

Sixth Session of the Regional Forum¹: Promoting Recommendations for the Reform of the Local Self-Government in Serbia and Ensuring Sustainability of the Regional Forum

On June 27, 2013, a meeting of the Regional Forum was organized by the Council for Inclusive Governance (CIG) at the Aeroklub in Belgrade. Following the public presentation of the Forum's Recommendations for the Reform of the Local Self-Government in Serbia held in Belgrade at the end of March 2013, it was decided to organize a meeting of the Forum members with a number of members of the Parliament of Serbia, with the goal of discussing the recommendations and exploring avenues for including them in the approaching parliamentary debate on the new Law on the Local Self-Government. In addition, CIG also decided to discuss the future of the Forum with the members of the Forum and especially the direction of the Forum's future activities and its sustainability.

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Discussion of the recommendations

Jadranka Jelincic, the Director of the Open Society Foundation opened the meeting and congratulated the participants on their success during the first program year in establishing the Forum and making it functional. She encouraged the participants to use the Forum as a tool for increasing the participation of their municipalities in EU-funded projects. She underlined that in the previous period the funds have not been used to their full extent, and that there is ample space to improve access to these funds, above all through increased cooperation of municipalities of the Region. She emphasized that given Serbia's new candidate status, additional EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) components will be available for the municipalities. However, the municipalities must cooperate in order to produce realistic and quality projects that could reflect local needs and be granted funding by the EU.

At the beginning of the session, two mayors and the speaker of a local municipal assembly, all members of the Forum, presented the recommendations to the members of the Serbian parliament who attended the session of the Forum. Afterwards, the MPs expressed their views about the recommendations and proposed ways how to present

¹Forum is composed of the following municipalities: Ivanjica, Novi Pazar, Nova Varoš, Priboj, Prijepolje, Raška, Sjenica, Tutin.

them to the rest of the parliament and other state institutions and ensure their eventual impact on the parliamentary debate on the new Law on the Local Self-Government.

The MPs proposed the following actions:

- To consult with relevant parliamentary bodies to improve the recommendations and their language and legal form and to make them fitting for inclusion in eventual amendments to the new Law.
- The MPs, especially the ones from the governing parties, should present the recommendations to their respective party leaderships and discuss their incorporation into their agenda of political activities.
- To form an informal group of all MPs coming from the Region, as well other interested MPs, as a “lobby group” for promoting the recommendations, the Region, and the work and future documents of the Forum.
- To consider possibility of organizing, with the help of the informal group, a public hearing of the recommendations at the Parliament of Serbia sometime in the fall.

The Forum supported these proposals.

Future activities and sustainability of the Forum

CIG informed the participants about its plans to gradually, over the coming year, transfer the responsibility of leading the Forum over to the Forum participants themselves. The main aim of the Forum is to help improve cooperation and trust among political parties in the Region, its main ethnic groups and between the Region and the central government. It was underlined that in the next period the aim of the Forum should be to ensure tangible *results, visibility and sustainability*.

As for the future activities of the Forum, the participants proposed the following:

- The Forum should serve as a catalyst for coordination among the municipalities of the Region for the better usage of EU funds, above all the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). It was outlined that after Serbia obtained the EU candidate status, the municipalities are becoming eligible for the three remaining components of the IPA funds in the upcoming period. The results of the previous IPA funding period (cross-border cooperation) showed that the funds have not been used to the full extent, and there is ample space for improvement even in the first two components in the next EU budget period.
- To serve as a lobbying mechanism for the interests of the municipalities and the people in the Region. There are numerous local projects that are currently on hold because of the inaction of the central authorities, many of them funded by international donors. Hence, the municipalities are losing time, funds and potential jobs that contribute to a greater instability in the Region. It was outlined that implementation of a practical project that is currently on hold would do more for the visibility and sustainability of the Forum than anything else.

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- The Forum could also be used as a contact point for potential investors in the Region.
- Finally, the Forum will be a place for discussing any open questions and challenges in the Region.

Regarding the visibility, it was decided that in the next period, the Forum will abandon the Chatham House Rule for most of its meetings and will allow the media to be present at and cover its events. In addition, greater visibility would be ensured through achieving tangible results by the Forum. One of the proposals was to construct a web site of the Forum as a way to present its work to a wider public.

Finally, regarding the sustainability of the Forum, CIG informed the participants that the general idea of the project is to ensure local ownership of the Forum. Therefore, CIG would step down as the main organizer of the Forum by the end of March 2014. The participants proposed the following solutions to ensure stability and sustainability of the Forum in the next period:

- The operational role should be given to a few local NGOs, while the membership of the Forum should also include representatives of municipalities. In such a way, the municipalities would be encouraged to participate in the work of Forum even in the case of a change of the local leaderships. The mayors present committed their municipalities to provide logistical assistance to the Forum.
- The Forum should begin to fundraise for regional projects targeting mostly international donors focused on the Region but also government agencies providing funds for infrastructure projects.
- CIG should continue to facilitate meetings of the Forum and help it with the planning of activities. The meetings will continue to be co-chaired with the Forum members.

All those present at the June 27 meeting decided to become members of the Forum and invited a number of participants active in the Forum's previous sessions but unable to attend the meeting in Belgrade to join the list. Membership in the Forum is open to new members and is individually based. The Forum's organizational committee will consist of representatives of the region's civil society organizations and the mayor of the municipality in which the next meeting of the Forum will be held.

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List of Participants

Vladan Avramović, Political Officer, Embassy of Great Britain in Serbia
Gavrilo Bujišić, Member of the Municipal Assembly of Priboj (Socialist Party of Serbia)
Zora Čelović, Director, NGO Ženska inicijativa, Priboj
Aida Čorović, Chair of the Governing Board, NGO Urban-in, Novi Pazar
Jovan Čorbić, Mayor of Raška (Socialist Party of Serbia)
Branislav Dilparić, President of the Municipal Assembly of Nova Varos (Socialist Party of Serbia)
Mirsad Duran, Director, NGO Nova Vizija, Prijepolje
Emir Elfić, Member, Parliament of Serbia (Bosniak Democratic Community, Novi Pazar)
Shpetim Gashi, Vice President, Council for Inclusive Governance
Alex Grigorev, President, Council for Inclusive Governance
Emir Hašimbegović, Mayor of Prijepolje (Sandžak Democratic Party)
Jadranka Jelinčić, Director, Open Society Foundation
Mirsad Jusufović, Project Manager, UNDP, Novi Pazar
Šemsudin Kučević, Mayor of Tutin (Party of Democratic Action)
Darko Mliutin, Lux Development
Hazbo Mujović, Mayor of Sjenica (Party of Democratic Action)
Mujo Muković, Member, Parliament of Serbia (Bosnjak People's Party)
Igor Novaković, Associate in Serbia, Council for Inclusive Governance
Dejan Radenković, Member, Parliament of Serbia (Socialist Party of Serbia)
Aleksandra Šanjević, Program Coordinator, Open Society Foundation
Zibija Šarenkapić, Director, NGO Cultural Center Damad, Novi Pazar
Ahmedin Škrijelj, Member, Novi Pazar Executive Board, Party of Democratic Action
Azra Zatrić, Member, Main Board, Bosnjak Democratic Community, Novi Pazar

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