



Bosnia-Herzegovina Democracy Assessment Report

Introduction

This paper analyzes Bosnia-Herzegovina's democratic transition process based on an assessment by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in September 2009¹. NDI has conducted democracy support programs in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH or Bosnia) since 1996, contributing to the development of the country's political parties, election processes, parliaments and legislative systems, and civic advocacy at the local level. The assessment is informed by NDI's experience in BiH, its consideration, broadly speaking, of democratic transitions, and its understanding of Bosnia's current political environment as derived from assessment team discussions with leading governmental, political, civic, and international actors².

This assessment was open-ended insofar as the team effectively went where the discussions with Bosnian counterparts led it. Bosnia's many political complexities being what they are, the discussions tended to reflect long-term perspectives, focusing on underlying political and other important factors determining the course of Bosnia's democratic transition, rather than immediate, "surface" politics – although, to be sure, with general elections one year away, the latter was addressed often, particularly among opposition parties seeking to break the country's current political paralysis.

Accordingly, this report is not a comprehensive political study as might be done through a survey methodology, nor does it focus on handicapping the political fortunes, or lack thereof, of major actors. Rather, NDI has drawn on assessment discussions to offer a more descriptive analysis of where Bosnia stands in its democratic development nearly 14 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement, and to offer recommendations on democracy assistance going forward.

The assessment focused on deep-seated issues because there is a growing sense of urgency that Bosnia-Herzegovina is running out of time in trying to break through its paralysis and advance toward political stability, genuine statehood, and democracy. Many interlocutors voiced the need for action – chiefly domestic, but also international –

¹ This assessment was funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), to which NDI extends its appreciation. The views expressed in this report are those of NDI alone.

² The assessment team visited Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Zenica, and Foca.

to prevent further political deterioration that could return the country to some form of violent conflict between its main ethnic groups³.

Background

NDI comes to this assessment, as it does in all of its work, with the view that democratic transitions are inextricably linked to politics – that is to say the political system and the actors, both governmental and nongovernmental, including citizens, who exercise power in that system. NDI thus examines the political system and environment to understand the extent to which political actors use their powers to advance or to retard the realization of such democratic principles as broad-based political enfranchisement and participation, the establishment of accountable and transparent government, the protection and advancement of fundamental human rights, and the peaceful resolution of political, economic, and social conflicts.

In Bosnia's case, this necessarily includes political leadership in fostering among citizens a common view that they are joined in developing and participating in a country with which they collectively identify, as well as citizens' initiatives to claim their rightful place in the political system as voters, advocates, and watchdogs.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a post-conflict, post-communist country whose political system and the behavior of actors in that system reflect the ravages of the 1992-1995 war that, in killing tens of thousands and displacing hundreds of thousands more, destroyed its society, economy, and, at a fundamental level, a shared identity among its citizens of belonging to Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the way they once did. The 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement put an end to the war through a political solution yielding a highly decentralized state that gave each warring side—Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs—substantial powers in protecting the interests of their respective communities from extent threats seen to emanate from the other two groups. Dayton in effect brought the war to an end by calling it a draw. The warring parties retreated to their respective corners, each seeing itself as victim rather than perpetrator. In this sense, the war has ended but the fear, recrimination, and lack of trust that sparked it remain and dominate the political environment.

In this decade the international powers which oversee BiH affairs as provided for in Dayton have sought to augment the jurisdiction and functions of the central state as the primary means to unify the country to a degree sufficient to set Bosnia on course for accession to NATO and the European Union, both of which are seen as guarantors of its viability as a sovereign state. Dayton does not preclude such restructuring, and Bosnia has indeed managed to centralize state functions in such critical areas as defense, customs and border management, taxation, and the formation of state judicial bodies that could begin to cohere a BiH-wide system of rule of law.

Other critical steps to fortify state-level powers – structural reform of the executive branch, procedural reform in law-making, and election reform to accord voting rights

³ Many interlocutors highlighted in particular the continued need for U.S. diplomatic and assistance efforts to promote political change. Some believe strongly that BiH can overcome its internal disputes only through continued and robust engagement by the U.S.

with European human rights conventions – have proved much harder to come by. Each speaks to a significant reduction in the political autonomy that leaders of two ethnic groups—Croats and Serbs—vehemently seek to retain. Each sees centralization of state power as inimical to their interests owing to the relative dominance, in terms of population, of Bosniaks. Conversely, Bosniaks believe that their security can only be assured through the survival of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Most Bosniaks see centralizing government power at the state level as essential to keep the country intact by warding off secession attempts by Croats and Serbs, each of whom has, in neighboring Croatia and Serbia, a patron capable of destabilizing the country⁴.

These dynamics were evident in the so-called April package of 2006, a set of internationally supported reform measures at the state level that narrowly failed passage in the BiH state parliament. Serb leadership supported the reforms in exchange for the preservation of the current entity system of government, installed by Dayton, which divides Bosnia into two federal units, the Federation, home largely to Bosniaks and Croats, and Republika Srpska, where the vast majority of Serbs resides. The leading Bosniak party at the time went the other direction in calling for the abolition of the entity system, claiming a moral imperative in asserting that Republika Srpska in particular was the result of genocide perpetrated against Bosniaks.

Strengthening the state—seen by most outside observers as critical to Bosnia’s ability to succeed as a country—inherently produces political instability that in turn has precluded such reform from occurring.

A Post-Conflict Legacy

As in 1995, the three ethnic groups retreated to their respective corners in 2006 and, in so doing, affirmed a fundamental truth of Bosnia’s post-war politics: its political leaders, reflecting a citizenry largely fearful and mistrusting, come to politics uniquely through the prism of ethnic identity, to a degree that the ethnic divisions emanating from the war appear fixed and immutable. Political structures created under Dayton reflect, if not ensure the primacy of ethnic identity in Bosnian politics. There is little if any other entry point into politics through which these divisions might yield to different alignments, based for example on traditional political ideology, or regional economic needs, or other constituencies such as labor or business, that could cohere the country’s political system.

What is emerging in Bosnia is a political cycle of stalemate predicated on the defense of ethnic interests perceived to be under threat. Prior to elections, political parties reflexively turn to ethnic-nationalist appeals; activate citizen fear and mistrust; win the elections on that basis; settle into government pledging to pass reforms needed to make the country work; achieve some measure of success⁵; but ultimately renege on agreed

⁴ The assessment coincided with a visit by Serbian president Boris Tadic to the wartime Serb capital of Pale where, together with Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, he inaugurated an elementary school called *Srbija*, a risible provocation among Bosniaks, though elsewhere in his one-day visit Tadic affirmed Serbia’s recognition of Bosnia’s territorial integrity. A number of indicators suggest that the present Serbian government underscores national ties with Serbs in Bosnia more to deflect right-wing criticism at home than to encourage secessionist sentiment among Serbs in Bosnia.

⁵ Most recently political parties agreed to finalize the constitutional status of the Brcko District, a strategically placed and disputed municipality.

principles of reform by choosing to interpret reform specifics as antithetical to ethnic interests alleged, but not demonstrated, to be under threat. In the next elections the parties return to the campaign trail extolling their defense of their respective community's so-called vital needs, as they define them, and are duly awarded a new mandate.

This cycle of political stalemate is not reserved for headline government reform issues, but indeed permeates nearly all political debate and government decision-making. Thus, for example, debate on the placement of a new freeway does not incorporate economic or environmental analysis but rather is restricted to which ethnic group is to benefit over the other. Selection of a new government minister and many other government positions is made on an exquisite balance of ethnic representation without due consideration of individual merit and on the default notion, perpetrated by Bosnia's so-called nationalist parties, that it is inconceivable that an individual of one ethnic group can effectively represent the interests of the other ethnic communities. Pork-barrel and identity politics are of course known in established democracies, but in these cases the highway project is postponed indefinitely, harming economic development and restricting social mobility, and the ministry is leader-less because, politically, there is no evident way to exit from this ethnic tug-of-war, no perceived alternate means to debate the merits of where to place the freeway or to evaluate the qualifications of nominated public servants.

Of course the parties cannot perpetuate this cycle without public support. Bosnia does have regular elections that are credible, if not meeting international democratic standards in full, and, in most elections, normally half of the country's electorate exercises its franchise⁶. The country's political psychology starts and ends with fear, recrimination, and mistrust. From the standpoint of people's suffering during the war, this sentiment is logical and real and is expressed at the ballot box. Ruling parties give voice to this sentiment, which is also helped along by the country's religious institutions and politically affiliated media that profess independence but, in large part, have yet to distinguish objective, multi-source reporting from hearsay invective (both factors, it should be noted, are increasingly apparent in self-described secular, advanced democracies). Bread-and-butter issues certainly matter; indeed, most polling identifies jobs ahead of post-war grievances as the leading concern among citizens. But with little reason to suggest that they should, people do not associate politics, and thus their franchise, should they in fact choose to vote, with addressing their immediate problems. The defense of ethnic interests, offered and duly seen as sacrosanct and typically defined in opposition to the other communities' interests, has captured Bosnia's political space.

Many argue that it is the very structure of government and legislative decision-making, created through Dayton, which has created this default to ethnic-only politics. It is a compelling viewpoint. Citizens vote for a three-member, rotating presidency, each member representing one ethnic group. Only citizens of Republika Srpska can vote for the Serb member of the presidency, and only Federation residents can vote for the Bosniak and Croat seats, unhelpfully conflating entity residency with ethnic identity and reinforcing the notion among voters that they should only vote for their own kind.

⁶ Turnout in elections has fallen this decade and roughly accords with regional averages. The assessment team heard concerns of alleged and widespread political party abuse of state resources and private and public media during Bosnian election campaigns, including threats of unemployment in both public and private sectors.

Candidates to certain elected offices must declare themselves to belong to one of the three ethnic groups or classify themselves awkwardly as “Other”, a repository for the country’s minority groups and for those who rebut the presumption of ethnic labeling as permission to participate in politics. Once the government is seated, ethnicity continues to reign in parliament, where entity- and ethnicity-based vetoes are easily available, and regularly pursued, to thwart all manner of legislation, often having no impact whatsoever on the standing of one’s ethnic community. By altering the structure, the argument goes, you change the politics. There is veracity in this argument, and it is precisely why the international community and its representatives in Sarajevo tasked to ‘fix’ Bosnia continue to focus on the reforms brought forward in 2006 as the basis for giving the country an opportunity to cohere its political system.

Reforming Bosnia’s governing structure, its legislative procedure, and its election rules is critical and urgent. But these reforms are by no means sufficient to cohering the country’s political system. The same structure, procedure, and rules were in place between 2000 and 2005 when reform at the state level, however incomplete, was negotiated and agreed.

Indeed, one might focus on political leadership rather than governmental structure as the root cause of the country’s political situation. In affording constitutional protections to Bosnia’s ethnic groups, Dayton does not preclude compromise, nor does it automatically separate ethnic groups into political fiefdoms, as evidenced in the 2006 election of the Croat member of the presidency representing a multi-ethnic opposition party. It belongs to the country’s political leadership, in how they choose to use their powers and in how they communicate with their electorate, to determine Bosnia’s political course. Bosnia’s one experiment with non-nationalist government under Dayton, between 2000 and 2002, failed to succeed not because of ethnic conflict, but rather owing to an ungainly and unworkable coalition of 11 parties crowded into a small state structure, and the unfortunate timing of taking power in a two-year cycle instead of the ensuing four year-mandate as per the election schedule established by Dayton. Rather predictably, the coalition failed, people were dissolute, nationalist parties retook government but, led by strong international pressure, found their way to compromise on some issues, albeit with recalcitrance.

Changing the structure may cause some to deviate from the default practice of ethnic-only politics, but in and of itself neither precludes nor favors the creation of a political culture that can surmount fear, recrimination, and mistrust. The role of political leadership in this sense is paramount. Reliance on external support by the country’s political leadership cannot become synonymous with deference to international direction, nor abstinence from taking the political measures necessary to lead Bosnia out of its current political morass. As noted below, the challenges to this end are significant, and revolve around internal – and unhealthy – political dynamics that can only be changed by domestic political and civic actors.

A Post-Communist Legacy

Bosnia’s post-conflict narrative of ethnic-based politics is central to understanding its democracy travails. It is particularly pronounced vis-à-vis other countries in the Balkans, also beset with ethnic conflict, whose task is to accommodate minority interests into an

established body politic, as opposed to cohering the interests of three relatively equal “constituent peoples”.

But the post-conflict narrative is not sufficient to understanding the challenges contained in Bosnia’s democratic aspirations. There is, as well, a post-communist narrative, comparable to other countries in the region struggling to build democratic political systems, that is equally pernicious, and often not given due consideration, particularly in the wake of the 2006 debacle.

In this narrative, Bosnia-Herzegovina is the victim of state capture by private interests subjugating the public good, bloated bureaucracies devouring public funds while impairing, rather than providing adequate government services, privatized media masquerading as independent, and the near complete absence of social capital, understood as relations among strangers that are characterized by trust and cooperation. In Bosnia, social capital would extend between the entities and among the ethnic groups. Politics in this narrative is not about open competition of conflicting interests; instead, conflict—understood here as healthy and democratic—is sidelined in favor of a forced consensus.

From this perspective, the relationship of citizen to government is not contained within the formal political system, but rather is found on the margins, where political elites divert and dispense government resources through extra-legal networks of patronage. Political parties become vehicles for corrupt practice. Political competition, as expressed through elections, is a turnstile to power, which the public views as an opportunity for or denial of benefits through patronage networks. Conditioned by historical practice of deferring to a paternalistic state, the public feels no ownership of government or allegiance to the political system, not because of ethnic pre-occupations, but because they have no faith that the political system can produce laws, allocate resources, and dispense justice that credibly meets the public’s interest in fair treatment and opportunity for material advancement. This is why foreign efforts to promote, for example, get-out-the-vote efforts using democracy messages alone do not succeed.

Civil society elites, donor-driven, bureaucratized and bereft of meaningful social capital, can espouse issue and political reform agendas but find themselves powerless to push those agendas after elections in a manner that would give citizens greater faith in political engagement. Those who organize communities to participate in the formal political system as advocates and government watchdogs may find success in local politics, and many do, but are frustrated when trying to create a bigger foundation of capital to take on vested interests at entity and state levels.

In this narrative, the political imbroglio over where to place the freeway is not understood as ethnic conflict, but as a struggle between political elites over whose land holdings will increase in value based on proximity to the freeway. The unyielding resistance by the Republika Srpska government to virtually any measure to extend greater power to the state level may be read both as a defense of the interests of Serbs and as a means to curtail state investigation into corrupt practices by RS political elites. Indeed, one might conjecture that the invocation of ethnic interests by political elites is a diversion tactic intended to distract a public that is seen to be willing consumers of ethnic rhetoric. By the

same token, post-conflict politics can set the stage for post-communist legacies to take root. The insistence among Croats and, to a lesser extent Bosniaks, for their own governing space led to the creation of 10 separate cantons in the Federation, producing a colossal volume of local government ministries and agencies whose budgetary largesse presents an easy staging ground to manipulate public assets for private interests, whether in hiring or procurement.

No Politics Means No Democracy

The combination of post-conflict and post-communist legacies has resulted in the fact that there is a dearth of genuine politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Put simply, nothing is debated nor discussed. Ethnic issues dominate politics but, because of the political leadership and mutual exclusivity of their positions, there is no ability to have legitimate and genuine debate, or even discussion, across ethnic lines on the conflicts that separate them.

And because ethnic issues crowd out other issues, and thus repress the formation of other political alignments, Bosnians do not have the possibility to debate and argue over other topics. Agricultural and environmental groups have no venue in which to debate pesticide or forestry policy, nor do business and labor on shop floor working conditions, nor do social democrats and free marketeers on corporate tax policies to generate employment⁷. Because intermediary political institutions like legislatures and civil society are unable to form sustainable, structured links between government and citizen that can compete with deleterious informal networks, citizens do not look to political institutions to settle their conflicts. And if there are frequently no real politics, then there can be no democracy—understood as the peaceful debate and settlement of political, social, and economic conflict.

Political Parties

Political parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina have organizational structure, membership, statutes, are proficient in the mechanics of contesting elections, and have institutional integrity and staying power if not full credibility among the citizenry. But, at a fundamental level, they rarely practice politics, meaning that they do not perform the standard function that political parties have in representing different constituencies and issues, and on that basis competing with each other for governmental power.

There is little motivation for parties to do so. As mentioned, a successful election strategy defaults to rote ethnic appeals. Governing does not require hard choices based on an ideologically coherent, policy-oriented platform because, essentially, there are none to make outside of ethnic issues, and on these issues there is no genuine debate. Party platforms extol Euroatlantic integration without explaining how they will lead the country to that end, and otherwise serve up promises on critical economic and social issues without credible policy prescriptions. It's hard to disagree with a platform that calls for new job creation, and impossible to generate political debate if parties demur from taking a stand on the tough policy choices—in terms of taxes, education, and

⁷ It would be misleading to characterize Bosnian politics as wholly devoid of such debates as they do occur, sporadically, through such venues as public legislative hearings in parliament.

constitutional reform – needed to produce employment. There is little substance – and equally important, distinction – in policy prescriptions that parties offer to citizens, who on that basis can determine which party best represents their interests and views on a host of critical issues that afflict their livelihoods together with the country’s economic foundation and social cohesion.

There is no consequence for political failure. If a party loses an election, the party leader does not offer his or her resignation. A leadership battle may or may not ensue, but the incumbent is retained regardless, prompting departure from the party by those disaffected, who usually move on to create a new party which tends to descend into obscurity with that political talent effectively forfeited. The cleavages tend to last and are not repaired. Bosnia’s party system, at present, is significantly fractured and impedes in and of itself a foundation for viable political and governing coalitions.

A perverse illustration of the above factors is found in the current governing coalition at the state level. There is no genuine political rationale for its existence. There is no common political ideology, no shared platform on such issues as agriculture, the environment, or employment, and certainly no agreement on how the country should be constitutionally structured. The government is comprised, paradoxically, around mutually exclusive post-conflict interests, otherwise united, it might be conjectured, around the shared pursuit of private interests. Public exasperation of government ineffectiveness mounts although it remains muted, sidelined, in seeming deference to the country’s pre-occupation around ethnic/constitutional matters.

In the Federation, the entity government centers on meting out laws, budgets, and policies based on Bosniak and Croat interests, with few if notable exceptions. As for Republika Srpska, one-party dominance of the entity government has produced, many argue persuasively, undemocratic encroachment by the government on independent media, including alleged harassment of journalists undertaking investigatory reporting, and civil society groups that are either captured by the government or which appear to censor their actions for fear of attracting hostile government response. The prevailing atmosphere in the Republika Srpska has effectively curtailed legislative politics, as all are in agreement on core entity and ethnic issues, and the opposition has little apparent recourse, through the media and other channels, to challenge the government on other salient matters⁸.

Some parties, mainly those in opposition, are gamely trying to build their profile on non-ethnic issues, such as health care, education, and pensions, and a not insignificant number of members of parliament take the time to meet with constituents to try and solve their problems through formal government channels. Citizens and local groups are responding by attending local meetings where party representatives can listen to what they have to say on these issues, and use that information to construct viable legislative and fiscal solutions. In democratic politics, parties and politicians do this out of self-interest because they attract votes and fight for their constituents in government. In Bosnia, and in other countries in the Balkans, parties do so without the full conviction, born of experience, that it is in their self-interest. They assume that the cycle of post-conflict

⁸ The assessment team found the political environment in Republika Srpska troubling from a democracy perspective, and notes that more information and analysis is needed to provide a complete picture of the present situation.

ethnic politics, along with the post-communist legacy of patronage politics, cannot be broken⁹.

It is NDI's experience that political parties have in fact developed or have access to policy expertise, and Institute representatives in Bosnia know many politicians—members of parliament, branch leaders, and activists—who want to introduce “new politics”, i.e. non-national issues, into the public arena, and who understand that getting people to talk about things other than ethnic power-sharing or constitutional crises is vital to the long process of regaining political stability and putting the country back on track toward democracy. There are new parties emerging which reject the country's current state of political affairs and, with some success, are building cross-ethnic structures and taking seats in local government. There is a reservoir of political talent at the local level, as evidenced by dynamic mayors from Bihac and Foca and elsewhere, who have the vision and the leadership skills to alter the way politics is conducted in the country, should they be given the opportunity to raise their political profiles.

Civil Society

If the “supply” of political parties has to be incentivized to be more fully developed, so too does public “demand”.

Bosnia's civil society groups—whether they be established nongovernmental organizations seeking influence at the state level or more informal and ephemeral groupings of citizens who take issue with a particular set of circumstances affecting their community—are significantly underdeveloped from the standpoint of entering the political fray and exercising power as issue advocates, government watchdogs, and generally helping to set the agenda for political debate. The organic ingredients for creating such activity and building social capital are largely absent. The public, it is commonly said, remains afflicted by the war and cannot extend itself beyond ethnic lines to build networks of friendship, cooperation, and trust.

Young people are educated within their own ethnic groups, precluding the development of cross-ethnic ties in the future. Many schools across the country have “shifts” in which they are sequentially used by students grouped by ethnicity; in other schools, students of differing ethnicities attend at the same time but are literally “walled off” from each other, even at recess. Consequently students are presented and digest ethnic-oriented curriculums in public schools. Organized religion and the implicit and explicit separation and exclusion that it conveys, has asserted itself in ways never imagined in pre-war Bosnia.

It has been extremely hard to build civil society in Bosnia from the ground up – although NDI, among other assistance organizations, has supported notable, even courageous efforts to do so. Donor strategies for civil society development have largely rested on building high-level, elite nongovernmental groups which are supposed to pry open governmental, legislative, and political space for a variety of issue- or constituency-based

⁹ With hapless gestures, two party officials, one Serb, the other Bosniak, indicated to the assessment team that they were averse to ‘playing the ethnic card’ during campaigns, but felt compelled to do so to avoid being tagged as traitors and losing votes.

groups to participate. But this has proved difficult. The type of advocacy and watchdog initiative that NDI has witnessed at the local level has not been able to find its way up to the entity and state level where it is most certainly needed. Instead, one finds civic elites without the benefit of public connection, or for that matter public endorsement, seeking to engage political elites who view them contemptibly as unelected, well-funded, self-styled representatives of the public interest.

Indeed, government tends to see civil society as a controlled, captured appendage rather than separate, nongovernmental bodies organizing and advocating of their own free will. Thus, a law in Republika Srpska mandated the creation of youth advisory groups to influence local government policy on youth concerns. A mayor could easily construe that it is only through this advisory group that youth issues can be raised, and stack the group with acolytes. While the law's intent to spur government responsiveness to the educational, social, and economic concerns of young people is genuine, its remedy of centralized and bureaucratized dialogue between government and young people can be construed as a post-communist example of providing a "permission slip" for controlled citizen participation in politics¹⁰.

It is important to note that political parties and civil society groups have an apparent distaste for engaging each other on issues of policy development and legislative reform. Each expressed to the assessment team skepticism of the other, as is common elsewhere in the region. Political parties tend to view civic groups as unelected upstarts seeking to usurp political power. Civic groups in turn allege that parties want to co-opt them for political purposes. Some of the acrimony can be due to a salient democracy challenge in the region: the ability, at both conceptual and applied levels, to separate and define the roles that political parties and civil society groups, respectively, play in a democratic political system. Civic groups play a fundamental role in aggregating and expressing the public interest, or demand, along issue- or constituency-based lines. Political parties, in turn, supply policy and legislative remedy to address this demand. In Bosnia and the region's other transitional democracies, strengthening political party-civil society linkages through discussion on clarifying their respective roles is a critical need.

Democracy Diagnosis

When demand is muted, supply cannot respond. And when supply does not respond, demand can be further depressed. In Bosnia, political supply and demand are subject to this dynamic and, because both are not substantively formed, they do not meet. Bosnia has not been able to foster a free political market of conflict, alliances, debate, and policies, where supply and demand are evident, in flux, and, as in economic theory, always seeking to meet.

¹⁰ A promising example of citizen engagement in politics was the *Grozđ* civic campaign in the 2006 general election cycle. Although fostered as a "top-down" exercise, the campaign gave voice to genuine public interest in changing Bosnia's political dynamics. The campaign, however, did not extend political engagement by citizens after the elections. Donor strategies to catalyze stronger 'demand' through election cycles must necessarily connect NGO-driven campaigns to the grassroots level and contain strategies to extend citizen participation in the post-election period, targeting legislatures in particular, so that people have a sense that voting can produce results when it comes to government policymaking and service delivery.

Bosnia's post-conflict ethnic politics will not disappear, even when there is agreement on constitutional reform and the country, however fitfully, begins in earnest down a path of Euroatlantic integration. It will continue to wrestle with post-communist politics as well, as will other countries in the region. Both will continue to distort political supply and demand.

Given the above, the country's democracy challenge is to find ways to introduce new political dynamics by getting people to start arguing about topics other than, or in addition to, ethnic rights and grievances, and to do so in ways that produce genuine debate about how the country is going to address the real needs of its people. This is a simple prescription that belies very difficult challenges. Below are several points of consideration and recommendation:

2010 General Elections

Bosnia's political energies are soon to turn to next year's elections. Many, particularly those in political opposition, argue that these elections will matter in terms of political outcomes because there are differences among the parties when it comes to political will in addressing Bosnia's ethnic/constitutional issues and its corruption problems. They are ready to build multi-ethnic, cross-entity governing alliances that can deliver real change to the country. The assessment team welcomed this sentiment and the commitment and talent being devoted to change the political environment, through election outcomes, but at the same time was challenged by political reality. Given present political circumstances, it will be difficult for opposition parties to succeed in forming governing majorities at entity and state levels, although it is possible and desirable to see a recalibration of political power, particularly in Republika Srpska, in which they are measurably strengthened. Much can change in one year, but present conventional wisdom predicts a muddled outcome to the elections, with incumbent, so-called nationalist parties sharing more space with the current roster of opposition parties, generally, if not consistently viewed as more constructive than the incumbents.

The political results of next year's elections may be less important, from a democracy perspective, than the content of the campaigns themselves. In this respect, the upcoming election cycle matters not in terms of who prevails, but with respect to how political parties and civil society engage one another. It is critical to use this election cycle to foster substantive public dialogue on non-ethnic issues so that the cycle of political stalemate on ethnic issues can be punctured. It is equally important that this dialogue be extended beyond the elections, into the entity and state legislatures. This election cycle is important but not sufficient to build genuine political demand and supply in Bosnia. The country's democracy needs are long-term in scope and content.

Political Parties

Having developed organizational integrity and campaign proficiency, Bosnia's political parties are faced with "next generation" needs and must meet them if they are to guide Bosnia out of its present political morass: articulating a real vision for the country's development in a variety of economic, social, and governmental sectors; developing policy research capacity to give legislative content to that vision; more sophisticated

voter research and outreach skills, customized to constituent groups, so that parties are defined by particular issues inasmuch as they are by their leaders and their positions on ethnic/constitutional matters; finding a way to accommodate internal dissent; and cultivating new leadership.

Accordingly, external assistance to parties, starting with and extending beyond the 2010 election cycle, should be focused on the following measures:

- External political organizations, in particular the European party groups, should work with Bosnian affiliates on constructing ideologically coherent political visions for the country that extend beyond platitudes and anchor parties to social and economic outcomes that are distinctive, clear, and compelling;
- Public opinion research, including focus groups, must animate party responsiveness to issues that concern citizens most, and efforts must be made to build internal party capacity to conduct and analyze such research in the future;
- Increased policymaking capacity, at headquarters, in branches, and inside parliament is needed to develop, articulate, and legislate policies on such difficult and divisive issues as government agricultural subsidies, reforming educational curriculums and de-segregating public schools, reforming media regulations and strengthening nonpartisan oversight of media behavior and financing; and ending ethnic- and gender-based economic and social discrimination. The parties need to address the chronic needs of Bosnian youth, who, in a Catch-22, cannot land their first job without prior professional experience. Perhaps more important, parties will need to legislate anti-corruption policies that set their sights on the very powers and assets that parties themselves have come to enjoy through illicit, unethical means;
- Parties need to incorporate more people into their ranks and cultivate new leadership. This is particularly the case among women, as Bosnia, more than any other country in the region, suffers from a glaring, indeed appalling absence of women in political life and government affairs; more than half of the population is effectively removed from politics altogether, denying the country a sizable pool of political and governing talent. Bringing new people with different experiences, perspectives, and expectations about politics into party ranks, and having them represent the party to outside audiences, rather than relying on party leaders presiding over mass rallies, will do much to show people that parties can represent them because the party in point of fact reflects who they are.
- Extensive and continuous outreach to the public is needed, drawing on the above resources, through policy dialogue with civic groups, “retail” outreach to communities and citizens and, through this outreach, issue-based coalitions with civic groups which have common purpose with political parties in seeing issues addressed through particular policy prescriptions.
- Parties must begin in earnest to establish cross-entity structures to preclude further separation of political environments/systems between Bosnia’s two entities and to

build stronger capacity in formulating BiH-wide policy platforms and legislative agendas.

- In conducting the above activity and starting with the 2010 election cycle, parties will need to negotiate governing coalitions and other political and legislative agreements on the basis of coherent and distinctive political platforms.

Civil Society

Bosnia's civil society needs to diversify, start with community dialogue and build upwards, and become proficient in how government works so that people voice genuine demands and find appropriate and varied entry points into the political process to voice those demands.

- Establishing sustainable NGOs is necessary but insufficient to generating social capital and fostering genuine and engaged civil society. In Bosnia, emphasis needs to be placed on unstructured citizen dialogue and interaction at the community level. Parents should gather to review how their schools are educating their children. Recreational hunters should discuss whether or not government restrictions on licensing hunting rifles are appropriate. Small business owners should meet to compare bank lending policies. These conversations, held independently without government or political sanction and with or without the benefit (or impediment) of having to structure a registered NGO, should be encouraged, such that people can associate based on shared interest and engage political parties and elected officials on the basis of a genuine, varied, and actionable agendas that the latter will have to respond to or fail to win power at the ballot box.
- Over time these conversations need to move upwards, out of communities and to the entity and state levels for broader policy responses. Citizens therefore need entry points into the legislative process. This can come through NGOs operating at high levels, and it can come through other means, such as constituency offices for members of parliament, legislative public hearings, policy roundtables between political parties and citizen groups, and parliamentary oversight of executive activity, in which elected representatives take it upon themselves to represent people directly, and not always through a structured NGO.
- More NGOs need to come into the electoral and legislative arena as advocates and, to do so, they, like political parties, need to decide and articulate what they stand for in concrete ways that people can understand. There remains in Bosnia a need for "democracy" NGOs that can advocate a broad agenda of political and governmental reform to accord the country's politics to democratic norms. In addition, all manner of issue- and constituent-based groups dealing with different issue areas, from agriculture to environment to small business to healthcare, need to become functionally proficient in Bosnia's admittedly complex government structure and lawmaking procedures, so that they can advocate for concrete fiscal, regulatory, or legal measures to meet their policy objectives.

Encouraging the above fosters politics in ways that transcend Bosnia's post-conflict and post-communist legacies, and that set the country's democracy course on track.

Bosnia Assessment Team Members

Robert Benjamin is senior associate and regional director of Central and Eastern Europe programs at NDI. In this capacity, he oversees the development and implementation of programs in 10 countries and republics involving civic education, citizen political participation and parliamentary development. Since joining the Institute in 1993, Mr. Benjamin has managed multi-year programs in Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, and Slovakia. Previous to NDI, Mr. Benjamin worked at Chemonics International, a Washington-based consulting firm, on economic development programs in Central Europe. He holds a B.A. in Political Science from Princeton University and a M.A. in International Relations from the John Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

Lincoln Mitchell is the Arnold A. Saltzman Assistant Professor in the Practice of International Politics at Columbia University. Before joining Columbia's faculty, Lincoln was a practitioner of political development and continues to work in that field now. In addition to serving as Chief of Party for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Georgia from 2002-2004, Lincoln has worked on political development issues in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Lincoln also worked for years as a political consultant in New York City advising and managing domestic political campaigns.

Dr. Mitchell's current research includes work on democratic transitions in the former Soviet Union, the role of democracy promotion in American foreign policy and on public opinion in the Muslim World. His book *Uncertain Democracy: US Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution* was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2008. He has also written articles on these topics in *The National Interest*, *Orbis*, *The Moscow Times*, *the Washington Quarterly*, *The American Interest*, *Survival*, *The New York Daily News* and *Current History* as well as for numerous online publications including the online sections of *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times* and *Transitions Online*. Lincoln has been quoted extensively in most major American, Georgian and Russian newspapers and appeared on numerous television and radio programs discussing the conflict between Georgia and Russia in the US including All Things Considered, Lou Dobbs, the Jim Lehrer Newshour, ABC Nightline, the Diane Rehm Show, The BBC as well as in Russian and Georgian television. Lincoln is also a frequent blogger on *The Huffington Post* where he writes primarily about domestic politics in the US as well as *The Faster Times* where he writes about foreign policy and baseball. He is currently working on a book about the Color Revolutions in the former Soviet Union. Lincoln earned his Ph.D from Columbia University's department of political science in 1996.

Ross Reid is Deputy Minister for the Voluntary and Non- Profit Sector in the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in St. John's.

He was a member of parliament and minister in the government of Canada and has been involved in Canadian politics and government since 1975. Mr. Reid has been Chief of

Staff to the Minister of Finance for Canada, Executive Assistant to the Prime minister and Deputy Minister to the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Reid is the former National Director of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada and has twice served as Campaign Chair for the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

From 1994 to 2003 Mr. Reid served with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in Ukraine, Ghana, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. He has advised on and conducted democratic development programs in more than 25 countries in Asia, Africa and Europe with a focus on political parties, elections, parliaments and civil society.

Elvis Zutic is acting country director for NDI in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). In this capacity, Mr. Zutic has overseen a policy development program designed to help NDI's three partner parties to develop and promote issue-based policies in preparations for October 2010 general elections.

Mr. Zutic first joined NDI in 1997 as a program assistant and regional field coordinator working primarily with political parties in his native Bosnia. Since then, he has held the posts of senior program assistant, program director and senior program manager for NDI's parliamentary program in BiH, as well as in Macedonia, where, during his two-year posting there, he designed and implemented a program that helped the parliament launch a network of more than 45 constituency outreach offices.

NDI Assessment to Bosnia-Herzegovina

List of meetings

No.	First and last name	Organization	Official position
1.	Adis Arapovic	Center for Civic Initiatives (CCI)	Project Manager
2.	Nermin Niksic	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Secretary General/Caucus Chair
3.	Haris Silajdzic	Party for BiH (SBiH)	President/Member of BiH Presidency
4.	Velimir Jukic	Croatian Democratic Party BiH (HDZ BiH)	Caucus Chair in Parliamentary Assembly of BiH
5.	Beriz Belkic	Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, House of Representatives	Speaker, SBiH Vice President
6.	Igor Golijanin	NGO STELLA	Director
7.	Hido Biscevic	Regional Cooperation Office	Secretary General
8.	Sadik Ahmetovic & Senad Sepic	Party for Democratic Action (SDA)	Vice Presidents
9.	Jozo Krizanovic	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Caucus Chair in Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, House of Representatives
10.	Ismar Kutlovac	Liberal Democratic Party (LDS)	Secretary General
11.	Aljosa Campara & Samir Buljina	Parliamentary Assembly of BiH	Head of Secretariat, Assistant Head of Secretariat
12.	Bakir Izetbegovic	Party for Democratic Action (SDA)	Caucus Chair, Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, House of Representatives
13.	Dragan Cavic	Democratic Party (DP)	President
14.	Mladen Ivanic & Branislav Borenovic	Party for Democratic Progress (PDP)	President & Vice President, Caucus Chair in RS Assembly
15.	Slobodan Vaskovic	Federation BiH TV	Journalist
16.	Sasa Trifunovic	Nansen Dialog Centre and Buka magazine	Journalist and NGO activist
17.	Zlatko Lagumdzija	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	President
18.	Vesna Saradzic & Anto Baotic	Parliament of the Federation BiH, House of Representatives	Deputy Speaker & Secretary General
19.	Sanel Huskic	Alumni Association of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies (ACIPS)	President
20.	Raffi Gregorian	Office of the High Representative	Supervisor for Brcko, First Deputy High Representative
21.	Husejin Smajlovic	Zenica municipal government	Mayor
22.	Said Mujkanovic	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	President of Zenica party branch
23.	Azra Hadziahmetovic	Party for BiH	Caucus Chair, Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, House of Representatives
24.	Kurt Basseuner	NGO	President
25.	Bojan Bajic	Nasa Stranka (NS)	President
26.	Lazar Prodanovic	Party of Independent Social Democrats	Deputy Caucus Chair, Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, House of Representatives
27.	Chuck English & Michael Martin & Alan Reed & Kristine Herman	US Embassy, USAID	Ambassador, Deputy Political Counselor, Head of Mission, Democracy Office Director
28.	Anes Alic	None	Freelance journalist
29.	Zdravko Krsmanovic	Municipal government Foca	Mayor, Socialist Party (SP) Vice President