

SOME BACKGROUND NOTES ON BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

The independent country of Bosnia & Herzegovina is 51,129 square kilometres and its population is estimated at 4.6 million people. The country's name is often shortened to BiH

- *in area it is the 26th largest of the 46 independent countries in Europe and 3^d largest of the former republics in Yugoslavia – just a bit smaller than Croatia)*
- *in population terms it is 27th largest and 2nd largest of the former republics of Yugoslavia – marginally larger than Croatia*

BiH is almost a land-locked country apart from a very narrow opening to the Adriatic with the small port of Neum. The country is mostly mountainous but with a small plain alongside the River Sava which forms the northern border with Croatia. Most of BiH would be classified as 'rural'; (in terms of the ECOVAST European towns study it is 61.5% rural – with this percentage of its population being in settlements of less than 10,000 people).

The country which was one of the former six republics of the former Yugoslavia became independent in April 1992 but was plunged into Civil war immediately. In November 1995 the Dayton Peace Accord was signed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia at the Dayton Airbase in Ohio, USA. The new BiH constitution agreed under Dayton is still in place today. The country of Bosnia and Herzegovina is now divided into two separate republics: the Srpska republic which is mostly populated by Bosnian Serbs which lies in the north and the east of BiH and which is divided into many municipalities and the Federation of BiH which is made up of 10 separate regional Cantons – 6 of them with a Bozniaks majority; 2 with a Croatian majority and 2 where the population is mixed. There is also a neutral self-governing District (Brcko) which lies between the northern and eastern parts of the Srpska republic.

It only has 10 towns above 30,000 populations. Sarajevo, the capital (and in the Federation area of BiH) is the largest city with a population regaining its pre-war size around 600,000. The second city is Banja Luka in the northern part of the Srpska Republic with a population of approximately 190,000; two other cities – Zenica and Tuzla (Tuzla Canton) are between 120-130,000 – both of them Federation towns: Mostar has a population of around 90,00 and Bihac around 60,000 – again both Federation towns: 4 towns are medium sized with populations in the 30,000's (Brcko the town of the neutral District; Bijeljina in Eastern Srpska, Prijedor in Northern Srpsko and Bugojno – a Federation town). Some 28 other towns would be classified as 'small towns' with populations between 10,000 and under 30,000 and are spread across BiH. (Sources Taseo.com and the ECOVAST study on European Towns – European Russia and European Turkey are counted within the 46 independent countries in Europe.)

REPORT ON THE 2 DAY WORKSHOP HELD IN BANJA LUKA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 18/19 JULY 2012

The event had been arranged by the Civic Association named 'Agency for Co-operation, Education and Development' or ACED which was set up by the Srpska Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and based in Banja Luka. It is a non-party, non-government, non-profit making organisation funded by membership and its own activities. It advocates humanitarianism, educational, cultural, health and environmental objectives serving development and progress of society.

There were 54 attendees at the two day event – 7 representatives of PREPARE (Goran Soster the PREPARE Co-ordinator from Slovenia; and members of the Organising Group - Marina Koprivnjak and Visnja from Croatia; Aris Adlers and Valdis Kudins from Latvia; Dragan Roganovic from Serbia and Valerie Carter from the United Kingdom/ECOVAST); there were 2 other delegates from Croatia (Jabukovac and Dvor) and the rest from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The workshop was held in Banja Luka the main town in the northern part of the Srpska Republic where the majority of the population are Bosnian Serbs. There were representatives from the Ministry of the Federation and the University of Banja Luka.

There was a good spread of delegates from municipalities spread across the different ethnic parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- There were delegates from 3 other municipalities in northern Srpska Republic (Doboj, Novi Grad and Srbac) and from 7 municipalities in the eastern part of the Srpska Republic (Bijeljina, Cajnice, Nevesinge, Pale, Priboj, Rogatica and Vlasenica).
- There were delegates from Brcko, the neutral self-governing District which lies between the two parts of the Srpska Republic.
- There were also delegates from 7 of the 10 Cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; 4 Cantons where the majority of the population are Bozniaks (Muslims) including Sarajevo of the Sarajevo Canton; Tuzla of the Tuzla Canton; Sanski Most in the Una Sana Canton and Zepce in the Zenica-Doboj Canton: 1 (of the 2) Cantons where the majority of the population is Bosnian Croat – Drvar in West Bosnian Canton and from both of the Cantons where the majority of the population is classified as 'mixed' - Jace from Central Bosnia and Mostar and Velez from Herzegovina-Nereta Canton.

Some of the delegates above represented Local Action Groups (LAGS) from the EU Leader programme in non-EU countries:

- 2 from the 35 LAGS in Croatia – Una and Zrinska
- 5 from 10 LAGS in BiH – Gozb, Rogatica, Semberija, Srbac and Una-Sana

DAY 1: Wednesday 18 July 2012

Opening

The delegates had arrived during the morning and the workshop formally started at 15.00 hrs. The event was opened by Goran Soster of PREPARE and Miodrag Matavulj of ACED from BiH. We were then welcomed by Zoran Kovacevic, Deputy of the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management from the Republic of Srpska. The workshop was carried out in Serbo-Croat but translation into English was provided by some of the

delegates particularly Miodrag Matavulj, Slavisa Jovanovic, Visjna Jelic Mueck, Marina Kopivnjak and Sabina Mujezinovic (and was very welcome)..

Session 1: The Role of Civil Society in Rural Development

The first three presentations were from members of the PREPARE group. Goran Soster explained the mission, aims, activities and structure of PREPARE as an organisation and how networking worked. Valdis Kudins then gave an example of how the Rural Forum worked in Latvia and lastly Aris Alder gave a presentation on how to include young people in rural development.

After a short coffee break delegates from BiH described several rural initiatives in Bosnia.

- The first presentation set the scene of what was happening in rural areas in Bosnia – by Slavisa Jovanovic of ACED
- The second was by REDAH, an NGO in Herzegovina with members from 23 municipalities and local development associations including Chambers of Commerce. This NGO had been established in 2003 to develop common interests. Priority sectors are agriculture, rural development, tourism, industry, energy and development of small and medium-sized enterprises. They had established a centre for rural development with an aim to help the development of networks, training for the networks and support for co-operative ventures. They had also developed ventures by linking with development agencies in different countries in Europe (Spain, Sweden and Italy).

The next 4 presentations were from 4 of the 10 Local Action Groups that had been supported by the European Union in BiH and which had finished in 2012.

- The third presentation was about the work of the Local Action Group Una-Sana. They had also been involved with cross border co-operation with Croatia.
- The fourth presentation was on the Local Action Group for Srednja, Cadavica and Bijeljina. There was a lot of interest in developing a rural network for BiH and work had started in their area. They recognised that it was groups like theirs that needed to get on with it and not wait for help from others. They recognised that 'rural development' was a necessity for BiH not a luxury.
- The fifth presentation was on the Local Action Group Vesta
- The final and sixth presentation was on the Local Action Group Svuda

These presentations were followed by a discussion session. There were questions on how much money countries like Latvia spent on rural development – how much of the country's total spending.

There was also agreement that school children should be active in rural development as well as youth and that schools, particularly those that catered for children between the ages of 11 and 16/18 were critical to rural areas as they would become the future population and should be involved in the development of their own rural future.

The debate highlighted the need for a national rural network in BiH, although it acknowledged that there were many political obstacles to overcome and it may take more than a year or more to achieve this.

After dinner we watched a film of Bosnia & Herzegovina which dated from 1969, and then the PREPARE group were taken on a night-time tour of the town, down to the river Vrbas and a boat moored on the riverside for a very pleasant evening.

Day 2: Thursday 19 July 2012

Session 2:

This session was made up of 3 separate workshops enabling group discussion on different issues.

- Working Group 1: concerned networking (a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats - SWOT - analysis) moderated by Visnja Jelic Muck (also attended by Valerie Carter of PREPARE)
- Working Group 2: concerned LEADER and was moderated by Valdis Kudins (also attended by Aris Alders of PREPARE)
- Working Group 3: concerned rural development policy and was moderated by Goran Soster (also attended by Marina Koprivnjak of PREPARE)..

Session 3:

This followed a short coffee break and was the Plenary Session of the 2 day workshop with reporting back from the working groups, discussion and future steps and conclusions.

The Networking workshop had encouraged active development of ideas on several issues being faced in BiH today proving the benefit of a partnership meeting. It would prove difficult to achieve one single rural network when there are two separate parts of government – The Federation and the Srpska Republic. However they did recognise the need to develop such a network and the need to collect data on what already exists in terms of structures and membership. They wanted to make sure they could use PREPARE and the transfer of knowledge that could be provided through PREPARE scholarships.

The LEADER workshop explored the knowledge learned from their 10 existing LEADER networks. They recognised the usefulness of LEADER for the future of rural development in BiH and that they faced a challenge because of the two separate structures in the country. However the existing Local Action Groups should co-operate more with each other at both organisational and community levels and share knowledge and information on structures.

The Policy workshop explored what had been done up to now and to evaluate what had been learned from the LEADER programme in BiH which had now finished. Capacity building would be an important issue in BiH as they progress. Although a large part of BiH is essentially rural, the country should strive to be a competitive one in all respects.

Conclusions

The workshop had been a lively session with a great deal of interest in pursuing rural interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina even though there were many challenges to face.

There was an overriding need for Ministers in BiH at all levels to work together and for the NGO sector to work with Government to help speed up developing structures and decision making – this would also help attract donors to support BiH

The NGO sector agreed the following:

- (a) BiH recognise that it will be a challenge to attain a 'PREPARE Gathering'.
- (b) BiH will now map their present situation in Bosnia
- (c) BiH NGO's will look at different options
- (d) BiH NGO's recognise that all the NGO's need to co-operate
- (e) BiH also recognise that they need to develop a positive partnership with the public sector
- (f) It was recognised that PREPARE could not lead BiH NGO's – they must take the lead themselves on moving forward
- (g) PREPARE however has lots of knowledge from different experiences and can help with enabling access to such knowledge and be there to help with the process when asked by BiH

PREPARE agreed that they will be willing to assist BiH as their work progresses. NB: If eventually BiH wishes to become a member of PREPARE then they will have to form one single rural network – not one for the Federation and one for Srpska.

The workshop ended with lunch and departure of the delegates during the afternoon. There was a genuine feeling by all that the workshop had been useful and that it would give a boost to future discussions in BiH on rural development in their country. The event had enabled the discussion on lots of issues being faced in BiH and proved the benefits of 'partnership working'.

Valerie J Carter: 24 July 2012