciliation to an interethnic process, thus perpetuating the alienation of the three ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The question whether the Bosnian conflict should be labelled a "civil war" or a politically induced international conflict triggered fierce debates. The official indictments of Milošević and others were cited to demonstrate the dominance of the international dimension, whereas the Bosnian traditions of multiethnic tolerance and cohabitation were brought to the fore as well. Politicians from Republika Srpska were adamant in defining the Bosnian conflict first and foremost as a civil war instead of an act of international aggression. To others, the term "civil war" ought to underline the fact that all parties to the conflicts were both victims and perpetrators, without implying the absence of stark interference by neighbouring republics with the use of the term "civil war."

"Collective guilt" turned out to be another divisive term in the debate. By and large, participants agreed that it would be a fatal fallacy to consider one ethnic group all victims and another one

all perpetrators. Some claimed, however, that the ICTY in The Hague tends to continue this false perception by indicting only Serb political and military leaders. Several participants applauded the courage of political leaders who visited the sites of wartime atrocities such as Srebrenica. Citing the fact that they were too young to have been involved in personally, several politicians strongly objected to the concept of “collective guilt.” At several instances in the discussion, appeals were addressed to the European Union to be aware of the fact that reconciliation is bound to fail if the younger generation is not enabled and encouraged to travel outside their own country and, no less important, to visit other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Civil Society, Part I – Framework Conditions and Project Work

The Panel dealt with the question what impact the grassroots level and civil society organizations can have today in Bosnia and Herzegovina, what the framework conditions for their work and what the most critical civil and human rights are.

The civil society representatives emphasized the importance of their work at the grassroots level and shared their experience in the field with the other participants of the conference. They very much welcomed the opportunity to bring their concerns to the attention of MPs and German participants to the conference. They noted that the reasons to engage in NGO work were originally very personal, e.g. to meet people from the so-called “other side”, to help oneself and to deal with the things that had happened (trauma) or to transform the war experience in some positive, constructive way. Furthermore, they underlined the importance of their work to prevent future conflicts. In this context all discussants agreed on the crucial role of education in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some criticised the current school system that divides the youth into more or less ethnically “clean” communities. Thus, children and youth are not able to meet each other, to learn from each other (e.g. two schools under one roof). According to the opinion of one participant, the educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is based on power and authority and not on the ownership of pupils, as it should be. Contrary to other countries, education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still a genuine post-war issue.

Some emphasized the need for common history-writing and common geography to prevent future conflicts. One panellist also shifted the focus to illiterate people including many Roma. In addition to education, one speaker drew the attention of the participants to deficits of the NGO sector: the need for more knowledge on economy and better qualifications as well as help from the academic community. Finally, it was mentioned that the connection with the labour market is still missing. One panellist concluded that the NGO sector often runs programmes which

should be run by the Government but that the NGO sector is too weak to make structural changes.

One participant coming from the civil-society sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina argued that the NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are in a very difficult transformation process to define their own role between politics and non-politics; to define how political this non-political sector is and should be; and to define themselves as partners of the government or as watch-dogs. The participant stressed that the picture of civil society is quite diverse: There are a lot of different organizations; it is wrong to assess politicians always as “bad” and civil society as “good guys”. One representative from the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlighted the relationship between the media and civil society: Only few NGOs are presented in the media with their good project results. NGOs have to be more aggressive (in a positive sense) to reach the attention of the media, e.g. by giving more information on their work, impact and concrete examples of good results. The public needs this information in order to know that somebody fights for their rights, to support civil society initiatives and to change the image of “big-profit-organizations” in a positive way. One MP stressed the importance of NGOs to champion issues such as education and health care and the role of the media, which should not always discuss big political issues but should shift the focus to more pressing needs.

Civil Society, Part II - Internal and External Influences

The debate on internal and external factors influencing the work of civil-society organizations illustrated the growing self-confidence of the actors. A representative of a local think tank described their motivation to deal with foreign affairs and Bosnia’s EU perspective as “not just to leave it to internationals” and that “it is time to have our own BiH working groups”. He pointed out the necessity of an increasing input for institutions given by local stakeholders. A Bosnian representative of an internationally supported NGO explained his understanding of cooperation among all entities: “We are all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina”.

International representatives of NGOs working in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlighted the big potential of diaspora and refugees with extraordinary links with NGOs in the European Union. They characterized BiH’s civil society as weak, fragile and fragmented. Grass-roots initiatives are spread all over the country, but a forum which brings civil-society stakeholders together is missing: “Everybody is working on his own”. The lack of coordination and cooperation between the EU and international civil-society stakeholders was criticized, too.

Civil Society, Part III - The Role and Impact of the Media

The role and impact of the media in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina is bound to have its specificities, but they are also – as the chairs reminded the participants – part of a wider process of media development in post-communist transition countries and even part of global trends such as new electronic media, commercialization. Issues concerning the freedom of the media, the media power of tycoons or political parties, the problems of investigative journalism should be seen in broader frameworks than merely Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Several speakers underlined that the institutions for the media that have been introduced in Bosnia and Herzegovina are in line with European standards, e.g. the state-level independent regulatory body or the Press Council as a form of journalistic self-regulation. The deficits concern the actual implementation and reach of these institutions rather than the formal regulations. In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina a state-level regulatory body is in and by itself an important step forward, even though attempts to put an end to the independence of the agency or to exercise political control over it is a recurring problem. The Press Council has been a success despite some setbacks. Representatives of private print media, fierce competitors on the newspaper market, nevertheless managed to set up a functioning self-regulatory system of ethics. Again, only one code of ethics exists for the Federation and Republika Srpska together. The functioning of the Council has contributed to the legal de-criminalization of libel, a well-known instrument of state control over the media in many other transition countries.

The war has made it abundantly clear how strong the incendiary impact of media (and electronic media in particular) can be. Therefore, the Communications Regulatory Agency Bosnia and Herzegovina has been set up in 1998 to distribute licenses in a transparent procedure and prevent the abuse of media outlets for various forms of hate speech. The principle chosen is one of self-regulation in order to guarantee the freedom of speech and the freedom of the media, whilst countering hate speech and threat-motivated self-censorship by journalists. Several participants recounted incidences of journalists who had been threatened or molested for political reasons.

Several speakers and participants pointed to the inherent problems concerning the quality, training and professional ethics as the key issue, irrespective of economic crisis or political constraints. Journalists regularly face pressure by advertisers, the owners of the media outlet or religious communities not to investigate or publish certain facts or opinions. A political and public culture that appreciates the crucial role of independent media is still in its infancy.

Conversely, public reactions to investigative journalism tend to be rather short-lived, with no tangible impact at the next elections. Negative news reporting tends to exacerbate the widespread political apathy and cynicism in Bosnian society. It became apparent that the Internet may be helpful in this context, but certainly is no panacea. The Internet serves as a key communication channel for civil society organizations. The downside, however, is that the public generally has a low esteem of the reliability and authority of most of the Internet news forums, although positive exceptions do exist. The Internet is an important alternative, as the ethnically divided Bosnian media market is too small for a broader spectrum of high-quality newspapers or TV stations – a large part of the population is bound to prefer Serbian or Croatian media outlets to national ones.

At the end of the panel, a debate ensued whether or not opposition politicians have a fair share of access to the media and thus to the public sphere in Republika Sprska or whether the Dodik administration purposively monopolized the local media outlets. Participants from the Federation and Republika Srpska largely agreed that it is more usual and easier for Serbian politicians to appear in the media of the other half of the Bosnian state than for Bosniak politicians to voice their opinions in RS media. Paradoxically, one RS politician noted, coverage of inner-RS political criticism of the Dodik administration in Sarajevo-based media may have a negative side effect. From a RS perspective, the opposition politician voicing such criticism is often perceived as a national traitor, because of the ample coverage he inadvertently receives in Bosniak media.

Last, but not least, more than one speaker identified the international community as at least partly to blame for the dire state of integrative media in Bosnia and Herzegovina. First, the OHR strongly suggested a media landscape without state media or public institutions. Next, the OSCE followed the logic of the institutionalization of two entities and three ethnic communities to the detriment of multiethnic integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Civil Society, Part IV - Status, Potentials and Limits of Action

Important issues discussed in this panel referred to the self-understanding of civil-society stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to the relationship between the governmental and the non-governmental sector as well as to the key role of sustainability and local and regional cooperation.

According to one participant from civil society the context and the meaning of the organizations' work and a common self-understanding remain to be defined. She emphasized

that this process should also include general discussions concerning the difference between “professionalism” – activism by means of expensive projects with questionable contents – and “real activism” with problem-oriented initiatives but small budgets on the grassroots-level. In this regard other representatives of social organizations pointed out that civil society is also in need of a more effective self-presentation. According to them, another potential for more effective action is a more active use of different sorts of partnerships with science, political stakeholders and non-governmental organizations.

The participants agreed that the cooperation between the political and the social level plays a crucial role for Bosnia and Herzegovina’s further development perspectives. It became clear that the legal framework for the involvement of civil society in policy development exists but that social organizations are in need of a related capacity building, which implies that effective capacity-building mechanisms have to be introduced. A general consensus emerged that this should also imply the beginning of a common learning process on the political and the social level. In this connection one expert from civil society stated that existing think tanks with technical knowledge could serve as intermediaries between the political and the grassroots-level. At the same time he pointed out that the main precondition for sustainable cooperation is the existence of a real political will including the political acknowledgement of the organizations’ specific know-how.

Another civil-society representative raised severe doubts concerning the existence of such a political will, referring to the fact that social organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still exposed to political pressure and that some state institutions simply refuse cooperation. A representative of a political party underlined that structures that can foster cooperation (such as a “board of civil society associations” with possibilities concerning a dialogue with the governments) do exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to him an office for civil society in the Council of Ministers is about to be established. Apart from this he mentioned the current development of a Social Inclusion Strategy the implementation of which should also include partnerships between the political and the social level.

The role of regional cooperation was put up for discussion as well. One participant from Bosnia and Herzegovina stated that the Regional Cooperation Council in Sarajevo does not use existing mechanisms for realising exchanges in the sphere of civil society and criticized this institution as a “waste of money”. She also mentioned that regional cooperation has been pushed within the framework of the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe until 2008 and that established networks in the sphere of civil society – for example a network for human rights - continue to exist.

A further focus of the discussion was the role of financial resources for the activities and the role of self-organized social networks. Some civil-society stakeholders believed that the lack of investment and capital as well as tax duties are key problems which severely limit the organizations' potentials for action and accordingly the sustainability of their work. According to them these shortcomings foster competition among the different stakeholders and make them dependent on the resources and the priorities of foreign donors. Other participants mentioned the positive potentials of foreign sponsoring and pointed out that not all civil-society organisations receiving foreign support are "donor-driven". In this regard one civil society activist framed the question "How much money is *really* needed?" He made mention to the fact that especially on the local level many grassroots-initiatives successfully implement concrete problem-oriented projects with very small budgets, as, for example, in the spheres of the protection of the environment, reconciliation or animal protection.

Apart from this it was agreed that non-governmental organisations on their part should increase the credibility of their work and hence gain more public and political support with more transparency concerning their projects and their financial management.

Last, but not least, the participants also discussed the role of the media. They reached a consensus that the media are a crucially important partner of civil society. At the same time, it was stated that journalism faces severe issues in the form of political and economic dependencies and funding shortfalls.

„Future Panel“

The discussions in the concluding panel were focusing on mainly two questions. First, the role of the international community and the EU membership perspective for the future of the country and second, the question of "how the two worlds could be connected better", as the chairman of the panel put it, referring to the relationship of the civil society organizations and the political class.

One civil society representative expressed deep disappointment and a feeling of humiliation by the recent EU decision that excluded BiH from the lifting of visa requirements. According to her, the recent procedure of granting visa to citizens of BiH is more restrictive than before the EU's decision of granting visa liberalization to journalists and other subjects. Whereas she had been granted a one-year visa in earlier times she now gets a visa exactly for the period of her visit. She concluded by saying "because of this, I have no vision." One international expert reacted by claiming that the people in Bosnia should rather blame their politicians instead of the

EU in reluctantly fulfilling the requirements of the visa roadmap. One EU advisor stated that people in BiH would sometimes have wrong expectations as concerns the EU. The EU agenda does not seem a top priority nor stemming from people's own conviction. Often, the EU is accused not to be enough flexible if it sticks to conditionality.

After all, the future of the Western Balkan countries is the future that the countries choose for themselves, he claimed, adding, "we care more for BiH to become a member state than BiH itself!" He reminded that "the door opened in Thessaloniki" would remain open but it would not remain open forever, if the countries in the region fail in making progress.

Another international official added that the performance of BiH concerning peace implementation has been highly disappointing recently, with all the deadlocks and stalemates on the ground. Eventually, the latter argument fueled an internal dispute within politicians from Republika Srpska, one of them stating that certain parties obviously were in favor of EU integration, whereas others would sacrifice their European vision for the sake of their separatist agenda.

Concerning the relationship of the civil-society organizations and the political class, another MP from BiH stressed that both parts have a common responsibility that should forge them together, namely the European agenda. Both should try to resist to the general trend that as soon as elections come nearer, prevailing rhetoric becomes more and more nationalist, sometimes culminating into inflammatory and separatist approaches. One civil-society activist referred to the prevailing rhetoric and stated that "the war seems imminent", admitting that this is the fault of politicians, the media as well as the civil society. Civil-society representatives, politicians and international experts unanimously claimed that a real dialogue between politics and civil society was an utmost necessity. It necessitates an attitude of listening to each other and of willing to compromise, both being virtues that constitute political culture. One civil society representative stated that a real culture of dialogue and compromise involves a profound change of mindset and a real "coal mining work". With an admirable attitude of self-criticism she demanded that civil society should stop looking at politics as a dirty job, but rather as a normal part of life. Otherwise, civil society will eventually fail to gain influence in the political realm. One MP from BiH brought forward the idea that members of parliamentary committees should be involved in civil society activities. On the other hand, civil society should and could play a leading role in formulating laws, a job that necessarily involves know-how and technical experience and thus is a challenge to the civil society.

Participants from BiH, from Western Europe as well as the conference committee unanimously agreed that this workshop has been characterized by a serious dialogue and extraordinary substance and quality. The Southeast Europe Association, as one participant stated (and was commended by all participants) sees itself confronted with an obligation – to organize a follow-up to this remarkable event.

(Munich, January 2010)