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**THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE LAUNCHES
PRE-ELECTION TV DEBATES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

SARAJEVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina - The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is organizing three political party debates to be televised nationally in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) prior to Oct. 3 general elections. NDI will produce the debates in partnership with the country's public broadcasters: Bosnia and Herzegovina Radio Television (BHRT), Radio Television Republika Srpska (RTRS), and Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina Television (FTV).

There will be one live debate in each of BiH's two political entities or regions: the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first will be in Banja Luka, Republika Srpska, on Sept. 16 and the second in Mostar, Federation of BiH on Sept. 23. A third national-level live debate will be held in Sarajevo on Sept. 30.

The debates will be hosted by RTRS (Banja Luka), FTV (Mostar) and BHRT (Sarajevo), and broadcast live at 8:30 pm. Public broadcast journalists will moderate the sessions.

As part of this unique statewide project, eight pre-election regional forums are also being held between Aug. 27 and Sept. 15, in Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Livno, Mostar, Sarajevo, Trebinje, Tuzla and Zenica. Political parties will debate economic issues and field questions from citizens in the audience. The issues raised will be used to develop questions for participants in the three TV debates.

A recent public opinion survey, commissioned by NDI and conducted by leading international polling firm Ipsos, found that two out of three BiH citizens wanted to see televised debates where politicians addressed issues of employment, economic development and standards of living. Seven out of 10 respondents considered

unemployment to be the biggest problem facing the country. Concerns about corruption and crime were also featured prominently in survey responses.

“The *Elections 2010: TV Debates and Forums* program is a key public service for all citizens in the pre-election period,” said the representatives of the country’s three public broadcasters in a joint statement. “This joint project by NDI and public broadcasters gives citizens an opportunity to have their questions about important issues answered directly in an independent and non-partisan setting.”

The debates and forum program established a citizen advisory group that has offered suggestions about the format of the TV debates and regional forums, the timing and location of the events, as well as how they should be moderated. NDI has also conducted meetings with 20 political parties throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in the months prior to the announcement of this project.

Martin Slutsky, an international expert on election debates with 30 years of television experience, assisted the state’s public broadcasters in their preparations. Slutsky, the winner of seven Emmy awards, was the executive producer for American presidential and vice-presidential debates in the last three U.S. election cycles, on behalf of the independent and nonpartisan U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD).

NDI and CPD both have more than 20 years of experience in helping to organize debates for all levels of government in more than 30 countries.

“This project gives citizens an opportunity to become active participants in TV debates and regional forums,” said David Hamilton, NDI’s resident director in BiH. “Political candidates will present their ideas and concrete plans about issues that citizens across BiH consider important.”

NDI is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide by promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information about NDI BiH is available at www.ndi.ba. For information about NDI programs worldwide, visit www.ndi.org.

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