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MEDIA RELEASE

National Democratic Institute (NDI) Launches Elections 2010 TV Debates and Forums Program

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) today launched *Elections 2010 TV Debates and Forums*, an initiative that will give citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina an opportunity to hear directly from political parties about issues in the upcoming elections.

The program is a unique statewide initiative that features eight pre-election regional forums that will be held across the country, along with three live statewide TV debates.

In collaboration with the country's public broadcasters – BHTV, RTRS and FTV - NDI and its partners will produce impartial debates that will cover issues of highest concern to voters in the Oct. 3 general elections.

“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.”

A recent public opinion survey, conducted by leading international polling firm Ipsos and commissioned by NDI, found that two out of three citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina wanted to see televised debates where candidates addressed the country's problems and offered solutions.

Seven out of 10 respondents considered unemployment to be the biggest problem facing BiH today. Corruption and crime also featured prominently in survey responses. Voters indicated they wanted politicians to address issues of employment, economic development and raising living standards.

During the eight regional forums, political parties will debate issues surrounding the economy and citizens will be able to ask questions from the audience. The issues that citizens raise at the forums will be used to help develop the questions used in the three TV debates.

Regional forums will be held in Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Livno, Mostar, Sarajevo, Trebinje, Tuzla and Zenica between Aug. 27 and Sept. 15.



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The *Elections 2010: TV Debates and Forums* program will continue with two live Entity-level TV debates that will be held in Banja Luka on Sept. 16 and in Mostar on Sept. 23. A live State-level TV debate will be held in Sarajevo on Sept. 30. All three debates will be broadcast statewide.

“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

“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,” they said.

The *Election 2010: TV Debates and Forums* project has 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 will 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.

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

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

For further information about the Elections 2010: TV Debates and Forums Project please call Selma Milovanovic at +38 762 394 482.