

# Managing Multiethnic Cities

## IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

*Case-Based Solutions for Practitioners*

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edited by **MEGHAN SIMPSON**  
and **RADOMIR ŠOVLJANSKI**  
with contributions from **GÁBOR PÉTERI**



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and Public Service  
Reform Initiative

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# Preface

In January 2007, a modestly-funded international policy think tank in Budapest invited a small group of inventive researchers and civil society representatives from Central Asia and South East Europe to its headquarters for a short meeting. The idea of this gathering was to bring together a group of reputable partners around one table to assess our initiatives to date and, through a moderated discussion, brainstorm on our potential “next steps” to improve governance in their ethnically-diverse communities.

This event was a culmination of the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative’s long-term investment in promoting diversity management in post-socialist Central and South Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Led by its in-house Managing Multiethnic Communities Program (MMCP), LGI began to engage more actively in diversity issues in Central Asia in 2005, first by identifying and forging relationships with potential partners. At their request, in 2006, LGI implemented a number of trainings with the Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan and the United Nations Development Program. These trainings in Kyrgyzstan provided an introduction to diversity management, its key concepts, issues, and tools, and were designed to meet the needs of trainers and civil society representatives who regularly encountered public authorities and decision-makers in their work. Concurrently, several individuals from Central Asia traveled to Budapest, and participated in MMCP trainings in a vibrant, international setting.

These events were significant in gathering support for an idea to support experience- and knowledge-sharing between Central Asia and South East Europe. In late summer of 2006, MMCP, working in concert with the Soros Foundation and UNDP offices in Kyrgyzstan, invited members of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South East Europe–Philia, based in Novi Sad, Serbia, to a short conference in Kyrgyzstan. This event brought together local experts and activists from communities throughout Kyrgyzstan, mayors, village heads, and members of central ministries, as well as colleagues from border areas in Tajikistan. Over two days, guided by representatives of Philia, participants engaged in an open dialogue about life at the local level in newly independent states, and the accompanying challenges of managing new national borders and of meeting the needs of diverse populations in the context of ongoing administrative reforms.

Shortly thereafter, a mixed team from Kyrgyzstan, including the mayor of the city of Uzgen, travelled to South Eastern Europe to learn more from the experiences of Philia. During this exchange, participants from Kyrgyzstan heard about Philia’s relentless efforts to rebuild relations in a deeply traumatized region, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of violent conflict. They explored the growth of strong, sustainable networks that bring together a mix of actors from multiethnic cities and regions to promote peaceful relations in South Eastern Europe. They discussed the establishment

of triangles of cities that carry out joint activities across new national borders: managing resources, building and maintaining infrastructure, supporting economic development, and facilitating interethnic, inter-municipal dialogue. They learned about the process of formulating policies and developing mechanisms to accommodate ethnically and linguistically diverse communities at different levels of government. They visited regions that now are divided by new national borders, with particular ethnic compositions and histories, and investigated struggles to balance a degree of administrative autonomy with national cohesion. These experiences in South Eastern Europe not only piqued participants' interest, but also reminded them of comparable contexts in Central Asia.

During our January 2007 meeting in Budapest, which brought together partners from Central Asia and South Eastern Europe, we discussed the value of documenting the story of Philia and its related institutions and initiatives. We considered the usefulness of describing their efforts to overcome divisions and re-build relations at the local level in a way that would provide guidance for others. Ultimately, we conceived a case-based approach to explore multiethnic community management in South Eastern Europe. We identified authors with in-depth and personal knowledge of the field, who could compose rich case studies on alliances, institutions, and their initiatives. We also invited Gábor Péteri, an expert in a wide range of issues related to local government, to advise the development of the case studies.

The resulting publication is meant not only to elaborate on the efforts of certain actors in South Eastern Europe, but also to contribute to an expanding, inter-regional movement devoted to realizing inclusive, responsive, and open governance in diverse communities. It includes a series of cases written by experts, activists, and policymakers in South Eastern Europe that also reflect issues of concern expressed by partners in Central Asia. It is innovative, in that it presents a grass-roots story of actors determined to overcome interethnic conflict, social divisions, new political borders, and other upheavals in South Eastern Europe. The work is intended to be not only informative and inspiring, but also practical. The contributors provide their insights and tools that are meant to equip actors with the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable them to address the complex problems of diversity in different, local contexts. We hope that this work will be a guide for policymakers, activists, and researchers, as well as politicians in city hall, and provide a solid basis for critically analyzing and formulating interventions and policies that will improve governance in diverse communities.

I would like to extend my congratulations to Gábor Péteri and Radomir Sovljanski and all the contributors, translators, reviewers, and colleagues who helped with this volume, and express my gratitude for the personal and professional stories that make this work complete.

*Meghan Simpson*

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# List of Contributors

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# Introduction

*Živorad Kovačević, Meghan Simpson, and Radomir Šovljanski*

## SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE: A COMMON HISTORY IN BRIEF

There used to be a clever description of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), indicating all of its complexity: *one* country, *two* scripts (Cyrillic and Latin); *three* basic religions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Islam), *four* languages (Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Macedonian); *five* major nationalities (Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Macedonians, and Bosniaks) and several smaller national groups (Albanians, Hungarians, Turks, Roma, etc.); *six* Socialist Republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia), with *seven* neighbors (Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania); and *eight* constitutive parts (six Socialist Republics and two Autonomous Provinces—Vojvodina and Kosovo).

A history of territory of South Eastern Europe might be best summed up in terms of the constant flow of populations and changing regimes. In the center of what came to be the SRFY, across Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, there stretched a line separating the Western and Eastern Roman Empire (later known as Byzantium); Roman Catholic and Orthodox religions (after the schism in 1054); the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires; the West and the East. While Yugoslavia's name was supposed to indicate that it was the country of the Southern Slavs, in fact, it was composed of significant non-Slav minorities—among them, the largest in number being Albanians, Hungarians, and Germans—who had also inhabited the region for centuries.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, established in 1946 (as the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia), was a socialist state and not an actual democracy. Though leadership in Belgrade wielded a significant amount of control over all the Republics, the country was much more liberal internally and more open to the world than other countries of the Eastern Bloc. For much of the socialist period, particularly from the 1960s, it enjoyed high living standards and access to international markets. When the SFRY refused to accept Soviet hegemony in 1948, it became, according to Warren Zimmerman, the last Ambassador of the United States to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the “protected and sometimes pampered child of the American and Western diplomacy.”<sup>1</sup>

Any history of the recent conflicts that engulfed the region is contentious. Susan Woodward reminds us of a unique geopolitical conjecture in the 1980s that fueled the

break-up of the country and the onset of war.<sup>2</sup> Troubles began a decade before the fall of the Berlin wall, when austerity measures and reforms required by Yugoslavia's foreign debt crisis triggered a slide toward political disintegration. This crisis had developed as a function of Yugoslavia's strategic significance during the Cold War, which provided access to foreign credits and capital markets. The economic and structural weaknesses of the country, however, rendered the federation of republics vulnerable just as the Cold War came to an end. As the Eastern Bloc ceased to pose a threat to the West, the geopolitical significance of Yugoslavia to the US also declined precipitously. Ambassador Zimmerman reflected on this change:

“...Yugoslavia and the Balkans remained important to US interests, but Yugoslavia no longer enjoyed its former geopolitical significance as a balance between [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the Warsaw Pact. It was no longer unique, since both Poland and Hungary now had more open political and economic systems... I would reassert... the traditional mantra of US policy toward Yugoslavia—our support of its unity, independence and territorial integrity. But I would add that we could only support the country's unity in the context of progress toward democracy.”<sup>3</sup>

Waning interest among policymakers in the US was paralleled by some troubling trends rippling across the region. As the SFRY began to crumble, nationalist leaders were becoming empowered, pursuing various avenues to bolster ethno-national divisions, and asserting their nations “right” to independence. Meanwhile, the “relay baton” of geopolitical interest was being passed from the US to Europe. However, preoccupied at the time with ongoing talks in Maastricht on the European integration process, the unification of Germany, and the fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe, the European Union (EU) failed to take seriously the signs of conflict brewing in the Balkans. As war engulfed the region, fueled by the destructive energy of aggressive nationalism that was being fomented and instrumentalized by political leaders, the response of the EU and other actors to the onset of conflict was delayed, muddled, and at least initially unconvincing.

By 1991, the dissolution of the SFRY was set in motion with the unilateral separation of Slovenia and Croatia and their declarations of independence that year. There were no major armed conflicts in Slovenia. In Croatia, however, the declaration of independence initiated the process of separation of autonomous regions with a majority Serbian population. Soon, war broke out between Croats and Serbs.

That year, ethnic Serbs in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) organized a referendum in which they asserted their determination to stay in the common state of Yugoslavia. However, the referendum was declared invalid and BiH proceeded with its declaration of independence from Belgrade. Armed conflicts between the three larg-

est ethnic groups—Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks—started in 1992. On April 28, 1992, Serbia and Montenegro decided to stay in a common state. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) became the the successor of SFRY.

War ended with the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Agreement, in November 1995, which brought together the leadership of BiH, the Republic of Croatia, and the FRY. But, this did not “solve” the problems in the region. Another crisis erupted between ethnic Serbs and Albanians in the province of Kosovo in 1999. To put an end to the conflict, the international community intervened with force. NATO bombings of Serbia leveled many strategic and civilian sites. Large-scale violence ended, but these bombings were extremely destructive and continue to be viewed as a very poor method of resolving conflict in the region.

By June 2, 2006, Montenegro declared its independence and split peacefully from its union with Serbia. The last territorial unit of the former Yugoslavia, the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, declared its independence on February 17, 2008, with strong support from the international community. Belgrade continues to oppose this move.

It should be emphasized that for much of its history, Yugoslavia was a multicultural society based on principles equality and unity. Explaining wars in the 1990s solely in terms of “ethnic conflict” or “ethnic hatreds” war devalues and discredits the region’s common history. Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, ethnic or ethno-religious identities were subordinate to a shared and essentially secular Yugoslav identity, and ethnic groups were hardly distinct categories. Yet, due to the confluence of a number of factors, Yugoslavia disintegrated in a very short period of time. The effects have been tremendous. The conflicts that rippled across the region were bloody, brutal, and psychological traumatizing. They caused many casualties, destroyed towns and infrastructure, displaced families, and ruptured social networks. Over a million displaced people found refuge in neighboring countries, as well as abroad. Economies and livelihoods were devastated and systems of governance dramatically altered. New geo-strategic realities and political boundaries were constructed. Divisions among previously fluid, or at least less ardently-felt, ethnic and ethno-religious identities were re-created, and the histories of nations rewritten. Across the former Yugoslavia, hatreds that had not existed prior to this cataclysmic period become entrenched. These conditions have had long-term and pervasive affects for South Eastern Europe, posing significant obstacles to the rebuilding and normalizing of pre-war relations, democratization, economic growth, and European integration.

The “Balkan wars,” their many atrocities, and the rampant ethno-nationalisms they perpetuated left the newly established countries with a very poor heritage. The greatest obstacles for the region as a whole have been to normalize relations among these new countries and their populations and to reestablish relations based on trust and

understanding. Indeed, dialogue and cooperation have been very slow to redevelop. Most new leaders, elected in democratic elections held after the wars, have lacked the courage and foresight to extend a hand of reconciliation to one another. To put it simply, where there is no trust, suspicion and insecurity prevail, and the threat of conflict remains.

## LEGACIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE

This book focuses primarily on initiatives launched at the local level—within communities and cities and across national borders—to engage communities and governments in rebuilding normal, peaceful relations and pursuing robust democratic governance. To understand why and how local communities and cities figure so prominently in this book, as well as the obstacles and opportunities that have structured their efforts recent decades, some historical context is needed.

Strong local government—that is, local self-government (*lokalna samouprava*)—has had a long and vibrant history in the region of South Eastern Europe. In Serbia, for instance, under the Ottoman Empire, the self-government unit was a village. Each village elected an elder, who acted as mayor. Local leaders were empowered to the extent that they led multiple uprisings against the rule of local Turkish officials. When the Progressive Party government came to power (1880-1883) with the aim to create a modern state in Serbia, it encountered fierce opposition: locally elected officials and rural village assemblies opposed its attempts at centralization on the state level.<sup>4</sup> In Montenegro, which was never completely occupied, tribal organization prevailed. This self-governing tradition, which required wide people's participation through "village assemblies," continued well into the twentieth century.

After 1945–1946, with the emergence of the centralized Yugoslav federation, the very nature of the state in the region changed. Strict centralization was exercised immediately after World War II, stripping the municipality of many of its local self-government functions. Then, citizens encountered the first layer of state power when submitting applications or requesting the recognition of their rights. By the 1950s, with the introduction of social self-management (*društveno samoupravljanje*), the situation was reversed yet again. Then, the tides shifted. The municipality regained many self-government functions, and its powers and authorities constantly increased until the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. That said, the very nature of self-government was in many ways undermined by the political supremacy of the Union of Communists, the only political party allowed, which was centralized up to the republican/provincial level.<sup>5</sup>

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the newly independent countries followed different paths, yet there were certain similarities.<sup>6</sup> Namely, they pursued a process of intense centralization in the early 1990s, and many powers were consolidated by the

state. The municipality remained the main form of local government, but with very little formal authority (in contrast to other formerly socialist countries, which introduced decentralization programs as a component of overall transition). In fact, this process was viewed by all the former Yugoslav republics as part of a vital, post-independence nation-state building process. Consequently, national euphoria “supported the execution of centralization.”<sup>7</sup>

More recently, new laws on local self-government have been adopted in countries across the region, often involving heated debates. Concerns about granting regions “too much” autonomy and calls for separation (along ethnic lines), insufficient local revenues and tax bases, political maneuverings, and other factors have made the full roll-out of decentralization uneven across the countries in the region. Meanwhile, processes of democratization have opened—or reopened—channels for citizens’ involvement in local decision-making. It is thus the case that—to various degrees in different national, sub-national, and cross-national contexts—local cities and communities are in many cases experiencing a “resurgence” of public participation by various actors, just as they are hindered by limited resources and authorities. In the following chapters, special attention is given to areas and municipalities with ethnically diverse populations. There, particularly in the aftermath of ethno-national conflict, attracting different groups and actors to cooperate in the consolidation of democracy at local levels has been a great challenge.

## NEW DIRECTIONS: CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENTS ENGAGED

Since the mid-1990s, a number of activists and organizations in civil society have emerged as exceptional leaders in efforts to overcome the intolerance and distrust that have been dominated social and political life in South Eastern Europe. It could even be said that continuous war and violent conflict, economic turbulence, and changes in the ways in which citizens are able to engage their governments contributed to development of a more robust civil society in countries in their region. In the midst of conflict, many in civil society established strong personal relations with one another, even when their communities and countries were at war and their political leaders perpetuated animosities and quashed dissent. They never insisted that the question “What have they done to us?” be the most important, and they often criticized their own regimes.

The Center for Regionalism, based in Novi Sad, Serbia, was one of the first civil society initiatives that focused on problems of stabilization and democratization in the context of an altered social, political, and economic landscape. Initiatives launched by the Center soon led to the emergence of three regional networks. Members of the networks include prominent political figures, local leaders, civil society representatives, and experts in various fields. This unique basis has been the source of creativity, mobil-

ity, and provided great opportunities to act in different areas, ranging from territories affected by the war to the ones where peace has never been violated.

One of these networks is the *Igman Initiative*, the strongest and most influential joint project of civil societies in South Eastern Europe. Since its inception, it has focused on overcoming the recent conflicts, normalizing relations, opening borders, and developing of cross-border inter-municipal cooperation. As a measure of the achievements of this network, it is worth emphasizing how rarely—in the Balkans and elsewhere—an initiative of civil society successfully impacts policy-making at the central level of government. The Igman Initiative managed to bring together leaders of newly independent states in South Eastern Europe, and even helped them reach agreements in various areas of regional cooperation and development.

The success of the Igman Initiative, as a platform for reconciliation and good governance, made way for the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia, a network made up of representatives of over sixty cities and NGOs. How this association and others struggled in the aftermath of war to overcome conflict and re-build relations across the dramatically-changed social, political, and economic landscape of the former Yugoslav Republics and South Eastern Europe forms the basis of this book.

## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This book maps out major initiatives in South Eastern Europe that were launched in response to region's turbulence. It is a logical step following cooperation with partners in comparable contexts in Central Asia, who have struggled with similar issues related to administrative reform, new national borders, resource management, and the accommodation of heterogenous populations. Through several cases, the book offers contextual background as well as detailed information on specific activities undertaken to deal with such issues. The authors draw from their own experiences, elucidating conflict situations and the tools they have used to mitigate these situations.

The book is divided into three major sections. First, it presents aspects of the origins, institutionalization, and development of the Center for Regionalism. Two chapters provide two details on major initiatives of the Center that have become regional movements: the Igman Initiative and the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia.

The second section deals with the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance, which resulted in an initiative to establish triangles and circles of cooperation among multiethnic cities. The actors involved in the program are the cities oriented towards the harmonization of interethnic relations. And they all have common interests that may help to

achieve regional benefits with their counterparts, the municipalities and cities across the newly-created borders. This part presents four city triangles of cooperation:

- Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – Osijek (Croatia) – Novi Sad (Serbia)
- Srebrenica (Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina) – Bajina Bašta (Serbia)
- Baja (Hungary) – Sombor (Serbia) – Osijek (Croatia)
- Herceg Novi (Montenegro) – Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska) – Dubrovnik (Croatia)

The third section is dedicated to Local Policies in Multiethnic Community management, an initiative launched by the Center for Regionalism and supported by the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia (FOSS). The outcomes and results of this initiative are relevant to other parts of South Eastern Europe, such as Kosovo and Montenegro, as well as Central Asia, indeed to any region that may experience an extended period of violent civil wars and economic turmoil. Finally, the book offers supplementary materials that provide background information on the initiatives discussed.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Warren Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, New York: Times Books, 1999, 7.
- <sup>2</sup> Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos And Dissolution After the Cold War*, Washington, DC.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.
- <sup>4</sup> Zeljko Sevic and Aleksandra Rabrenovic, Civil Service of Yugoslavia: Tradition vs. Transition, in T. Verheijen, ed., *Comparative Civil Service Systems: Central and Eastern Europe*, Edward Elgar, 1999, 47–82.

- <sup>5</sup> In the Yugoslav concept of federalism, there was very little, if any, formal difference between republics and provinces; even from 1974, provinces were constituent parts of the federation.
- <sup>6</sup> See Emilia Kandeve, *Stabilization of Local Governments: Local Governments in Central and Eastern Europe*, Budapest: OSI/LGI, 2001.
- <sup>7</sup> Zeljko Sevic, Local Government in Yugoslavia, in Emilia Kandeve, ed. *Stabilization of Local Governments: Local Governments in Central and Eastern Europe*, Budapest: OSI/LGI, 2001, 422.

### Republic of Serbia

The Republic of Serbia became an independent country in 2006, after its peaceful separation with Montenegro. From 1992–2003, it was part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). In 2002, Serbia and Montenegro came to a new agreement regarding continued cooperation and entered into negotiations regarding the future status of the FRY. By 2003, the Yugoslav federation was replaced in favor of the looser State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. As of 2009, Serbia had two autonomous provinces: *Vojvodina* in the country's north, and *Kosovo and Metohija* in the southwest. Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008, despite opposition from Belgrade. Serbia has a multiparty system of government, with a prime minister as the head of state. According to the 2002 Census, 82 percent of the population of Serbia (excluding the Albanian majority in Kosovo) declared their nationality as Serbian. Most are adherents of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Belgrade is the largest city and the country's capital.

### Republic of Croatia

The Republic of Croatia declared independence 1991 and was internationally recognized as a sovereign state on January 15, 1992 by the European Union and the United Nations. During that time, Croatia controlled less than two-thirds of its legal territory. The vast majority of the population is ethnic Croat and follows Catholicism. Other large groups include ethnic Serbs, though their numbers have declined dramatically since Croatia's independence, particularly in the former Serb-dominated territory of *Srpska Krajina*. Between 1990 and 2000, Croatia had a semi-presidential system, and since 2000, a parliamentary system. It is a high-income country with a robust tourist industry, and a strong industrial sector dominated by shipbuilding, food processing, and the chemical industry. Croatia's capital city is Zagreb.

## Montenegro

Montenegro (*Crna Gora*) became an independent country in 2006, on the basis of a referendum held on 21 May 2006. From 2003–2006, it was part of a union with Serbia, within the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the successor state of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The majority of citizens identify themselves as ethnic Montenegrins. However, estimates on the ethnic composition of the country vary, reflecting changes in the ways in which census data has been collected and how people experience their ethnicity. Podgorica is the capital city of Montenegro.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) gained independence 1992, as war in the region escalated. It is home to three ethnic “constituent peoples”: Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), the most numerous population group of three, Serbs, and Croats. (Regardless of ethnicity, a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina is often identified in English as a Bosnian.) BiH is politically decentralized and comprises two governing entities, the *Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* and *Republika Srpska*, with *District Brčko* as a *de facto* third entity. It is further divided into 10 cantons (*županija*): 4 Bosniak, 4 Croat, and 2 of mixed ethnicity. Devastated by war, the country has been grappling to develop as a unified state. Sarajevo is its capital city.



# Alliances and Institution Building



# *Introduction*

*Aleksandar Popov*

The first section of this book tells the story of a set of actors that have worked for the normalization of troubled relations, stability, and the entrenchment of democracy in South Eastern Europe. This story begins with the Center for Regionalism (*Centar za Regionalizam*) which, since its establishment in October 1998, has played an important role in creating a favorable environment for cooperation within and across communities, cities, and regions of the former Yugoslavia. The Center has been involved in several initiatives that have had wide-reaching effects, from local to inter-regional levels.

To understand the expansion of the Center and its engagements, it is important to identify a number of important elements that surrounded its establishment:

- The Center was founded in the province of Vojvodina—a territory with a long history of autonomy and identification as a specific multicultural region. These legacies made it logical for the Center to be oriented towards the issues of regionalism and interregional cooperation—not only in name, but also in mission.
- In their previous professional and political engagements, the individuals who initiated the establishment of the Center had worked on issues of decentralization, human and minority rights, cross-border cooperation as well as anti-war activities. They were committed to these issues, even after war severed many of their connections and caused social, political, and economic turbulence in the region.
- In the period during which the Center for Regionalism was founded, the regime of Slobodan Milošević was at its peak. Nationalism in Serbia was the dominant ideology, and power and resources were shored up in the capital city of Belgrade. Serbia was isolated from the rest of the world. It no longer had normal relations established with its neighbors, particularly those that emerged after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

One year after its founding, the Center for Regionalism played a pivotal role in the launching of the Igman Initiative. With the aim to re-build and normalize post-war relations, the Igman Initiative brought together the signatory countries of the Dayton Agreement—Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the Federal Re-

public of Yugoslavia (subsequently named the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, and by 2006, the independent states of Serbia and Montenegro). Years later, the Center continues to coordinate this project. Owing to the moral and intellectual credibility of the people it gathers, the Igman Initiative has implemented a range of projects. Their implementation and related advocacy and lobbying efforts have made significant contributions to accomplishing its original mission. Through its activities, the Igman Initiative's reputation increased to such an extent that, as of mid-2009, it managed to gather the leaders of several states in the region of SEE on four occasions. Representatives of international institutions have gone on to recognize the success of the Initiative on many occasions.

Another project of the Center concerns the establishment of triangles of cooperation that connect cities in newly independent and neighboring states. These city triangles are based on the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance and implemented under the auspices of the Igman Initiative. The expansion of triangles and circles in the region ultimately gave birth to the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe—Philia, the Secretariat of which is based in the Center for Regionalism. During its four-year existence, Philia has managed to bring almost all national capital cities, regional centers, and other multiethnic cities, along with partner non-governmental organizations from eight countries of the region, to implement projects across new borders. This “city diplomacy” contributes to the reestablishment of broken relations, particularly between cities situated in what had very recently been a war zone. In this manner, contributes to the improvement of overall relations in the region.

All projects implemented by the Center for Regionalism, as well as regional projects launched with other partner organizations, are intertwined with the same idea. Their common denominator is to enhance the democratization process, and in doing so protect human and minority rights and reestablish communication and other linkages in South Eastern Europe. Efforts in pursuit of these goals can and do transform the region from a zone of instability to one of stability, peace, and cooperation. The chapters in this section are meant to provide detailed information on a set of actors—the Center for Regionalism, the Igman Initiative, and the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe—Philia—and their work toward these goals.

# The Center for Regionalism

*Aleksandar Popov*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Center for Regionalism was established by a group of intellectuals from Novi Sad, in the northern province of Vojvodina, Serbia in October 1998, with the aim to promote and spread the idea of regionalism in accordance with modern European trends and experiences. The circumstances under which the Center for Regionalism was established at the end of the 1990s determined the basic trends of its activities. On the one hand, there existed a need, despite the strict centralization and undemocratic nature of the Milošević's regime, to create new *perspectives for decentralization and democratization* in Serbia. As it later turned out, this task was not short-term. Almost ten years after its first project and its hard-fought efforts for constitutional reform, by 2008, the Center began to promote decentralization in Serbia more actively and publicly than ever before, initiating public debates and offering concrete expert recommendations. The Center also initiated a nearly impossible mission to re-establish understanding and trust in the region. Though the scars of war were still tangible, the Center played a lead role in a strong movement of non-governmental organizations and other actors, including the Igman Initiative, Philia, Civic Vojvodina, and Civil Dialogue (between NGOs in Serbia proper and in Kosovo). These initiatives helped rebuild relations that had been severed during the wars of the 1990s and overcome psychological and other barriers.

## INTRODUCTION

The Center for Regionalism was established by a group of intellectuals from Novi Sad, in the northern province of Vojvodina, Serbia in October 1998, with the aim to promote and spread the idea of “regionalism” in accordance with modern European trends and experiences.<sup>1</sup> This non-governmental organization was established when Serbia—as with South Eastern Europe as a whole—were facing the consequences of Slobodan Milošević and his destructive rule.

At that time, the 1990 Constitution of Serbia continued to set the terms of administrative reform. The Constitution dictated a policy of strict decentralization, concentrating power in Belgrade. The autonomy of two historically autonomous provinces—Vojvodina

and Kosovo and Metohija—was suspended, resulting in long-term consequences for both, as well as for the entirety of Serbia.

In Kosovo and Metohija, the suspension of autonomy strengthened the separatist desires of the ethnic Albanian population, the majority group in the region. As political and interethnic tensions grew into armed conflict in the region, communities and cities were divided along ethnic lines and thousands of people were displaced. The situation reached its climax in 1998 and 1999, during extensive military and police actions. In the spring of 1999, seeking to bring the conflict to a halt, NATO carried out a massive bombardment of Serbia, destroying infrastructure in Belgrade, Novi Sad, and other areas. These events preceded the establishment of Kosovo as an international protectorate, and later, its declaration of independent statehood.

The suspension of autonomy was also significant for Vojvodina, though for different reasons. With a unique set of historical conditions and an extremely diverse, multiethnic population, Vojvodina was known as a region of innovation and prosperity. Administrative reforms introduced by the Constitution of 1990, however, meant that the region no longer had the power to administer its resources. It became less prosperous and no longer represented the “driving force of development,” as it was once called. Vojvodina was deprived of the perspective to grow rapidly, as had once been the case, prior to Milošević’s coming into power, and its development was abruptly tied to the other parts of Serbia.

Such strict centralism caused a lot of anger not only in Vojvodina, but in other parts of Serbia as well. Šumadija or a region of Niš also demanded a higher degree of decentralization. The overall non-democratic environment, reflected in suppression of the opposition’s actions and ideas, led to the decline of all social values and destruction of democratic institutions. Nationalism, which was becoming a dominant ideology at the time, caused a feeling of insecurity among all minority communities, as well as among all democracy-oriented citizens of Serbia. Vojvodina, with its vibrant and diverse population, was no exception.

In 1998, Serbia was an isolated country—a consequence of sanctions imposed by the international community because of the role of the Milošević regime in provoking and expanding violent conflicts across the territory of former Yugoslavia. Three years had passed since the signing of the Dayton Agreement, yet relations between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (of Serbia and Montenegro), Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) were still not normalized. Conflict in Kosovo continued, and life across Serbia remained uncertain and unstable. Relations and economic contacts with neighbors, as well as with European countries and the US, were at a very low level. This was the background against which the Center for Regionalism was established.

## LAUNCHING THE CENTER

The inaugural assembly of the Center for Regionalism was held on October 12, 1998 in Novi Sad. During this assembly, the mission of the Center was formulated, its structure created, its Statute adopted, and members of its governing bodies were elected. After submitting all necessary documents to the competent ministry, the Center was officially registered on October 29, 1998.

In large part, the initial momentum driving the establishment of the Center came from the individuals it attracted: a group of well-known public figures, activists, and respected intellectuals from Novi Sad and Belgrade. This collection of personalities gave the organization and a degree of credibility that was significant in numerous respects, not least in its search for funding or when attracting experts for particular projects. That said, until March 7, 2000, the Center did not have its own premises and even lacked technical and other office equipment. During its the first few years of its operation, it used the facilities of the Aeronautical Union of Vojvodina and Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance.

International organizations and other actors from abroad played an important role in sustaining the early efforts of the Center. With its mission to promote democratization processes, the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia found synergies with the Center, and provided initial support that was crucial for its growth. As the number of active non-governmental organizations in Serbia was very low at that time, the Fund played the role of an incubator, providing financial and technical support for the establishment and initial operations of many civic groups in the country. The Fund also financed one of the first projects of the Center for Regionalism, which was aimed at facilitating the organized return of refugees from Vojvodina to Tuzla, a city in northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Fund continued to provide assistance in a range of respects, allowing for the Center to expand and develop.

The internal political environment, including the general postwar situation in the region, shaped the orientation of the Center for Regionalism and its engagements. Therefore, in the first few years of operation, it performed two basic activities:

- (i) At the domestic level, the Center started developing projects on decentralization and democratization, with particular emphasis on the reform of local self-government, the improvement of interethnic relations, and the protection of national minority rights in Serbia.
- (ii) At the international level, the Center focused on the promotion of regionalism as a dominant European trend at that time, as well as interregional networking.

The postwar environment across the countries of the former Yugoslavia was marked by severed relations and deep psychological barriers. Undeterred by these challenges, the Center for Regionalism focused on reestablishing and normalization connections

among the signatories of the Dayton Agreement, as well as across the entire region of South Eastern Europe. It set out to establish several regional networks, including alliances of cities that worked across new national borders. The first example of this kind involved the city triangle of Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Osijek in Croatia, and Novi Sad in Serbia.

## Mission and Objectives

The work of the Center is based upon the notion of “regionalism.” That is, many territories within and across states—such as in South Eastern Europe—are united by historical, geographic, economic, cultural, and other ties. For instance, the province of Vojvodina takes pride in its unique and complex mix of historical factors that continue to shape contemporary conditions and innovations in social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. While Vojvodina is located within Serbia, there are numerous examples of regions in South Eastern Europe and elsewhere that exist across national borders. The triangles of cities presented later in this book are examples such cases.

There are two main aspects of the Center’s focus on regionalism. First, the Center explores the ways in which, during processes of democratization, decentralization, and the devolution of state power, regions can become stronger units, with specific functions and capacities. Second, the Center promotes the European-wide trend toward empowered regions, or Euroregions, that exist across national borders. Along these lines, the Center works to support the political, social, and economic growth of regions in South Eastern Europe, necessary legislative changes that might accompany this process, and cooperation among regions. In pursuit of the notion of regionalism, the Statue of the Center specifies six main areas of operation:

- Learning about the practice of interregional networking as practiced elsewhere in Europe, and ways to include regions in South Eastern Europe in these trends;
- Engaging experts and study groups to examine specific topics in the field of regionalism;
- Organizing expert and public discussions in the form of open fora, conferences, symposia, seminars, and others events on topics in the field of regionalism;
- Implementing cross-border cooperation within particular regions, based on joint projects of NGOs, and local self-governments;
- Establishing links with other NGOs in Serbia and abroad along the lines specified above; and
- Disemminating information through various media and public relations campaigns on topics related to regionalism.

## Organization and Structure

The Statute of the Center for Regionalism lays out the organization's structure and governance. It stipulates in detail the main bodies overseeing the Center's activities—the Assembly, Steering Committee, and Supervisory Committee—as well as the roles of the Center's director and other members of the staff.

- Pursuant to the Statute, the *Assembly* is the supreme body of the Center and is composed of all its members, except the honorary members. The Assembly is entitled to convene once per year, though an extraordinary session may be scheduled (on the basis of a justified proposal by the Steering Committee and on a written initiative supported by at least one-third of all its members).
- The *Steering Committee* is the executive body of the Center responsible for implementation of the goals of the Center that have been established in the Statute and the Assembly decisions. The Steering Committee has five members who are elected and relieved of duty by the Assembly. The Steering Committee elects a President and Secretary from among its members and also appoints the *Director of the Center*. The mandate of the Steering Committee members lasts four years and members may be re-elected for the same position. Among the members of the Steering Committee are individuals from various professions, who share the principles of Center. They include the vice-president of the Chamber of Economy of Vojvodina, the Director of Ljubljanska Banka in Novi Sad, and the Editor-in-Chief of *Ruske Slovo*, a newspaper published in Ruthenian, a minority language in the region.
- The *Supervisory Committee* controls the regularity of material and financial operations and submit a report on financial operations to the Assembly once per year.

The *Director of the Center*, appointed by the Steering Committee for the period of four years (with the right to be re-elected) represents and acts for the Center. He or she has the rights and duties of the financial ordering party and is authorized to sign all financial and monetary documents on behalf of the Center. The first director, a political scientist by training, worked for many years as a journalist and as the director of the *Dnevnik* newspaper publishing house. He was an aide to the provincial Minister of Information for four years, but resigned from this office after Milošević's coalition took power in the province. He was one of the founders and leaders of the Reformist Democratic Party of Vojvodina, which opposed the breaking up of Yugoslavia and the war. His entire professional and political experience helped him in founding and steering the Center for Regionalism those first four years.

The Director also manages the work of the Secretariat, which conducts the operative activities of the Center. The Secretariat consists of six internal and two external associates, four of which are full-time employees. The Secretariat is shared with the that of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia.

In terms of staff, in addition to permanently employed personnel, the Center has two regular external associates, namely: (i) the Coordinator of the Igman Initiative and (ii) the Program Director of Philia. For the implementation of concrete projects, the Center for Regionalism also engages a range of experts and other external associates on a part-time basis.

## Financing the Center for Regionalism

As previously mentioned, the Center for Regionalism first obtained financial support for the establishment and operation of its office and early activities from the Fund for an Open Society in Serbia. Since then, a great amount of effort has been put into securing the financial resources needed to maintain a degree of continuity in the Center's work and staff while expanding its activities.

From 2002, the James Stewart Mott Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation have provided much-needed institutional support. This provides the Center with a solid base from which to maintain its regularly operations. Over the years, the Center has also established good relationships with other organizations and donors that are active in the region, and has attracted funding from multiple sources. The Center's dedication to its mission, its proven ability to prove concrete results, and personal relations have been important in these efforts. Various projects of the Center have been supported:

- The Balkan Trust for Democracy of the German Marshall Fund (US) has funded activities of the Center within the Igman Initiative and Civic Dialogue.
- The Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI) of the Open Society Institute, Budapest has supported projects within the Association of Multiethnic Cities of the South Eastern Europe (Philia). In particular, it assists the Center develop and transfer its knowledge to areas outside of Europe, including Kosovo and Central Asia.
- Freedom House has provided assistance for the launching of the Igman Initiative and projects realized within it.
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo has financially and organizationally supported the launching of the Civil Dialogue and projects realized within it.

- The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has financed a great number of projects within the Igman Initiative, as well as other projects aimed at democratization of Serbia.

The Center regularly updates information on its partners and donors on its websites and other publications.

## ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

The Center has been involved in many initiatives over the years, over both the long- and short-term. Because of their scope, unique interesting, and important impacts, some of these, like the Igman Initiative and the Association of Multiethnic Cities—Philia, deserve attention and are discussed separately in this book (as well as briefly here). A selection of major initiatives, including background information, main activities, and outcomes, are presented in this section to show the breadth of initiatives as well as focus of the Center over the years.

### Promoting Decentralization

One of the first projects of the Center that contributed to its promotion in the public eye in Serbia addressed the constitutional and legal framework of decentralization and the autonomy of Vojvodina. Initiated in mid-1999, the Center successfully gathered a group of prominent experts from Novi Sad and Belgrade, who drew up a concept for the new Constitution, in which Serbia, as a decentralized and democratized state, was perceived as a country that is part of the region. This was a precedent: a nongovernmental organization took the lead in spelling out a key concept for the new Constitution of Serbia.

Other significant concepts from expert groups at non-governmental organizations were developed in the early 2000s, with the beginning of the democratic changes in Serbia. By the second half of 1999 and the first half of 2000, opposition to Milošević in Serbia continued to grow, culminating in a joint campaign to defeat Milošević's regime. Democratization in Serbia appeared to be in motion. These processes intensified after the tragic events in Kosovo and the bombardment of Serbia by NATO.

At that time, it was essential to draw the attention of the public to a particular issue essential to the democratization of Serbia, that of decentralization. In this respect, at the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000, the Center organized a range of *open fora* in almost all large towns in Serbia, taking the opportunity to present the concept of a new constitution of a democratized and decentralized Serbia. These open fora and

other public presentations aimed to explain to citizens the essence and advantages of decentralization. It is worth emphasizing that many ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority groups are concentrated in particular territories of the country. Encouraged by political rhetoric in that period, therefore, the majority of the public was inclined to treat any demand for decentralization as separatism, and it was widely considered that that a strong state is only a state with strong centralized power. These fora opened the door to new thinking about how Serbia could democratize.

A range of other projects later developed out of this project, pertaining to decentralization, the development of local self-government, and the exercise of human and minority rights.

The Center for Regionalism, together with the Democratic Alternative Forum of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Sarajevo, organized a conference on perspectives of bilateral relations between FRY (that later became two states, Serbia and Montenegro) and BiH in February 2000 in the city of Banja Luka, BiH. This conference opened a new field of activities of the Center for Regionalism. Attention was focused on cross-border cooperation in the region, namely by facilitating normalization of bilateral relations after the wars waged in the 1990s. The conference also marked the launch of the Igman Initiative.

## Igman Initiative

The Igman Initiative is a movement of non-governmental organizations from the Dayton Agreement signatory countries. It is focused on the normalizing and rebuilding of relations based on mutual understanding and trust in the region after the wars of the 1990s. The movement's activities include around 140 non-governmental organizations from the countries of the so-called *Dayton Triangle*: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It was founded by the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad, the Democratic Alternative Forum from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Citizens' Committee on Human Rights from Zagreb. When it ceased to operate, the Democratic Alternative Forum was subsequently replaced by the Citizens Forum from Tuzla. After Montenegro declared independence from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (the successor of FRY) in 2006, the Center for Democracy from Podgorica became the fourth partner.

The Igman Initiative acts through *expert groups* that offer concrete proposals and recommendations to decision-makers, as well as to the public at large, on a range of topics related to the normalization of post-Yugoslavia and post-war relations in the region. The positions of experts are presented at the Igman Initiative's sessions that are held twice or more a year. These sessions are also an opportunity to analyze the state of affairs in each country of the Dayton Agreement and submit proposals that may

accelerate the normalization process—that is, on the identification and elimination of specific impediments to this process. Recommendations to governments of the signatories of the Dayton Agreement were adopted at several sessions, particularly related to confronting the recent past more openly, resolving the issue of common borders, re-establishing freedom of movement, abolishing the visa regime, and resolving the problem of refugees and their return.

The Igman Initiative is a special network of non-governmental organizations, gathering under its auspices the heads of states—until the present, the heads of state of the Dayton Agreement signatory countries have met four times and on two occasions signed a joint statement prepared by Igman Initiative experts. The Igman Initiative also has organized various types of activities through its members, contributing to dealing with the past and overcoming the psychological and other barriers that hinder a more rapid normalization of relations between these countries, as well as in the entire region.

## Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia

The Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia has its roots in the Igman Initiative. In 2002, a panel of experts carried out research on the conditions of interethnic relations in the cities of Tuzla, Osijek, and Novi Sad. This research formed the basis of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*. Signed initially by the officials of the three city administrations, as well as by NGO representatives, this document was dedicated to the improvement of interethnic relations in these cities and in the region they share. Specifically, it provided the basis for the establishment of the first city triangle.<sup>2</sup>

Having expanded and experienced some notable successes since this inception, the Center and its allies soon engaged in a regional campaign, with the aim to establish a dozen new triangles or circles of cooperation in South Eastern Europe on the basis of the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance. This initiative grew rapidly from its inception, bringing together capital cities, regional centers, major towns, and civil society organization from the region of South Eastern Europe, namely: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. The Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe was founded on the basis of this agreement. Members may have the status of standing (founders) members or associated members. The Association's activities are coordinated and administered by the General Secretariat located in Novi Sad.

Like the Igman Initiative, Philia is specific in that it is a self-developed network based on the bottom-up approach, meaning that the initiative was launched by local non-governmental organizations, experts, and professionals, as well as elected representatives of local and regional authorities. Its model for city triangles includes partners from city administrations and one or several local non-governmental organizations.

Mutual cooperation and exchange of experience within the Association is part of city diplomacy, which contributes to the improvement of the overall atmosphere and re-establishment of understanding and trust in the region of the South Eastern Europe. The essential aim of the Association is the enhancement and coordination of cooperation between its members and implementation of concrete, collaborative projects in various fields, such as education, economic development, culture, resource management, and infrastructure.

## Civil Dialogue

Civil Dialogue was established on the basis of the Igman Initiative's experiences related to the networking of non-governmental organizations around a single common aim—to reestablish understanding and trust in divided communities and create an environment for normal communication and dialogue. The Center for Regionalism found a partner in Mother Theresa, a charitable organization (NGO) from Priština, Kosovo, in its efforts to engage three target groups: youth, women, and the mass media.

The initiative was born from the ashes of the tragic events in 1999, when links and cooperation among civil society organizations from Serbia and Kosovo were almost completely suspended. Antiwar non-governmental organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia and Montenegro had been cooperating actively during this time. With the cessation of full-scale conflict, they had the chance to make their greatest contribution to the rehabilitation and elimination of psychological and other barriers put in place by the wars of the 1990s.

The first meeting of partners of Civil Dialogue was held in March 2002 at the head office of the OSCE Mission in Priština. At the meeting, participants established that there was a need and willingness on both sides to join forces. The initial actions and projects were fully supported by the OSCE Mission to Kosovo and the Freedom House Foundation.

Civil Dialogue is oriented toward:

- facilitating open dialogues between different ethnic groups in Kosovo, as well as between Kosovo and Serbia;
- joining people across ethnic divisions in good will;
- opposing publically official policies that violate human rights and diminish the possibility of establishing the rule of law; and
- establishing a region of peace, cooperation, and tolerance, where responsibility is accepted and freedoms are guaranteed.

The Civil Dialogue Board was founded and composed of five members from each side, Kosovo and Serbia. The first co-presidents of the Civil Dialogue were Mr. Živorad Kovačević, President of the European Movement in Serbia, and Don Lush Gjergji, President of the NGO Mother Theresa.

By conducting political surveys and organizing regional and international roundtables, workshops, conferences, public discussions, and cultural events, Civil Dialogue created, executed, and promoted civil society projects that have been of interest to all ethnic groups in Kosovo and Serbia. These include, among others, projects concerned with reconciling the past, youth issues, gender issues, freedom of the media, freedom of movement, and free trade.

In drawing up the concept for their strategy, the founders of Civil Dialogue agreed that the future status of Kosovo would not be the topic of the discussions, nor would the participants in this network of non-governmental organizations take sides in this respect. This issue, inevitably, would be decided on by politicians, together with the international community as a mediator. The aim of Civil Dialogue, irrespective of Kosovo's future, was to turn this area into a zone of peace, tolerance, and security.

A number of events and activities have been organized in the frame of this initiative, with the essential aim to establish connections and joint actions among Albanian and non-Albanian non-governmental organizations from Kosovo, as well as their connections and actions with organizations from Serbia. These include:

- Seminars for members of the Youth Congress, a network of youth from multi-ethnic local communities, established by the OSCE Mission to Kosovo;
- An inter-faiths forum of young community leaders;
- A youth forum addressing political radicalism;
- Opportunities for Kosovar youth to attend the EXIT music festival, an international, week-long event in Novi Sad;
- A regional conference on educational and university reform within the Bologna process;
- Support for “media dialogue” between Belgrade and Priština;
- Training courses for project proposal writing;
- A regional (and multiethnic) conference of women's organizations;
- An exhibition of contemporary Serbian art at the National Gallery of Kosovo in Priština;
- Local policy development to accommodate multiethnic communities in Kosovo; and
- A youth campaign around the idea of peaceful coexistence.

## Other Projects

In addition to the projects implemented within its three regional networks—namely, the Igman Initiative, Philia, and Civil Dialogue—the Center has been involved in numerous activities that fit within its six main areas of operation (learning about the practice of interregional networking as practiced elsewhere in Europe; engaging study groups; organizing expert discussions; implementing cross-border cooperation; establishing links among NGOs; and disseminating information). Additionally, the Center has organized or been a part of a number of initiatives, including social activism and public relations campaigns, to build support for its efforts and work against some troubling local and regional trends.

A number of the most significant projects are presented briefly.

### **Campaign for Local Self-government Reform**

In May and June 2002, USAID, in cooperation with the Serbian Ministry of Justice and Local Self-government, organized a campaign on the reform of local self-government in Vojvodina, with the Center for Regionalism as the executive organizer of the campaign. Fourteen municipalities in Vojvodina were covered by this campaign. The campaign included the organization of expert seminars for councilors and representatives of local authorities, in order to learn about the basic goals of reforms of local self-government, novelties in the new Law on Local Self-government, as well as the obligations of local authorities thereof. Lecturers in the seminar included leading experts in this field. Their involvement was arranged by the Center for Regionalism.

### **Decentralization in the Context of the New Constitution and the EU Integration**

This project, realized in 2007–2008, was aimed at elucidating and rectifying shortcomings of the new Constitution of Serbia from 2006, specifically related to the territorial organization of state power. The project also entailed a public campaign, organized in 22 large towns in Serbia, which attracted attention to and support for the need for legislative changes. On an expert basis, the Center took part in both amending existing laws and adopting new ones:

- In 2007, the Center drew up a set of amendments to the Law on Local Self-government, which concerned institutions for protection of minority rights in local self-government. Some of these amendments were included in the new Law on Local Self-Government, which was passed in December 2007.
- When passing the Statute of Vojvodina, the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina accepted several amendments drawn up by experts of

the Center, which improved the defining of Vojvodina as a modern, European region.

- The Center also played a central role in passing the Law on Regional Development. Moreover, the Center provided recommendations and amendments that were ultimately adopted by the competent ministry.

## **Civic Vojvodina**

The Center for Regionalism is one of the founders of Civic Vojvodina, a Vojvodinian NGO network that includes seven NGOs from this province: the Independent Journalists Association of Vojvodina; the Helsinki Committee in Serbia office in Novi Sad; the Youth Initiative office in Novi Sad; NGO Panonija; Open Lycee from Sombor; the Center for Development of Civil Society from Zrenjanin; and the Center for Regionalism. Civic Vojvodina was established with a joint action of NGOs, which aimed at boycotting a referendum on the new Constitution of Serbia of 2006.

As part of this alliance, the Center for Regionalism has initiated and participated in several campaigns at the regional level, across South Eastern Europe. With partner NGOs in Vojvodina, the Center participated in a campaign entitled “Serbia in the EU: What is in it for me, What is it in for my city?” This campaign was carried out in the spring of 2008, before the general elections in Serbia, held on 11 May 2008. It involved a number of debates, involving a number of experts and prominent members of political and social life answering the question what Serbian integration into EU actually means. In addition, a series of accompanying interactive events were organized, aiming to open a number of topics on real and concrete benefits that EU membership will bring to citizens and local communities in Serbia.

Additionally, the Center was a central figure in a major campaign to build public support for visa cancellation was carried out in all countries of the region in cooperation with the Civic Stability Pact.

## **Local Policies in Multiethnic Communities**

This project, in which the Center for Regionalism was involved in 2005–2008, aimed at the improvement of laws and local regulations relating to the protection of rights of minorities and interethnic relations. Through trainings provided to members of local authority bodies in Serbia, it aimed to foster their capacities and sensitivity to the issues of interethnic relations.

## **Civil Dialogue in the South of Serbia**

The Center sought to make use of its very positive experiences in the municipalities of Sombor, Senta and Zrenjanin in Vojvodina during the pilot project on Local Policies

in Multiethnic Communities. The municipalities of Bujanovac, Preševo, and Medvedja in the south of Serbia, where a smaller-scale armed conflict took place in 2000 and 2001, are among the least developed municipalities in the country in economic, infrastructural, and other respects. Civil society in these areas is also very weak. Thus, building on its expertise, the Center sought to improve the capacities of NGOs and other civic groups from this area, and link them with local authorities in joint projects that would be significant for the entire community. After extensive research, insights and technologies from this project would be transferred to municipalities in Kosovo via a number of targeted trainings.

The trainings, intended for representatives of local governments and NGOs, provided an introduction to local diversity management. They also addressed legal and local regulations and activities of the institutions tasked with protecting of minority rights in local communities. Capacity-building trainings were delivered specifically for representatives of non-governmental organisations to enhance their skills as relevant policy actors.

### **Media and Publicity**

The success of the Igman Initiative to bring together the heads of states of the signatory countries of the Dayton Agreement on four occasions was the highlight of widespread media coverage that also touched on the activities of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia and the Center for Regionalism. This extensive media attention exposed the general public to the core ideas of the Center, as well as numerous initiatives launched in pursuit of the Center’s mission—relating to civil dialogue in Kosovo, the improvement of interethnic relations, and decentralization and democratization in Serbia. In addition, the Center strives to disseminate information about its activities regularly, and support publications by affiliated experts and associates.

### **Inter-regional Collaboration**

The Center for Regionalism has also “gone global.” With support from the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative of the Open Society Institute, the Center has partnered with local NGOs and international organizations operating in Central Asia. The Center, LGI, and partners have recognized many similarities between Central Asia and South Eastern Europe, including new and contentious borders that divide communities and create problems for the “usual” flow of people and goods and the management of resources, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse populations, and territorially concentrated ethnic minorities. The Center, along with the extensive network of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia (as will be discussed), have been involved in a number of professional exchanges between Central Asia and South Eastern Europe.

These exchanges have taken place in both regions, and have introduced local policy-makers and leaders, civil society representatives, activists, experts, and central authorities their counterparts abroad. The idea is to share technologies to manage new borders and diverse populations, particularly at the local level. For instance, in the summer of 2009, a group of community mediators from southern Kyrgyzstan, where the ethnic composition of the population is quite different from northern areas and the capital city, travelled to Kosovo as part of the Center's "Local Policies" project. There, they delivered a training on community mediation as a tool for mitigating interethnic conflict, and discussed the opportunities and limitations of this type of technology in different contexts. The Center has also used inter-regional exchanges to share its experiences as an important institution, or player, in affecting social attitudes and policies in South Eastern Europe.

### **Anti-Fascist Rally**

In autumn 2007, National Alignment, a neo-Nazi organization, announced a gathering for October 7, 2007, to be followed by a march down the streets of Novi Sad. The official response to this announcement was mild. However, Civic Vojvodina decided to call upon the citizens of Novi Sad to gather, at the same place and on the same day, to prevent the neo-Nazis from organizing their rally and march. Responding to Civic Vojvodina's invitation, approximately 5,000 citizens of Novi Sad gathered on the main square and were addressed from the assembled stage by Aleksandar Popov, Director of the Center for Regionalism. This was a powerful response to troubling trends in the region.

### **The Burek of Solidarity**

After the self-declared independence of Kosovo, in Sombor, Vojvodina, a group of nationalists broke the shop windows of a bakery run by Albanians, and they started to distribute free burek—a type of baked or fried filled pastry popular in the region—to dissuade citizens from buying the burek sold there. Upon an initiative by the Center for Regionalism, Civic Vojvodina organized a visit to the bakery to have a "solidarity burek." The mayor of Sombor and local ombudsman joined this act of solidarity.

### **Anti-Fascist Encounters**

The Center for Regionalism celebrates every May 9 as the Day of Victory over Fascism and the Day of Europe. On this date every year, the Center organizes a gathering of all its associates and friends from the entire region. These are quite informal encounters, as they take place at a cottage in Fruška Gora—the mountain range bordering Novi Sad—which belongs to the president of the Center. This kind of get-together has become a kind of tradition, contributing to fostering and strengthening the friendly relations that are the key ingredient for the effectiveness of joint activities within the regional network of the Center.

## SUMMARY: THE VALUE OF REGIONAL NETWORKS

The circumstances under which the Center for Regionalism was established at the end of the 1990s determined the basic trends of its activities. On the one hand, there existed a need, despite the strict centralization and undemocratic nature of the Milošević's regime, to create new perspectives for decentralization and democratization in Serbia. As it turned out later, this task was not short-term. In September 2000, opposition parties, claiming that Milošević committed fraud in routine federal elections, took to the streets. Protests and rallies throughout Serbia eventually forced Milošević to concede and hand over power to the recently formed Democratic Opposition of Serbia (*Demokratska opozicija Srbije*, or DOS). Yet, even after these democratic changes, the main political factors continued to support a centralized system of government. This was verified in the new 2006 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which pursue decentralization. Therefore, almost ten years after its first project and its hard-fought efforts for constitutional reform, by 2008, the Center started to promote decentralization in Serbia more actively and publicly than ever before, supporting public debate on the issue and offering concrete expert recommendations.

At the level of foreign policy, the Center initiated a nearly impossible mission to re-establish understanding and trust. Though the scars of war were still tangible, the Center played a lead role in a strong movement of non-governmental organizations and other actors, including the Igman Initiative and Philia. These initiatives helped rebuild relations that had been severed during the wars of the 1990s and overcome psychological and other barriers. After an initially favorable period of *détente*, however, the possibilities for cooperation deteriorated. Strong nationalist political leadership and popular sentiments in Serbia continued to fuel instability in the region, particularly around unresolved claims for independence in disputed areas like Kosovo.

To ameliorate this instability, the Center for Regionalism and its allies continued to pursue interregional networking, with the hope that such alliances will act on a long-term basis, influencing political actors the general populace and keeping normalization of relations in the region on course.

The Center for Regionalism has confirmed that NGOs need to support their expert activities with advocacy. This can mobilize public opinion toward support for experts' proposals. Such actions rely on the engagement of as many respectable independent intellectuals as possible, who could provide the basis for establishing the expert teams, as well as be a part of the team responsible for public advocacy. The case of the Center for Regionalism additionally indicates that, although things develop rapidly in this area, a long-term action strategy is required, which, if necessary, may be adapted to fit with current circumstances and needs.

Clearly, NGOs should not compete among themselves or hoard resources or information. Rather, for the sake of the wider community, they should work together.

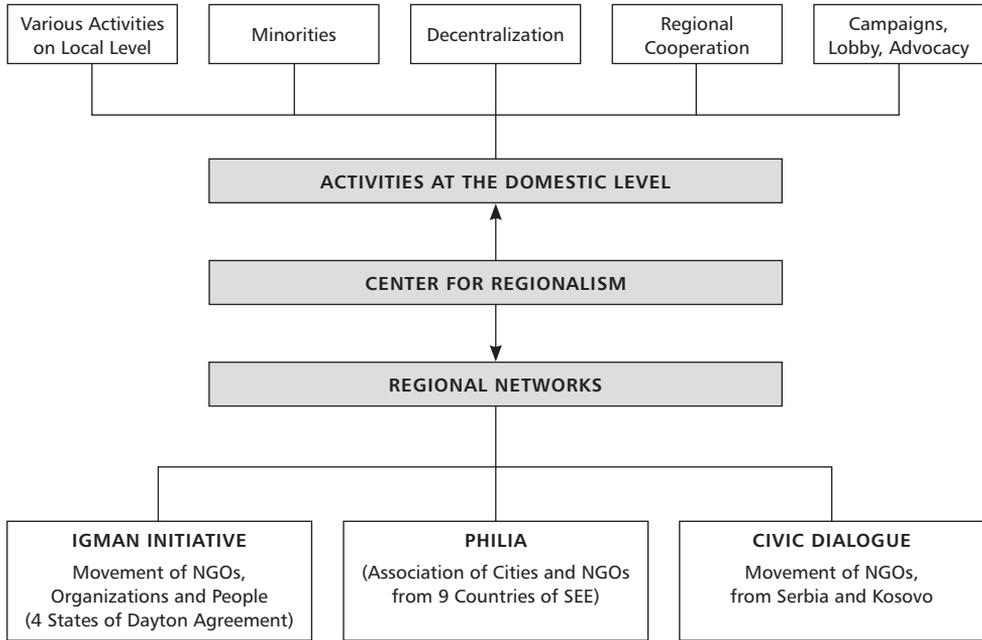
Strategically, collaboration can increase the range of opportunities available to all members of a partnership, enhance their knowledge and capacities, expand the field of their activities, and achieve a greater level of self-sufficiency and sustainability. Positive examples in this respect, may be found in the Igman Initiative, Philia, Civil Dialogue, and Civic Vojvodina, all sharing a partnership that has resulted in actual benefits for all involved.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The homepage of the Center for Regionalism can be found at: <http://www.centarzaregionalizam.org.rs/>.
- <sup>2</sup> The text of the Agreement can be found in Annex 2 of this book. All members of Philia as of August 2009 are listed in Annex 3.

ANNEX

*Figure A1*  
Organizational Chart of the Center for Regionalism



# The Igman Initiative

*Živorad Kovačević*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Igman Initiative is a joint, permanent project of well over one hundred non-governmental organizations from the countries of the so-called *Dayton Triangle* (Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which, after a referendum in Montenegro in 2006, was dissolved into the independent states of Serbia and Montenegro, transforming *Triangle* into a *Quadrangle*). The Igman Initiative was created from the *bottom up* and achieved a *regional ownership* of its projects. From the very beginning, it had *clear objectives* that remained unchanged in the course of a few subsequent years: overcoming the consequences of war; encouraging any form of cooperation among various actors and across communities, cities, regions, and countries. These goals also reflected aspirations towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The acceptance of the authority of the Igman Initiative was made easier by its manifestation as a *joint project*—a process—rather than a centralized, formalized NGO. The *flexible structure* of this form necessitated respect and equality among all members, who ultimately shared a common vision. Through its activities, the Igman Initiative established a great *reputation* among the public in the region and attracted the desired media attention. The reputation of the Igman Initiative was also built to a great extent through the active participation of very *prominent public figures* (heads of states among others) from the three, and later four, countries of the region.

## The Igman Initiative and its Objectives

The Igman Initiative, a joint and permanent project of well over one hundred non-governmental organizations from the countries of the so-called *Dayton Triangle*,<sup>1</sup> was named for an event that occurred when war gripped the region. In April 1995, a group of thirty-eight intellectuals and antiwar activists from Serbia and Montenegro made a forty-eight hour journey (through Hungary and Croatia) over Mount Igman and through an improvised tunnel, and finally arrived to Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sarajevo was under siege.

Heavy artillery and sniper fire from military forces gathered in Republika Srpska, a political-territorial division of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), devastated the city. Thousands of lives were lost. With no other avenues of formal political participation through which to make their voices heard, those who made the trek openly contested their leadership at the time. They putting their lives at risk to demonstrate their solidarity with Sarajevo's citizens, and expressed their feelings publicly at an Assembly of the Sarajevo Serbian Civic Council. This gesture in a time of war was a great encouragement to the citizens of Sarajevo, as it proved there were some in Serbia who condemned the siege and shelling of their city.

The *objective* of the Igman Initiative is to normalize and rebuild relations of mutual understanding and trust between the states of Dayton triangle after the devastating wars of the 1990s. In doing so, it encourages cooperation among the countries, regions, and municipalities, in political and civic life, across all areas of the media, business, culture, education and sports. It work to restore the flow of information and ideas across diverse people and institutions, and support normal diplomatic relations among the newly independent countries.

*The Igman Initiative is a joint project of more than 140 non-governmental organizations from Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), and Croatia, working toward renewing cooperation and normalizing inter-state relations within the Dayton Triangle. This project is named "The Igman Initiative" after an extraordinary event which took place in 1995 during siege of Sarajevo by forces of the Bosnian Serb Army. Risking their lives from sniper and heavy artillery fire from surrounding hills, a group of respected Serbian intellectuals from Serbia and Montenegro, after travelling for 48 hours through Hungary, and Dalmatia, although Sarajevo is only some 400 kilometres far from Belgrade, entered Sarajevo after passing over the mountain of Igman and gave support to the founding session of the Serbian Civic Forum in February 1995.*

## MOTIVES OF ORGANIZING

Throughout much of the 1990s, the situation across the former Yugoslav republics was dire: those in power were encouraging and spreading hatred among citizens and communities who, until very recently, had lived peacefully in a common state. These same leaders—or war lords, in fact—and their proxies attempted to prevent free communication and access to information, in order to prolong their wars. They fought and colluded with one another to shore up their power, particularly at the expense of

ethno-cultural groups like Bosniaks, Albanians, and Roma that lacked political voice. The most notorious of their cooperation is the example of a secret agreement between the presidents of Serbia and Croatia, Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman, to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina. These wartime leaders did not object, upon signing the Dayton Peace Accords, to the normalization of relations among their governments and countries. However, through tools ranging from propaganda to administrative measures, they strove to divide and prevent communication among the region's inhabitants. In doing so, they halted cultural, media, economic, sports, and any other form of cooperation.

The only voice of reason that could be heard at that time—a voice that often seemed lost in a landscape of lies, hatred, and intolerance—was that of a growing movement of non-governmental actors. Those involved were united by two positions.

One was taking a stand *against*—against the senseless violence and wars that had subsumed their communities. They were against and condemned the ruling political leaders and regimes who initiated, organized, and encouraged aggressive nationalism, divisions, armed conflicts, battles for people territory, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. They were against the intellectual elites who had supported these leaders, adding weight to their claims. Antiwar activists within non-governmental organizations were clearly and boldly *against*, which made them equivalent to national traitors. Instead of crying “Looking what they are doing to us!” they directed their condemnation primarily to those responsible for perpetuating hatreds and divisions, particularly within their own ethno-national communities, and they anticipated that others would follow their lead.

The stand *against* also implied a stand *for*—for democratic change, for the “European option,” for free communication among citizens, ethnic groups, and newly independent states, and for diversified bilateral and regional cooperation.

## BEGINNINGS

The immediate predecessor of the Igman Initiative was a conference on the *Perspectives of Bilateral Relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* held in Banja Luka, BiH, on February 11–13, 2000. The participation of numerous NGOs united by their basic positions and numerous requests for the establishment of permanent forms of cooperation naturally led to the idea of creating a common “umbrella” network. This network include NGOs from all countries of the so-called Dayton Triangle.

The Dayton Triangle lies in the heart of the former Yugoslavia and was also, in the 1990s, the center of conflict. It has been one of two critical spots of persistent instability in South Eastern Europe; the other is Kosovo. Within the triangle, there are two key hubs of regional stability, and thus, two potential sources of *instability*.

One is *Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Without a strong, cohesive, sovereign, and independent BiH, free from any interference from its powerful neighbors of Serbia and Croatia, there is no credible and lasting stability, peace, safety, and all-inclusive cooperation in the region. Part of the reason for this is historical, related to centers of power; part is also connected to division of ethno-national communities within the newly independent state.

The other hub is *Serbo-Croat* relations—relations between two large groups that cannot be divided simply, despite new statehood and ethno-national identification. These relations are either an apple of discord and a source of regional instability, or a backbone of cooperation and trust. For some in the center of these relations, it makes sense to draw parallels with and learn lessons from Germany and France. Thanks to the visionary abilities and responsibility of some leaders, these countries have their troubled relations and become the initiators and most important pillars of European integration.

*Created on the basis of anti-war engagement of NGOs from three countries, the Igman Initiative is one of the few networks that gathers NGOs which initiated the creation of the body, instead of being induced from the outside.*

## MANNER OF ORGANIZATION

Founders of the Igman Initiative debated the institutionalization of civil society cooperation within Dayton Triangle. They did not believe that it would not be valuable to form yet another non-governmental organization. Rather, they envisioned a kind of a permanent, casual dialogue as a common project of existing organizations, through which each was to give its creative contribution to a free and multi-form cooperation.

Three NGOs served as the organizers and activity leaders, responsible for realizing the agreement within the Igman Initiative: the Democratic Alternative Forum from Sarajevo, BiH (to be succeeded by the Tuzla Citizens' Forum), the Human Rights Civic Committee from Zagreb, Croatia and the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad, Serbia. It was agreed to have a co-president for the Igman Initiative from each country. Upon the independence of Montenegro in 2006, the initiative got a fourth co-president.

In each of the four countries there are Igman Initiative *councils*, comprised of prominent writers, scientists, and other respectable cultural and public figures. All conclusions of the Igman Initiative are made after a free debate, resulting in a consensus. Final decisions have *not* been made by a majority vote or by the leadership imposing their positions. So far, there have been few problems in this regard. In fact, this method has reinforced participants' engagement.

The Igman Initiative holds its *sessions* two times a year, alternately in each country, and hosted a country's co-president. These meetings are attended by several hundred participants, including representatives of member NGOs and others who are well-versed in the issues on the agenda. Typically, the agenda involves both plenary meetings and smaller meetings with working groups. The sessions are covered by media outlets from throughout the region.

In accordance with decisions or conclusions reached during the sessions (and other gatherings), representatives of the Igman Initiative present themselves to the officials of the four countries—Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and other ministers in charge of specific issues. Their support is sought and the involvement of competent state bodies is required to take those issues into consideration and seek an appropriate solution.

Thus, within the projects like *Mini-Schengen*, an initiative for the liberalization of visa regimes in the region, or the *Single Free-Trade Zone*, representatives of the Igman Initiative had an opportunity to meet current Presidents of their countries, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and other decision-makers who, after discussions and debate, promised their full support. The Igman Initiative also employs other means to exert pressure on governments, engaged in advocacy campaigns, lobbies parliaments, and influences the public agenda in the realization of its views, initiatives, and requests.

## FUNDING

The Igman Initiative funds its activities primarily on a project-to project basis. As its engagements grow more rich in substance and complex in detail and garner more and more recognition, there has been a greater readiness among Igman Initiative members to both provide financial support for activities and meetings and, as part of coalitions, join in major proposals for funding.

A number of institutions have offered a great amount of support over the years. These include, among others, USAID, Freedom House, the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Balkan Trust for Democracy, the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, and the James Stewart Mott Foundation.

## INITIATIVE TO ORGANIZE A SUMMIT

At its meeting held in Kotor, Montenegro in 2002, in the early days of the Igman Initiative, members formulated and sent a letter to the heads of state of the three countries (BiH, Croatia, and FRY). This letter invited the Presidents to promptly hold

a *tripartite summit* and introduce this as a regular practice. Rather surprisingly, the response was swift. Only two weeks later, the initiative was accepted by the President of BiH, and invitations were also accepted by Stjepan Mesić, President of Croatia, and Vojislav Koštunica, Prime Minister of FRY. The first summit was held that very summer in Sarajevo. Unfortunately, despite optimism at this even, no new tripartite summits were held for a few years after, although there were a plethora of mutual problems to be resolved in mutual interest.

The Igman Initiative then launched a new initiative and proposed that the heads of state meet again, this time at a session of the Igman Initiative, held in Zagreb in September 2004. They agreed, though FRY leadership was unable to attend. They leaders did in a historic tenth session in 2005, and again in subsequent years.

Joint declarations of the leadership of the countries contain views on the achieved level of cooperation in the region, barriers to be eliminated, and their common interests and aims. The most frequently mentioned issues that must be addressed are the following:

- Intensive regional cooperation and mutual understanding as significant accelerators of the process of the European integration.
- Developing an atmosphere of tolerance in mutual relations on all levels.
- Economic cooperation, particularly through an increase of mutual foreign direct investment and joint appearance in third markets.
- General political, cultural and sports cooperation.
- A border regime that enables people to communicate smoothly with their regions.
- Full and unconditioned cooperation with the Hague Tribunal.
- Facilitating, within the shortest possible period of time, the return and integration refugees and expelled persons.
- Institutionalizing a visa-free travel regime through bilateral agreements.
- Creating conditions under which national minorities are enabled to express freely and cherish their national and cultural heritage and be an integral and equal part of society.
- Air and bus lines through joint plans and investments to create a higher level of regional, cross-border travel.
- Joint actions to prevent and eradicate any form of organized crime and terrorism.

Igman Initiative sessions attended by heads of state consist of two parts. First, presidents (or prime ministers) state their views regarding current issues in their relations,

upon which, a joint declaration is officially signed. Second, in their absence, current topics of interest are discussed.

The practice of holding high-level summits within a civic society project is unique in Europe and in the world. Understandably, the active participation of heads of state and other prominent political figures attracts greater public attention than do the underlying values and activities of the Igman Initiative itself. Thus, the involvement of key decision-makers has been important not only in terms of carrying out activities, but also in building public support around the normalization of post-war relations.

## PROJECTS

The Igman Initiative has set up expert groups in various fields of work and for specific projects. These groups prepare project proposals and other documents that are to be submitted to competent bodies of the states in the region. Projects frequently are accompanied by draft regulations, which are to be passed if the projects are accepted. In addition to experts from within civil society, including members of policy centers, activist groups, and academia, experts from state bodies often take part in the work of such groups. This joint civil society-government cooperation creates strong linkages at early in a project's preparatory phase.

In keeping with the Initiative's aim to normalize relations in the region, expert groups formed by the Igman Initiative have prepared a range of concrete projects to address problems in the fields of citizenship, property, and the flow of commodities, persons, and capital. Solutions to these problems were proposed to the governments of the three states in May 2001, and in meetings thereafter, and have included legislative changes and intergovernmental agreements. This section presents, in brief, several areas in which projects of the Igman Initiative have been developed.

### Citizenship

Issues of citizenship create a complicated set of problems, related to the creation of newly independent states based around ethno-national identities, families divided by new national boundaries, the dislocation of people by war, and the ownership of property, among others. The expert team in charge of citizenship issues stressed in particular that any solution had to take into account: first, the principle of the protection of the unity of a family and property; and the second, the will of the individual whose status was equal to that of all others on the entire territory of the former Yugoslavia, despite new states and borders.

Expert groups formulated very practical recommendations and encouraged openness and flexibility from policy-makers. They proposed the introduction of dual citizenship whenever possible in order to eliminate numerous negative consequences that the dissolution of Yugoslavia had on citizens.

## Property

After extensive research, an expert team concluded that citizen's rights can be jeopardized by the on-going, rapid changes in regulations and legal practice. This was particularly the case in the realm of proprietary rights. Many people had left or been moved from their homes during the war or, for various reasons, had been stripped over their right to own property within the altered political landscape. Therefore, the expert team recommended that it was necessary to promptly conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as to change internal regulations and practice. The team submitted draft legislative changes and resolutions along these lines.

## Free-Trade Zone

One major project of the Igman Initiative related to the establishment of a free-trade regime in the region. One of the starting points of this project was the general recognition that economic activity between the countries of the region was far behind actual needs, interests, and capacities. Economic activity could be and needed to be increased dramatically. Measures to enhance economic activity were being adopted only slowly, and were not meeting needs and interests in the region. Experts argued that a significant acceleration of cross-border economic development and exchange would have wide-reaching effects for the region as a whole. After a careful review, they offered a set of concrete recommendations that included both continuing along the current course of economic development in some areas, and adopting several new measures in others.

One major event in this field was the signing of a Memorandum on Liberalization and Facilitation of Conditions of Trade in Brussels on June 27, 2001 by key decision-makers of the countries of South Eastern Europe. All countries of the region committed to concluding bilateral agreements on free trade by the end of 2002. The Igman Initiative offered the competent ministries of the three countries expert assistance in drawing up draft bilateral agreements and monitoring their ratification and implementation.

However, a bilateral agreement is only one important step in the process of establishing a single and complete free-trade zone in South Eastern Europe and in creating economic linkages across the region. A number of specific measures were also needed

to stimulate cross-bordered trade, and particularly among the three countries of the Dayton Triangle.

Thus, an expert team developed a project, which was submitted to the governments of BiH, Croatia, and FRY. The project prioritized work in the following areas:

- harmonizing the three bilateral agreements on free trade and creating mechanisms to monitor the realization of these agreements in the triangle of BiH, Croatia, and FRY;
- abolishing possible non-tariff barriers to trade;
- identifying possible practical problems for mutual trade and promptly addressing the problems;
- setting up special mechanisms for consultations on the free-trade agreement realization with other countries;
- establishing periodic consultations on experiences in trade cooperation with the European Union, as well as on activities of the World Trade Organization;
- working actively and consistently to improve mechanisms for technical cooperation among the competent bodies of the three countries in the following spheres: standards and technical regulations, regulations on the quality of accreditation systems, mutual recognition of standards, harmonization of regulations with EU rules, passing veterinary and sanitary regulations, customs cooperation, rules on competition and intellectual property, cooperation of agencies for promotion of export and foreign investment;
- setting up mechanisms for regular cooperation and consultations of economic representatives (chambers of commerce, associations of employers, trade associations, etc.); and
- holding periodic joint meetings of the three mixed committees for trade cooperation (provided for by free trade agreements), as well as periodic regular meetings of ministers of trade.

Representatives of the Igman Initiative paid separate visits to the heads of state of the three countries and Ministers of Foreign Affairs. All welcomed the initiative and proposals, and promised to lend their full support to the project. Igman representatives stressed that the full cooperation of the three countries of the Dayton Triangle was an important, but only partial step in promoting economic development and trade. The initiative must include all countries of South Eastern Europe, resulting in the establishment of a free-trade zone for the entire region—a market of 55 million consumers.

## Mini-Schengen

The Mini-Schengen project has been in the focus of Igman Initiative since its founding. First, the Initiative launched a campaign “No to Visas in the Region, No Visas in the Region!” The basic idea of this campaign was that countries of the region would gradually approach the borderless “Schengen regime” that brings together countries of Europe. As in the Schengen zone, visa regimes in South Eastern Europe would be liberalized and eventually completely abolished.

The Igman Initiative was active on two fronts. First, expert groups developed projects to soften the visa regimes established in the aftermath of the war and gradually abolish visas. In doing so, they also launched concrete initiatives to eliminate different forms of discrimination that were accompanying the existing regimes. Second, the Igman Initiative proposed the unilateral suspension of visas for Croatians by Serbia and Montenegro and the abolishment of various restrictions and forms of discrimination that were widely documented at border crossing between BiH and FRY. Specifically, the relevant authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were requested to change their discriminatory practice toward citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were not being afforded the same treatment as citizens of the Republika Srpska when entering and staying in the FRY.

Though still part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (with Serbia), Montenegro abolished visas to neighboring countries as early as 2001. At the end of 2003, at a meeting in Sarajevo, the leadership of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina signed an agreement that enabled citizens to travel between the two countries with ID cards only—a step lauded by the Igman Initiative. Finally, Serbia accepted the Igman Initiative’s proposal to suspend visas for citizens of Croatia; in response, Croatia suspended visas for citizens of Serbia (of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Persistent lobbying and public pressure proved fruitful, and the visa regime across what is now Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia was liberalized fully.

## Legal Rights of Workers and Retired Persons

At the fifth Igman Initiative session in Kotor, Montenegro, in the summer of 2002, members proposed the unification of all legal rights of workers and retired persons in the countries of the region in accordance with European standards. *Nezavisnost*, an umbrella of unified industrial unions in Serbia, was the project leader. All support in the realization of the project was given by the International Trade Union Confederation.

## Bilateral Agreements in the Dayton Triangle

This project was launched at the sixth session held in Sarajevo in October 2003. The Igman Initiative offered its experts to help draw up draft regulations. It was concluded that, in spite of significant progress in the conclusion of bilateral agreements over the preceding three years, the pace of their conclusion and ratification was far behind the expectations and demands. Inadequate personnel in the competent ministries could be improved partially by the engagement of Igman Initiative experts. Additionally, six more draft bilateral agreements were drawn up by Igman Initiative experts at the tenth session of the Initiative held in Belgrade in June 2005. These agreements were submitted to the heads of state.

## Resolving the Problem of Water Supply of Herceg Novi

At the fifth session of the Igman Initiative in Kotor in 2002 project to address the problem of water supply and sharing across the cities of Trebinje (BiH), Dubrovnik (Croatia), and Herceg Novi (Montenegro). The project included a proposal to seek assistance, with the support of the OSCE, of a prominent European expert in this field, who would draw up an expert analysis with recommendations on how to resolve that issue in the area. The project moved quickly into the implementation stage, involving a high-level donor conference in Herceg Novi on February 28, 2003. Research and other activities to find concrete solutions to the issue of water supply in the area continued at least until late 2009.

## Restoring Confidence among the Peoples of the Region

One of the most sensitive and most significant problems common to the three countries of this study is how to discuss and confront the regions common, recent history. This has been a precondition for restoring confidence among the peoples of the region. There were many initiatives to commence the process of truth and reconciliation, such as by setting up committees as in South Africa that would create a basis for tackling the past fairly. Yet, experiences of the countries of the Dayton Triangle were disappointing in this respect. Various committees set up in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina achieved practically no results for two years. No such committee was set up in Croatia.

The Igman Initiative, too, had the idea to set up a tripartite civic committee for truth and reconciliation, but this was abandoned. Finally, another model of restoring understanding and confidence was embraced. Built patiently and seriously, this model

was conceived to avoid another compromise of what was in essence noble and needed idea. Participants in these discussions disagreed with the notion of “reconciliation” as a collectivistic connotation that, in a way, could not go beyond the past wars, for distrust and hatred have occurred over a much longer term in South Eastern Europe.

For that reason, the Igman Initiative chose to build a model to *restore mutual understanding and renew confidence*. A prominent joint expert group was chosen from a pool of respectable and honorable persons from all four countries. It was accompanied by discussions led by Alex Borein, the author of the rather successful South-African model. By inviting Borein, the idea was not merely to replicate under entirely different local circumstances. Rather, he was meant to inspire, share his experiences, and inform the process in the former Yugoslavia. That is, aim was not to follow a one-size-fits-all approach, but to develop an appropriate model for the region. This model was to be constructed patiently and conscientiously, through public discussions and round tables and research, and by engaging and pressuring governments.

All the activities of the Igman Initiative are, inevitably, linked to the idea of restoring confidence and trust. One particularly important event, though, was the tenth session of the Igman Initiative, held in Belgrade in June 2005. This was only the second time since the signature of the Dayton Accords that the three heads of state came together for a summit meeting. This was also the first time that they had met at the invitation of a group of non-governmental organizations.

Particularly significant was the signing of the *Tripartite Position Towards the Present and the Future*.<sup>2</sup> This joint statement, drafted by the experts of the Igman Initiative and signed by the presidents of Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, provided an overview of situation in the region at the time. It also offered a general outline for future cooperation between three states. This was the first joint document signed by the three heads of state since the Dayton Accords almost ten years prior.

In the joint statement, it was emphasized that full cooperation with the Hague Tribunal—the international court on war crimes committed during the Yugoslav wars—was necessary. This statement also pointed out that it is necessary for political leaders to be honest about the past, promote good within their communities and countries; they must also take the play a lead role in enabling persons expelled and displaced during the war to return to their homes, to protecting national minorities, as well as to institutionalizing a visa-free regime among the three countries. The full text of the *Tripartite View of the Present and Future* was published in at least a dozen news dailies throughout the region.

## Interethnic Tolerance

In 2001, a mixed team of experts conducted in-depth research on the state of interethnic relations in Tuzla (BiH), Osijek (Croatia), and Novi Sad (Serbia). Three NGOs in these cities put this research to work: the Center for Regionalism, Citizens' Forum from Tuzla, and the Center for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights from Osijek. Over the course of several months, these NGOs engaged their respective local authorities and communities in public discussions, negotiations, roundtables, and working meetings about improving cooperation and communication among their cities. These efforts culminated in an agreement that obliged the local governments of the three cities to carry out joint activities in fields of economic development, education, exchange of information, sports and others, with the understanding that this cooperation would contribute to the improvement of interethnic relations.

This *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*, signed on January 21, 2002 in Tuzla, represented the nucleus for a new movement for regional integration. Truly, previous efforts had been made and projects carried out to improve interethnic relations in the region. However, the agreement was envisioned to make cooperation across cities and borders more formal and consistent, by providing a principled, thematic framework for their interaction. This Agreement created the basis for city triangles of cooperation, and for the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia. At regional conferences and other events, cities and non-governmental organizations from across the region have accepted the Agreement for Interethnic Tolerance.

## SUMMARY

Several elements came together to make Igman Initiative a powerful player in South Eastern Europe. These elements can be unpacked and summarized as a basis for movements elsewhere.

First, the Igman Initiative was created from the *bottom up* and achieved a *regional ownership* of projects. Firm links among antiwar NGOs were established during the wars of the 1990s. Through such cooperation, under the extreme circumstances of war and hatred, personal friendships were forged. These friendships enabled agreement about joint goals, made with the full confidence of all involved on the basis of equality and mutual respect, and without insistence on issues of prestige and precedence.

Second, the reputation of the Igman Initiative was built to a great extent through the active participation of very *prominent public figures* from the three, and later four, countries of the region. These participation of these leaders facilitated cooperation in a range of fields and activities.

Third, from the very beginning, the Igman Initiative had *clear objectives* that remained unchanged in the course of a few subsequent years: overcoming the consequences of war; encouraging any form of cooperation among various actors and across communities, cities, regions, and countries; and promoting free communication of people and ideas. These goals were pursued as part of the process of democratization and establishing normalized political, economic, and social relations, based on trust and mutual understanding. They also reflected aspirations towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Fourth, the acceptance of the authority of the Igman Initiative was made easier by its manifestation as a *joint project*—a process—rather than a centralized, formal NGO. The *flexible structure* of this form necessitated respect and equality among all members, who ultimately shared a common vision.

Fifth, the Igman Initiative, through its activities, established a great *reputation* among the public in the region and attracted the desired media attention. At the same time, it also managed to foster greater openness among state bodies and officials—although they have not always been pleased with what the Igman Initiative says or demands.

Sixth, major priorities of the Igman Initiative has been to overcome impediments to the *normalization* of relations, re-establish cooperation, and restore *confidence* among peoples. Simultaneously, the Igman Initiative puts on the agenda of its sessions<sup>3</sup> complex social and economic themes, such as consequences of neo-liberal economic reforms, administrative reforms, and various unexpected “speed bumps” on the road towards democratization.

Finally, it should be noted that one of the primary *ramifications* of the Igman Initiative, both territorially and functionally, has been the creation of new forms of civic society interaction and engagement with the government. Those involved in the Initiative had powerful demands, and pursued these demands with great intensity. But, they were also open to discussions and flexible in their efforts. As a result, many of the original objectives of the Igman Initiative have been met, and the results have reverberated across South Eastern Europe and other critical areas outside the Dayton Triangle, such as Kosovo.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 1995, a peace agreement was made in Dayton, Ohio, which effectively led to an end to war in the Balkans. The Agreement was signed by the heads of state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. (As previously noted, in 2003, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was named the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. In 2006, after a referendum in Montenegro, it peacefully dissolved into the independent states of Serbia and Montenegro.)

<sup>2</sup> The full text of the Tripartite View can be found in Annex 1 at the end of this book.

<sup>3</sup> More on Igman Initiative sessions can be found at: [www.igman-initiative.org/sessions.pdf](http://www.igman-initiative.org/sessions.pdf).

## ANNEX

*Figure A1*  
The Structure and the Working Process of the Igman Initiative

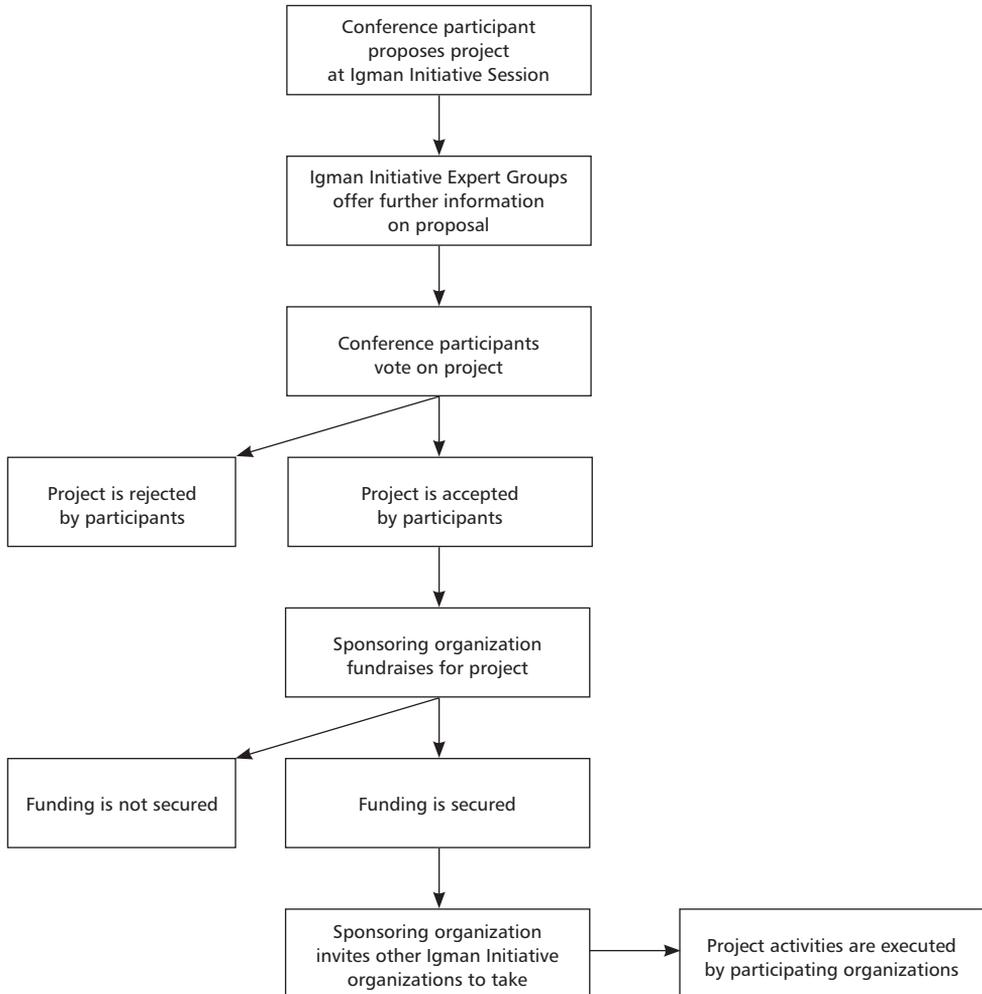
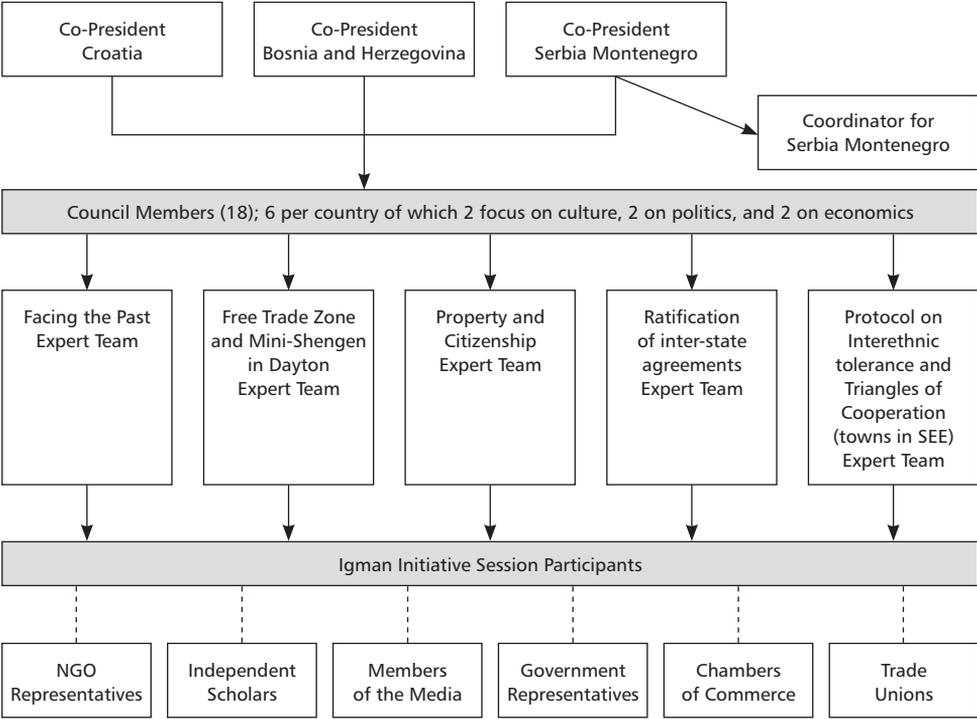


Figure A2  
Igman Initiative Organizational Structure



*Figure A3*  
Signing of the *Tripartite View of the Present and Future*, Tenth Session of the Igman Initiative, Belgrade, Serbia, June 27, 2005



The Tenth Session of the Igman Initiative was historic. This was the second time since the signature of the Dayton Accords that the three heads of state came together for a meeting, and first time ever that they met at the invitation of a group of non-governmental organizations. Even more significant was the signing of the “Tripartite View of the Present and Future.”

Pictured (seated): President Stjepan Mesić (Croatia), President Svetozar Marović (Serbia and Montenegro), President Borislav Paravac (Bosnia and Herzegovina)



# The Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia

*Jovan Komšić*

*“This initiative confirms that the dark side of the region’s recent past has ended forever [...].  
It shows how people of this region can overcome the legacy of the past through the  
regional cooperation”*

—Ambassador Maurizio Massari  
Chief of the OSCE Mission in Serbia and Montenegro

These meritorious but daring words were offered by Ambassador Maurizio Massari, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro during a speech at a regional conference on “Tolerance and Understanding, Above All,” July 6, 2004 in Belgrade. With an audience of representatives from almost every capital, regional center, and other cities in the region, his remarks represented a new optimism in the region, still referred to as a “risky European neighborhood.” This conference made was a break-through in relations in the region. At the event, 37 representatives of local governments and 38 NGOs from seven countries of the region signed the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*, thus committing themselves to tolerance, communication and cooperation, mutual respect, the celebration of cultural differences, protection of human and minority rights, as well as to the improvement of local and regional self government in accordance with the democratic standards of Europe (see Annex 2). It was the first event after the wars of the 1990s that brought together representatives of a large number of cities, including capitals and regional centers, from the region. It was also a crucial step in the establishment of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia.

This conference took place when the reminders of war were still fresh in the minds of all participants. Only a few years had passed since the disintegration of the multiethnic Yugoslav federation and the ensuing wars that “froze” relations in the region. A cautious thaw in relationships had begun, but with frequent disturbances in communication among citizens, local self-governments, and newly established countries in the Western Balkans. Nevertheless, Ambassador Massari spoke about his support for what appeared to be significantly and new approach in confronting the ongoing stereotypes, divisions, and intolerance:

“Under such circumstances, while the wounds still hurt, it took great courage and inventiveness to launch the initiatives to gather the cities from neighboring countries that used to be conflicted, and involve them in the project aimed at promotion of tolerance. All credit for this goes to activists of civil society, such as the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad and its partners from other cities.”<sup>1</sup>

Ambassador Massari referred to two significant events initiated by the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad and its allies. The first was the signing of the Agreement on Interethnic Cooperation between the cities of Osijek (Croatia), Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Novi Sad (Serbia) on January 21, 2001. This act attracted interest from several institutions, including such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE. With others, they provided the moral and financial support to this initiative and the numerous projects it inspired.

The second event was a successful regional initiative that resulted in a meeting of mayors from all the capital cities of the successor states of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY): Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Podgorica, Skopje, and Belgrade. This was the first time representatives of cities and urban centers of these countries had come together since war had ended.

\*

The establishment of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe—Philia is one of the most significant forms of implementation of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*, signed by representatives of, at that time, seven countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro.<sup>2</sup> The essential aim of this Agreement was to overcome the burden of the recent wars and interethnic conflicts on the territory of the former SFRY and increase the “density” of cross-border communications via city triangles and circles of cooperation. Now, members include cities, local self-governments, and non-governmental organizations from these countries. Collectively, they are from countries oriented towards European integration—candidate countries and those which have signed or are in the preparation process for signing the EU Stabilization and Association Agreement—as well as those that have already joined the European Union (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria). In addition to committing to common values through their membership in Philia, they take part in various concrete regional activities, several of which are discussed in this book.<sup>3</sup>

As an umbrella of permanent dialogue and activities, Philia has adopted a consensual framework to improve human and minority rights, in compliance with European standards. It has promoted the implementation of good practices in the areas of tolerance, multiculturalism, and cooperation among the civil sector and local authorities, as well as contributing to the stabilization of the overall prerequisites of integration of all countries in the region with the European Union.

## WHY PHILIA?

*“Interethnic tolerance and understanding are the basic postulate of European Union and they represent, just like the EU Constitution, unity in diversity.”*

—Stefan Lehne

Advisor to the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security

In the early 2000s, some years after all-out war had ceased, scientific research and public opinion polls on the perception of citizens in the region still registered a more or less worrying level of ethnic distance, prejudice, and lack of trust towards persons belonging to other ethno-national groups. These elements were bolstered by feelings of being post-Yugoslav “transitional losers,” particularly in those states that were to engage seriously in democratic reforms. At the turn of the twenty-first century, these states continued to be areas of nationalist tensions and conflicts, and struggled with economic recovery and democratization.

However, in former SFRY countries, powerful parochial and ethnocentric trends prevailed throughout the 1990s, and tensions between ethno-national groups, among minorities and majorities within states, were apparent. Surrounding the period of the Balkan wars, so-called “political entrepreneurs” of the ethno-national majorities did not support either the stabilization or the normalization of interethnic relations within and across states in the region. Some of them supported a centralized nation-state and the slow normalization of relations with the neighbors. Others supported high autonomy, including forms of ethnic political autonomy on territories where they constituted the majority.

In particular, early members of Philia were particularly concerned about troubling trends among the region’s youth. Many secondary school and university youth had been, in the decade of wars and nationalist transitions, deprived of communication among themselves and any personal positive experiences with others. Youth were growing up and entering political processes at a time of extreme polarization: on the one hand, those who stood for xenophobia, intolerance, aggression, and isolation with respect to their neighbors and the EU; on the other hand, protagonists of tolerance, peace, democracy, cooperation, openness, and European integration.

Clearly, at the time of Philia’s founding, the powerful guarantors of stabilization of security conditions in the region—the UN and EU—proved to be unable eliminate the reasons why South Eastern Europe, particularly some countries in the Western Balkans, are still regarded as a “risky EU neighborhood.” These institutions, acting alone, could not normalize relations among communities and states or consolidation

European living standards in the region. Nor could drastic reforms of economy, law, and policy in favor of market democracy lead to consolidated democracies. In a typical crisis surrounding such changes and a traumatized postwar situation, these processes must happen in parallel with the enhancement of a strong, capable civil society. The overall “moral infrastructure” had to be changed and patterns of social interaction have to be adjusted to facilitate the involvement and accommodation of diverse values, interests, and goals in political processes. Divisive ideas about “us,” “ours,” or “us versus them” needed to be questioned. Guiding this sort of “cultural transformation” was not an easy task. It was vulnerable to political distortions and manipulation, which were typically underpinned by intolerant forms nationalism and fears about the destiny of one’s own ethno-national community and state.

In this context, Philia’s establishment was seen as crucial. Early allies of Philia and the movement they represented argued that democracy and stability necessitate the full participation and integration of all groups in political processes, particularly at the local level of government. Moves in this direction entailed the delicate act of balancing a degree of national and regional cohesion with the administrative reforms needed to decentralize and empower local governments to accommodate their diverse communities. Working in concert with members of local governments, civil society, and many others, the founders of Philia hoped to make a significant contribution to long-lasting peace and sustainable human development. They believed their efforts were seen as a vital step in securing peace, re-integrating the states and region of South Eastern Europe with the rest of the Europe, and facilitating the process of EU accession.

Philia turned to existing legal and political norms within to substantiate its arguments: the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Charter of Local Self-government, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the draft Constitution of the EU, and the Lisbon Treaty. In short, irrespective of their many differences in ethnicity, mission, and experiences, all the actors involved in Philia have agreed with European standards for human rights, interethnic tolerance, protection of fundamental freedoms and national minority rights.

Philia’s founders also understood the need to facilitate and confirm democratization in the diverse, urban environments of the region, focusing on the local level of governance. They saw that political stabilization in South Eastern Europe clearly relies on the restoration of citizens’ belief in the unfolding of democratic processes. In this respect, a “bottom-up” initiative like Philia—made up of prominent individuals and organizations and matched with the support of local authorities—can enhance the internal legitimacy of public institutions. By linking local demands and action to international normative frameworks, Philia has helped strengthen citizens’ trust in government. Broadly speaking, civil society-government engagement is key. Participation in Philia’s initiatives has helped cultivate citizens’ loyalty and patriotism; strengthen governance capacities in diverse

communities; accelerate the processes normalizing interregional and intergovernmental relations, and contribute to the implementation of national policies of stabilization and accession to the European Union for countries in South Eastern Europe.

Integration with the European Union for these countries represents not only the most preferable framework to represent their special interests, but also the most comprehensive formula for cooperation with their neighbors and for development of common interests. In ratifying the goals, forms, and methods of implementation of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*, local assemblies and NGOs as governing bodies and signatories have underlined that it would be best to merge their interests around the platform Europe-oriented development across their region.

The story has been an uphill battle. Generally, majority and minority groups—ethno-national, linguistic, religious, and others—in the countries of South Eastern Europe, while seeking political and institutional recognition in their newly independent states, lean in favor of democracy, the normalization of domestic and international political relations, and European integration. Yet, around a decade after all-out war has ceased, and many years after Philia’s founding, democratic institutions and a stable pro-European course remain unconsolidated, and the residual effects of conflict remain. During every new election, there is a chance that the protagonists of ethno-nationalist conflicts and human rights violations will mobilize citizens around various grievances and return to power at the local, regional, and central levels. Thus, progressive, democratically-minded actors must be unrelenting in their pursuits, and work to constantly to broaden and expand their alliances. The *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* has come to be a powerful tool for uniting actors around a common cause.

## STAGES OF ESTABLISHMENT

*The founding of Philia is one of the most significant aspects of the realization of the Protocol on Interethnic Tolerance, signed in Belgrade, on 6 July 2004, by representatives of 38 local government bodies and 37 NGOs from seven countries of the region: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia and Montenegro. Currently the Association has over 60 member communities. The main goal of the Agreement is to overcome the burdensome legacy of war and interethnic conflicts on the territory of the former SFRY and to increase the “density” of cross border communications within triangles and circles of cooperation.*

The Association was established in several phases. First, in-depth research on the state of interethnic relations in Tuzla, BiH, Osijek, Croatia, and Novi Sad, Serbia, was conducted by a mixed team of experts. On the basis of the research, non-governmental organizations from the region, namely the Center for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights from Osijek, the Citizens' Forum of Tuzla, and the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad were the main drivers of this initiative. Bringing together local authorities, community groups, and others, they facilitated the drafting of Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance. This Agreement, first presented at a roundtable in Novi Sad in July 2001, provided a basis for the first triangle of cross-border cooperation. The agreement, ratified on January 21, 2002 in Tuzla, represented the nucleus for a new movement for regional integration.

Phase two started with the launch of a campaign for new members, which was concluded by the conference on "Tolerance and Understanding, Above All," held in Belgrade in 2004. In the period that followed, the efforts to grow the network expanded, managing bodies were established, and finally, at a conference held in Zagreb in 2005, the establishment of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe was formalized. During 2006 and 2007, Philia was registered, the campaign for more members continued, along with the establishment of regular regional communication. The period of stabilization of the organization began in 2007, including the implementation of regular activities and creation of new initiatives. Since then, Philia has been supported technically and financially by several donors, including: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Germany); the Balkan Trust for Democracy of the German Marshall Fund (US); the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative of the Open Society Institute (Hungary); Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe; and city administrations and the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

*"After a decade of wars and bad mutual relations, this conference will provide a strong impetus in transformation of Balkans into a zone of peace, security and cooperation"*

—Svetozar Marovic, President of Serbia and Montenegro  
Belgrade, July 6, 2004

## AIMS AND EFFORTS: AN OVERVIEW

### Principles of Work

- Free will
- Autonomy
- Openness
- Public transparency
- Mutual respect
- Recognition of realistic interests and possibilities of every protagonist
- Consensus

Broadly speaking, Philia aims to: promote European and international legal and political standards regarding the protection of human rights, national minority rights, and freedoms; increase and enhance active citizen engagement in local governance, and combat hate speech, xenophobia, and all other forms of ethnic and religious intolerance. Philia encourages citizens, local governments, NGOs, and others to join efforts to consolidate liberal democracy in multiethnic environments and preserve cultural diversity. Toward these ends, Philia promotes the European tradition of “open cities,” and the free flow of goods, people, ideas, and information within and across these cities.

*Philia's membership only comprises municipalities and communities that have expressed their dedication to ethnic tolerance and actively worked to improve interethnic relations through their ratification of the Agreement.*

Philia's efforts along these lines includes, for instance, creating conditions that support the minority languages in both public and private life. Joint activities across cities have been designed to provide support to the media to promote cultural traditions and languages of national and ethnic minorities, thereby facilitating the full societal integration of diverse members of society. Philia has also worked to integrate diversity issues into national education. This has involved ensuring that education accommodates the local specificities of diverse communities, and monitoring the implementation of education programs and reforms.

The development of small- and medium-sized enterprises and cooperation between the private and public sectors is another important area of activity. Philia has worked to develop communication and cooperation among citizens, NGOs, and authorities

of local and regional self-government in all countries of the region. In accordance with the ratified international treaties, as well as multilateral and bilateral agreements, the association has shaped networks of NGOs and local authorities into triangles and circles of cross-border cooperation. In this manner, cooperation has been reestablished and new forms are created between the capitals and other regional, university, cultural, and information centers of these countries.

Philia has been a frame from which to launch joint projects. The Association pursues cooperation with other NGOs, national associations, and local self-governments to enhance the effective participation of national minorities in decision-making on all issues relevant for the local community. Citizens' initiatives to soften borders and enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation are coordinated by Philia, too, meshing with the larger aim to establish a new Euroregion for cooperation in South Eastern Europe. In short, the Association has sought to bring together the civil sector and local authorities to conduct joint actions that aim to improve public opinion and the cultural, legal, political, and economic prerequisites of interethnic tolerance and cooperation.

*Philia offers a number of novel ideas in its approach. The first of these is the mandatory inclusion of the NGO sector into the processes and projects of the Association. Every participating municipality must enter to the Association with its partner local NGO.*

## ALLIES AND TARGET GROUPS

At its core, Philia deals with local authorities (municipal and city) and NGOs. In particular, it targets multi-ethnic communities. But, its reach is much larger than this. Philia's activities span regional multicultural communities; political parties and Parliament members; cultural and educational institutions; school and university students; sports clubs and associations for the promotion of the cultural and technical achievements of youth; local, regional, and national media; chambers of commerce; associations for the development of small- and medium-sized businesses; and Euroregional associations.

Philia's focus on local authorities and NGOs is justified as follows:

- 1) In general, central authorities are not positioned to address consistently and efficiently the specific circumstances and needs of citizens at the local level.
- 2) Collaboration among local authorities (cities) and civil society actors can expand the range of channels for cross-border, inter-municipal cooperation. That is, once agreements on certain aspects of cross-border cooperation have

been made, city and civil society engagement can help make this “high policy” responsive to needs and interests “on the ground”—from the management of shared resources, to the free flow of people and information. Involving civil society in inter-municipal cooperation is key.

- 3) In the consolidation of democracy, this collaboration requires facilitation in order to become a common practice.

### **The Importance of Civil Society-Government Engagement**

On two occasions, nationalist parties came to power in Philia members cities. This happened through local elections held in Novi Sad in 2004, as well as in Osijek in 2005. These parties were not willing to cooperate with certain Philia members; they were also not considered to be acceptable partners by other Philia members. In these circumstances, the Steering Committee of Philia made a decision to temporarily “freeze” the cities’ membership Philia. In such situations, the principle according to which Philia members comprise not only cities, but also local non-governmental organizations, was important. In both cases, NGOs in Novi Sad (the Center for Regionalism) and Osijek (the Center for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights) became the crucial link between the Philia network and wide range of local economic, cultural, educational and other institutions in Novi Sad and Osijek. Thus, though nationalist parties were in power, these two NGOs represented Philia and continued cooperation with members of the network.

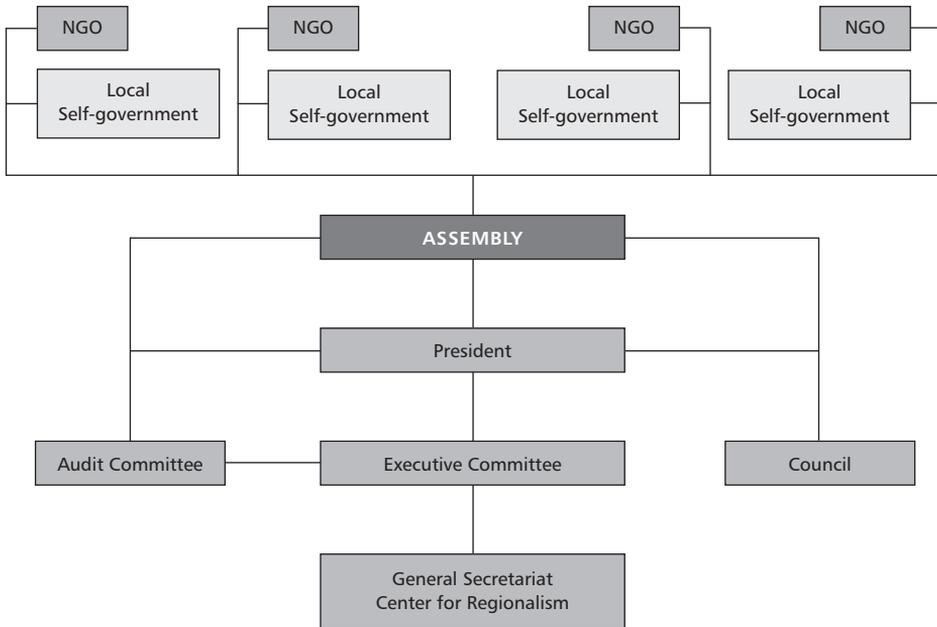
## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Philia, as an association of different societal actors, was founded on the principles of equality and mutual respect, volunteerism and openness, flexibility and process. Decision-making within Philia is flexible, reached by consensus; there is also no illusion that everyone can and will take part in every action. It is understood that steps are taken gradually and are responsive to changes in the environment. Along these lines, Philia has used some of the following slogans to publicize its cooperative process: “Step by step—Action!” “Word by word—Tolerance,” “City by City—Region,” “Region by Region—Europe without Frontiers,” and “Tolerance and Understanding—Above All.”

Though flexible and collaborative, decision-making in Philia does follow a certain logic. Its organizational structure is comprised of the following bodies: the Assembly, the President, the Steering and Supervisory Committees, the Council and the General Secretariat seated at the Center for Regionalism.

- The *Assembly* is the highest body of the association and it is composed of all its members. It is called by the President at least once in two years, upon the proposal of the Steering Committee or if initiated by at least one-quarter of the Association's members. The Assembly decides on all the issues within the scope of Philia's activities and responsibilities: adopting statutes, defining the program guidelines for the association's work, approval of financial reports and reports on the association's work, elections to the association's bodies, committees, and commissions, decisions on joining international organizations, establishing institutions of interest for its members and deciding on the termination of the association's activities. In the Assembly, quorum is achieved if more than a half of the association's members have been present. Decisions are made by public voting, on the basis of majority votes, unless otherwise specified by the Assembly.
- The *President* represents Philia before other bodies and organizations and convenes and chairs Assembly sessions. He or she is accompanied by two Vice-Presidents, who can stand in for the President when needed. The term of office of the President and Vice-presidents is four years.
- The *Steering Committee* is an executive body of the Assembly and comprises 11 members elected by the Assembly. It coordinates the association's activities in the period between two sessions. The mandate of this body is four years.
- The *Supervisory Committee* comprises five members and the term of office is four years. The role of the Supervisory Committee is to control the material and financial transactions.
- The *Council* is an advisory body of the association. Its members tend to be well-respected public figures, including intellectuals, political leaders, and various advocates for human and minority rights, democracy, tolerance, mutual understanding, and cooperation among nations and countries. The Council discusses the strategic issues concerning the association's activities and make recommendations to the Assembly and other bodies of the association. Whenever needed, the Council addresses the authorities and the overall public in the region, expressing its positions and initiatives as regards improving the culture of peace, democracy, tolerance and interethnic cooperation in the region and the entire Europe. The Council is chaired by the President of the Association.
- The Center for Regionalism in Novi Sad serves as the *General Secretariat* of the Association. The Secretariat is, essentially, the executive body of Philia. It manages and coordinates activities among all Philia members, sometimes initiating projects, and sometimes responding to initiatives proposed by members.

Figure 1  
Organizational Chart of Philia



## PHILIA ENGAGED: PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Expectations about the *direct benefits* of the cooperation process within the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia were numerous. Of many projected results, the most important has been the movement’s longevity and growth: communication, contacts, and new forms of cooperation among local communities in the region have only expanded over the years. Philia has helped ensure the institutionalization of regional cooperation, particularly by establishing intensive partnerships among non-governmental organizations and local authorities and facilitating “city diplomacy.” Indeed, as will be discussed in great detail through a series of case studies in this book, Philia has been integral in overcoming diplomatic stalemates and facilitating cross-border cooperation, particularly among ethnically divided communities, by way of city triangles. Additionally, Philia has enlisted and established project teams and expert groups to address issues of local concern.

Despite its rather modest financial resources, Philia’s activities have been wide-ranging. Some initiatives have had a short lifespan; others have been continued and even expanded. Philia has developed projects to support dialogue and understanding among

minority and majority groups, formulate policies that accommodate diverse populations at the local level, and support more effective participation of minorities in public life. These projects have entailed enlisting expert groups and conducting research, carrying out lobbying, advocacy, and extensive public relations campaigns, implementing educational events and trainings, personal communication, and organizing various open events to discuss and debate issues related to interethnic relations. Philia has also engaged in networking and capacity-building in and across the civil society and government sectors to support the accommodation of diversity, and provided small grants for concrete projects. It has addressed active resistance to hate speech and other forms of discrimination and ethnic and religious intolerance. Along these lines, an important *indirect impact* of Philia's work has can be seen in the creation of a constructive approach towards interethnic relations, civic initiatives, and civil society-government engagement.

Several areas of activity are featured below.

## Exchanges of Experiences

Philia members and the General Secretariat communicate regularly, including by way of personal visits, meetings and other events. Thematic conferences and round tables are organized for representatives of multiethnic municipalities (NGOs and self-governments), members of Euroregions, as well as triangles and circles of cooperation within them.

Additionally, since 2007, the General Secretariat of Philia has envisioned itself as a center of information exchange and education. It has organized several study visits for students, youth, NGO activists, and other interested parties to offices of the EU, local and central authorities, international organizations, and others. Making use of its extensive professional network, Philia has also supported students' research in the field of human and minority rights and democratization of society. In cooperation with the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies from Sarajevo, students from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia have used the Secretariat's services. Finally, Philia members have arranged regional cultural events, including events for diverse secondary school and university students, as well as sport competitions.

## Cooperation of Philia with Pro-European Civic Organizations

As the seat of the General Secretariat of Philia and one of the key actors of the Igman Initiative, the Center for Regionalism in Novi Sad has been engaged permanently in facilitating cooperation among more than one hundred civil society organizations around the promotion of human and minority rights, democracy, and the normalization of rela-

tions in the region on the basis of European living standards. Philia has been invited to join a consultative group of the National Convent, offering expertise on various aspects of regional cooperation. The National Convent is a state institution that deals with the complex and multifaceted process of Serbia's accession to the EU..

## Training, Seminars, and Local Capacity Development

Multiple events have been organized aimed to raise awareness and build capacity in certain issue areas, from political participation, to local economic development, to human rights. Participants in educational seminars have included Philia members, as well as members of target groups, like students and youth or representatives of political parties.

With financial and technical support from LGI, Philia participated in the training of local authorities for efficient governance and the provision of high-quality services provision. Seminars and trainings were focused on strengthening the capacities in the field of minority rights and public administration. In February 2007, a training on diversity management included the participation of representatives of local authorities from Zrenjanin, Senta, and Sombor in Serbia.

With the support of the Balkan Trust for Democracy, the NGO Partners for Local Development Foundation (FPDL) from Bucharest, Romania organized two trainings for Philia members, one in September and another in November 2007. The aim of these trainings was capacity development for the employees of local administrations and NGOs in the participatory decision-making process; to learn mediation skills in crisis resolution, and to ensure quality in conflict management. FPDL provided several small grants, which were allocated to most successful participants in the seminar, to be implemented in these local environments.

## City Triangles of Cooperation

Philia has been integral in facilitating cross-border cooperation, particularly among ethnically divided communities, by way of city triangles. (This area of activity is discussed later in this book.) Through public relations and publications, public meetings, official visits, and other avenues, Philia has facilitated the establishment and expansion of city triangles. With the hope to engage more civil society and government participation, a great amount of effort is put into raising awareness about city triangles. For instance, publications of the General Secretariat of the Association, the *Philia Reports*, are used to present Philia's efforts to promote city triangles.

### Philia Conferences: Highlights

- The founding assembly of Philia was at a conference entitled “Tolerance and Understanding—Above All Belgrade, July 6, 2004.”
- A conference on “Cooperation in the Tri-border Zone between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro,” held in the coastal city of Neum, BiH, April 27–28, 2007, resulted in establishing the triangles of cooperation.
- The enhancement of cooperation among the respective capitals was discussed at the conference “Reform of Authorities and Cooperation of Capitals in South Eastern Europe,” organized in Belgrade, April 17–18, 2007.

### Research, Publishing, and Public Relations

Philia places great emphasis on sharing and publicizing its work. A great number of thematic conferences and roundtables have been organized for representatives of multiethnic municipalities (NGOs and self-governments), members of Euroregions, as well as triangles and circles of cooperation within them. Philia has also organized a large number of public discussions as part of the thematic unit titled “Communication and Cooperation in South Eastern Europe with the Association of Multiethnic Cities.”

In addition to events, Philia puts a great amount of efforts into publishing—to share basic information, for educational purposes, and to support targeted lobbying and advocacy campaigns. The electronic version of monthly *Philia Newsletter* is regularly published and distributed, containing relevant information about the activities of the Association and its members. The newsletter is distributed to members of Philia, international organizations and institutions, as well as other relevant entities in the region. Often, such as when carrying out scientific research and public polls, Philia cooperates with universities and other educational and cultural institutions. Philia’s efforts have also been recognized and publicized by other actors in the field. For instance, its activities have been presented as a “success story” by the Balkan Trust for Democracy of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Major publications include the book *Decentralization in the Light of the New Constitution of Serbia* was published with contributions from the most competent experts in the field of decentralization and regionalization in Serbia. Through different initiatives to improve minority rights in local communities—empirical research, expert analyses, and public debates—the Center for Regionalism, too, has published several books and expert brochures, which have been distributed throughout South Eastern Europe.

Independently, many Philia members engage in research and publish on themes related to good governance and democracy. As part of its publishing activities, Philia has published two books written by Professor Jovan Komšić. *Dilemmas of the Democratic*

*Nation and Autonomy* was published in cooperation with the *Official Gazette* from Belgrade (the publisher of the year in 2006). Later, *Principles of European Regionalism* was published in English and Serbian, both electronically and in printed versions, for the conference and annual assembly of Philia held in Novi Sad in November 2007. Beyond the introductory study by Professor Komšić and several other authors' analyses, the book contains all the relevant documents of Council of Europe pertaining to regionalism. For this reason, it forms part of the basic literature at the interdisciplinary EU Master Studies of the University of Novi Sad, for the course on EU Regional Policy.

## Charter of Interethnic Tolerance

Philia has developed an award, its *Charter of Interethnic Tolerance* that has been granted to several distinguished individuals at the association's meetings in Zagreb in 2005, in Podgorica in 2006, and in Novi Sad in 2007. Recipients are awarded for their efforts to improve relations interethnic relations and the position of ethnic communities in municipalities, to encourage these individuals to continue their work, and to stimulate others to follow their lead.

### Recipients of the *Charter of Interethnic Tolerance*

- *2<sup>nd</sup> Assembly Meeting, Podgorica, Montenegro, July 4, 2006*
  - Erhard Busek, Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe
  - Jasmin Imamović, Mayor of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina
  - George Ciuhandu, Mayor of Timisoara, Romania
  - Ilona Mihaes, Director of the Euroregional Center for Democracy, Timisoara, Romania
  - Vehid Šehić, Director of the Forum of Tuzla Citizens, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- *3<sup>rd</sup> Assembly, Novi Sad, November 29, 2007*
  - Boris Miletić, Mayor of Pula, Croatia
  - Mirjana Galo, President of the NGO Homo, Pula, Croatia
  - Trifun Kostovski, Mayor of Skopje, Macedonia
  - Vlado Dimovski, Director of the NGO Center for Interethnic Tolerance and Refugees in Macedonia
  - Bojan Kostreš, past President of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, Serbia

- *4th Assembly, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 3, 2009*
  - Alija Behmen, Mayor of city of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
  - Lidija Živanović, President of Helsinki Citizens Parliament of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
  - Ivan Cenov, past Mayor of City of Vidin, Bulgaria
  - Petra Kovacs, Program Manager, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest

*Figure 2*  
Charter of Interethnic Tolerance



## Small Grants

Philia has organized small grants competitions. After designing and circulating a call for proposals, the Association supported seven regional projects (in BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Montenegro, and Serbia) that addressed cross-border and regional cooperation, youth issues, and the capacities of local self-governments.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In accordance with its program goals and through its network of members, Philia has established contacts and cooperation with a large number of similar associations, such as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Assembly of European Regions, the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South Eastern Europe (NALAS), and others.

In 2006, Philia, officially became a part of a task force of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, which is political declaration of commitment and a framework agreement on international cooperation to develop a shared strategy among all partners for stability and growth in the region. A part of this expert and consultative body, Philia has made a substantial contribution to deliberations on local democracy and cross-border cooperation in South Eastern Europe. Engagement with the Stability Pact has been mutual: support provided by the Stability Pact, with the guidance of its Special Coordinator, Mr. Erhard Busek, and his close associates, has been significant for the establishment and affirmation of Philia as a prominent actor in the regional public environment

Philia actively cultivates its regional expert base, with the aim to share and exchange experiences within South Eastern Europe and beyond. Among others, LGI, as an important advisor and funder for the network, has supported these efforts. Specifically, it has encouraged Philia to share its knowledge and innovations in improving relations in multiethnic communities. The unique value of Philia in its consultative role lies in its emphasis on promoting the principles of the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance as a model for resolving conflicts. Beyond South Eastern Europe, Philia's messages have been shared among local experts, officials, and civil society representatives in Central Asia, as well.

## Inter-regional Dialogue

Philia representatives have also shared their experiences with colleagues from other regions, to support the spreading of good practices, build professional linkages, and create a more robust understanding of local practices to multiethnic community management. With the Center for Regionalism, Philia has received financial and technical support from the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI) for a range of activities with post-Soviet Central Asia.

Inter-regional cooperation was underpinned by the understanding that countries of both regions—the former Yugoslavia and post-Soviet Central Asia—share numerous similarities. Both were members of large, multiethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-confessional unions or federations, and continue to struggle with process of rebuilding national identities, economies, and systems of government. In both regions, new—and at times contentious—national borders have divided communities, resources, and the flow of information, goods, and people. Certainly, there are differences, too: it has become clear that levels economic development, institutions, political will, administrative systems, socio-cultural factors, and geopolitical issues (including EU integration), among others, must be taken into account in the transfer of knowledge experiences across regions.

Since 2006, joint activities between Central Asia and South Eastern Europe have focused issues of cross-border cooperation, local policies in multiethnic communities, regionalism, and various issues of local governance and administrative reform. These issues have been explored through professional exchanges, or study trips, in both regions, conferences and workshops, resource development and translation, mentoring, informal discussions.

In the summer of 2006, Philia representative traveled to Kyrgyzstan for an introductory forum on inter-regional cooperation. This was followed by a study tour of partners from Kyrgyzstan to the General Secretariat of the association, as a continuation of professional cooperation among Philia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kyrgyzstan, and the Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan. In November 2006, a group consisting of the mayor of the city of Uzgen city in southern Kyrgyzstan, representatives of the UNDP, experts of the Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan, and the head of the Association of Cities from Kyrgyzstan visited South Eastern Europe. The participants attended several regional conferences and round tables, such as the ones held in Miločer and Novi Sad. The group visited the municipalities of Herceg Novi (Montenegro), Tuzla and Srebrenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Sombor (Serbia), where they had an opportunity to learn about the problems and good practices of the local administrations. In November 2008, Philia representatives traveled to Kyrgyzstan to meet with a range of stakeholders, visit local sites, and participate in a regional conference to present and discuss the range of local practices that have been developed to manage ethnically

diverse communities. In November 2009, a group of Philia representatives participated in a conference with local leaders from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, organized by UNDP offices in these countries with support from LGI/OSI, on cross-border municipal or community cooperation. Using Philia as an example, this area of work is helping to formalize cooperation among communities in border areas in the region, potentially toward an Association of Multiethnic Cities of the Central Asia.

These initiatives are part of a constant learning process. They have revealed both similarities and differences across the regions: that help support on-going professional exchanges and mentoring. Moreover, they have helped build and expanding network of actors in both regions dedicated to common goals of peace, democratization, and regional stability.

## TRANSPARENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Media attention focused on Philia's activities<sup>4</sup> indicate just how much the general public is the "soul brain, and power" of the organization. In this framework, Philia has pooled together and enabled reputable persons to show their moral virtues during an "era of evil." Its members are ready to stand up against hatred and violence and use their knowledge and organizational skills in the struggle for change toward the rule of law and democracy for all citizens.

Philia and many of its members previously were part of the antiwar struggle for human rights in the region; it represents a civil initiative or movement to achieve multiculturalism within Philia and among its members. Philia has since provided the prerequisites for the synergy in competencies and influences of a great number of respectable individuals, civil organizations, and public institutions. It wants to ensure that European values of peace, tolerance, democracy, social justice, and transparency receive a substantial support in transitional societies, especially those still burdened by past frustrations and fears for the future.

The advantage of *Philia* in comparison to many other civil organizations is primarily found in the diversity of its members, in a network comprised of many types of civil organizations, with experts from the entire region of South Eastern Europe, who have a great variety of available information, experiences, and practices. Therefore, as an organization Philia has thought and acted both locally and regionally to bring about a change in public discourse in the region. Some important European organizations have recognized Philia's contribution as a credible and efficient partner in the processes of improving the social and political prerequisites of Euro-Atlantic integration of all countries in the region. Members of Philia have certainly become significant partners of central authorities in the process of decentralization and public administration reforms at local and regional level.

The very diversity of the association's members—be it individuals, cities, or organizations—has ensured that its members could maximize their potential to free themselves while contributing their wisdom and skills to the effort to narrow the gap between minority and majority groups, eliminate discrimination, and reopen old trade routes that are essential to their economies in the many years of peace to come.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> M. Massari, *Which Way for Serbia and Montenegro to Europe?* OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro, Belgrade, 2005, p. 60.
- <sup>2</sup> The text of the Agreement can be found in Annex 2 of this book. All members of Philia as of August 2009 are listed in Annex 3.
- <sup>3</sup> The names of some of these initiatives are: Danube–Sava–Drava, Danube–Kris–Mures–Tisza (DKMT), Drina–Sava–Majevica, Adriatic-Ionic Region, EuroBalkan (Niš–Sofia–Skopje), Danube 21, Stara Planina Region, and Alpe–Adria–Panonia.
- <sup>4</sup> The evidence for this may be found in a media portfolio featuring Philia and its announcements, projects, members, and partner organizations.

# Cross-border Cooperation: City Triangles



## *Introduction:*

# Municipal Triangles in South Eastern Europe

*Gábor Péteri*

### TRIANGLES OF COOPERATION: PROCESS AS RESULT

This section of *Managing Multiethnic Cities in South Eastern Europe* presents the technical aspects of inter-municipal cooperation within triangles of cities across the newly created borders of the former Yugoslavia. However, it tries to go beyond standard issues of the local government analysis, like: What sources of funding and sustainability were procured? Which organizational forms and management techniques were the most efficient? During our research for this book, we sought to answer why and how, in the aftermath of violent conflict, local governments have been able to institutionalize their cooperation. This introductory chapter discusses how, despite the legacy and consequences of the Balkan wars, these cities formalized their contacts in order to resolve their common problems and managed to remain home to ethnically diverse and recently divided populations. Their joint activities ranged widely, from “soft issues” like cultural and sport events, to business development and questions of water supply.

These various forms of cooperation began in extremely trying times. After the war, in the period when memories of the fights and hostilities were still very much alive, some members of the first, new generation of leaders took the risk of opening towards their former enemies. Often, they had just enough sufficient public and political support to initiate the contacts with their neighbors, but in a rapidly-changing political environment, they soon either had to resign or change tact and cooperation then slowed. Perhaps this *fluctuation* in joint programs, the constant negotiations, and the dynamics of collaborative actions—rather than the model of city triangles itself—characterize inter-municipal cooperation best.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of inter-municipal cooperation, by synthesizing several key points that are explored in-depth through the four case studies of city triangles presented in this section of the book. Among other issues, these cases expose how difficult and risky it was to initiate contacts and to launch any type of cooperation with a city on the other side of the border. Local leaders had to find their

local counterparts in neighboring communities and also allies at the national level. They had to create the legal forms of cooperation and constantly had to solve newly emerging problems in a hardly-supportive, if not deliberately obstructive, legal, administrative, and political environment. One of the starting points was the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance, developed partly by experts and others from these cities. Later, after being ratified by the cities' assemblies, it opened the prospects for concrete cooperation.

All these struggles to develop, implement, and re-establish diplomacy, trade, and cooperation among triangles of cities prove that the maintenance of the *process* of cooperation itself is as important as the intended *results* of the joint activities. Laying down the foundations of cooperation proved to citizens in these municipalities that—after the recent war and interethnic conflicts, and the emergence of new national borders and independent states—there were actually chances to rebuild connections and return to the earlier, relatively peaceful forms of cohabitation. The case studies in this section and this brief summary intend to focus on the factors of this process, laying down the conditions of future tangible results of cooperation in the triangles of cities.

## FACTORS OF SUCCESS: CIVIC GROUPS, POLITICS, AND DONORS

### Launching Cooperation: The Role of NGOs

A decentralized response to the problems caused by the war and the newly created national borders originates partly from the political history of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Even under the single-party rule in the former Yugoslavia, special forms of self-governance created important counterpoints to the central state. During the late 1990s, cities and municipalities also played a significant role in initiating political changes in Serbia. The “diplomacy of cities” was the basis of the first triangle of cooperation in the Baja-Osijek-Sombor region.

Civic initiatives and non-governmental organizations worked to build the triangles of cities on two different levels. Firstly, they were strong allies of those innovative mayors and local leaders who launched the cooperation. These projects were initiated from below; as grass-roots movements they were close to ordinary people. Consequently, they could recognize their needs and interests.

In most of the triangles of cities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) guaranteed continuity in cooperation. When the local leadership was changed or the composition of the elected councils was modified and institutional support evaporated, these civic groups then kept their contacts alive. NGOs, being the formal founding members of the agreements, had the right to continue the cooperation in their own fields (e.g., in the case of Bajina Bašta/Srebrenica after 2004).

Secondly, the civic organizations behind the triangles of cities movement were able to promote this cooperation at the national and international levels. The group of activists and former politicians around the Center for Regionalism had various initiatives, which helped to launch and to formalize these joint actions. The best example is the case of the triangle in Herceg Novi–Dubrovnik–Trebinje. Here, the local partners were rather divided, but there was some willingness to solve their common problems. It was communicated to the national level (Ministries of Foreign Affairs) by the local consultants and representative of the Igman Initiative. Building on their informal contacts to the central government officials, the local partners received support (and “directives”) to build their solutions through cooperation. Here, NGO leaders worked as interlocutors. They were able to influence the reluctant local governments through the national political party mechanisms and the administrative channels from the top.

### Politics Matters—But Individuals Count

In the over-politicized public sector and centralized local government system, the political parties defined the scope and speed of cooperation between the cities. When immediately after the war, progressive political forces were in power on both sides of the border, then they could more easily find their counterparts at the municipalities in the other countries. In the cases of Bajina Bašta–Srebrenica and Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad, the mayors representing local liberal and democratic parties were more open to cooperation. In the latter case the regional authorities (the Okrug and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina) were also supportive.

In local politics, where individuals tend to matter more than members of the national party machinery, the mayors and municipal elected officials had room to maneuver and cooperate. However, when there is a nationwide shift in political preferences, these progressive actors might not be supported by their own parties. When local elections are primarily based on party lists, political parties supporting cooperation may fear that they will lose votes because of cooperation-minded candidates.

The political influence was very visible in those cases where nationalist or conservative forces were elected. The triangle of Herceg Novi–Dubrovnik–Trebinje is a clear example of how local conservative party representatives could block cooperation, even when there was a firm support for cooperation from the national level.

Political influence might be also helpful, as it was very much visible in the case of the Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad triangle. Here, there are personal networks and informal organizations behind the triangles of cities. The Center for Regionalism and the movement initiated by its management had a democratic-reformist political party affiliation. These political forces fighting against the disintegration of Yugoslavia actively promoted cross-border cooperation. Through their own personal contacts, they were

able to mobilize local and national leaders in the new countries, once all being part of Yugoslavia.

## Historical Roots

Traditional contacts and the former legacies of interaction in a relatively peaceful multiethnic environment contributed to the development of diplomacy by using the triangles of cities approach. Traditional contacts cultivated over the centuries were good bases for cooperation, especially in those regions that had once belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and that also were part of the Ottoman Empire for a shorter period. The cities of Baja, Osijek, and Sombor were important fortresses and later became leading, autonomous centers of the Austrian Monarchy at the Ottoman border region. Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad also used to belong to the well-organized Habsburg state, which helped to establish thriving economic and cultural contacts.

More recent historical developments also might influence the cooperation of cities in the different countries included in this report. For example, Srebrenica is located in Republika Srpska, an entity of Bosnia and Hercegovina, which helps to establish good international contacts with the municipality of Bajina Bašta in Serbia. The contacts are further strengthened by the fact that the large municipalities in these countries have mixed ethnic groups. So there are villages with a Serbian population in the territory of predominantly Muslim (Bosniak) Srebrenica. This is one reason why the cooperation here focuses primarily on education and healthcare services.

History has not only connected but more recently divided these cities. Reports from the triangles of cities during the wars of the 1990s often refer to the attacks launched from a neighboring city, that is, from Novi Sad army headquarters to Osijek; from Podgorica to Dubrovnik. The very names of military units (Novi Sad Corps, Podgorica Corps) suggested that the attacks on cities in Slavonia, such as Osijek, or in Dalmatia, such as Dubrovnik, were launched from those cities with the army barracks. Although a very small percentage of Novi Sad and Podgorica populations were actually part of these corps, only the military units were named after them.

## Economic Decline

Cities establishing new forms of cooperation often belonged to the same economic area. Regional power plants provided energy through the common grid, former state-owned enterprises were built on raw materials of a broader area, markets for agricultural products were available in the neighboring cities, tourism was developed in a complementary way

for a larger region. Cities of the triangles were sometimes centers of smaller economic regions, also cut by the new borders (e.g., the Tuzla basin, Eastern Slavonia (Osijek), and Vojvodina (Novi Sad)).

Most of these economic contacts were destroyed by the war and the businesses were separated by the new boundaries. Restructuring of the ailing national economies was an additional burden, especially in the triangles located on the new peripheries, far from the capital cities. Poorly managed privatization also increased the economic and social problems in these regions. Unemployment was an important motivating factor of cooperation for the local leaders.

Yet slowly the economic contacts were re-established. In 2007, all the countries of the former Yugoslavia joined the Central European Trade Agreement (CEFTA). Traditional local businesses, like fruits and dairy products reached the regional markets. Tourism was developed with simplified border crossing.

## Development Assistance

Many international organizations and various donor-funded development programs were active in the region. An emerging group of NGOs were obvious partners for programs dealing with humanitarian relief, reconciliation, capacity development and technical assistance issues. Donor funding re-connected these organizations, especially when joint programs and training events were organized on a regional basis.

As the European Commission became the major international organization in the region, its goals and priorities primarily define future international assistance to the triangle of cities program. In the present budgeting period till 2013, as the European Agency of Reconstruction programs were replaced by the Instruments of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) programs, the importance of cross-border cooperation has increased. This component supporting cooperation among the beneficiary countries and with the Member States is available for all the candidate (Croatia and Macedonia) and the potential candidate countries (Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, and conditionally, Serbia).

In South Eastern Europe and within this larger region in the Western Balkans, cross-border cooperation is a high priority. And there also are transnational cooperation programs. Some of the larger, more developed areas already wanted to create an Euroregion (Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad). This shift in the EU policies towards supporting cross-border cooperation might be a positive side-effect of the previous efforts to connect the neighboring cities. But it will be a new opportunity also for the triangles, because these funds open up new possibilities for cooperation.

## COOPERATION MECHANISMS: WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

The cooperation of autonomous local governments in a market economy has several advantages, especially for those municipalities that are located relatively far from the national capitals and isolated in rural, border regions. Cross-border cooperation increases the significance of the horizontal linkages between local governments, because it also strengthens the international relations with neighboring countries.

In South Eastern Europe, traditional contacts were cut by the newly created borders. Here the primary benefit of cross-border cooperation is to give an institutional, formal *framework of dialogue* through twinning or administrative, cultural exchange programs. This political dimension of cooperation is usually the starting point for establishing contacts in other areas, too. In countries of the Western Balkans, legislation allows for local governments to openly establish international contacts; however, they are usually reported to central authorities.

Local governments, even in the most centralized systems, have some responsibilities for promoting *economic development*. Support to businesses through city marketing, opening new market opportunities, assisting to create direct contacts between entrepreneurs, and demolishing administrative barriers to businesses are the most typical actions. The economic rationale behind these efforts is that they create agglomeration effects. Or potential benefits from larger markets and more diverse business contacts create added value for companies and entrepreneurs. Within the European Union these activities are also part of regional development programs.

In the area of local government *service provision*, cooperation could improve efficiency through decreasing the unit costs of public service delivery in larger service areas. Economies-of-scale in service provision are present primarily in the case of network-based utility and infrastructure services. Larger local water systems or bigger catchment areas for waste collection and connected energy systems could decrease the costs of services. Beyond these financial benefits, cooperation in environmental protection or risk prevention also could be valuable for local governments.

Most of these benefits from cross-border cooperation are present in the triangles of cities. During the past few years some of these advantages of municipal cooperation have been realized and the forms of collaboration have been gradually developed. They will be summarized in the following sections.

### Typical Projects

Areas for municipal cooperation are very much defined by the characteristics, competencies, and powers of the local governments. In countries of the former Yugoslavia usually there are one-tier local government systems, with relatively large municipalities. These

municipalities with a population of 30,000–50,000 usually cover several villages (on average, 16–18 sub-municipal governments). Croatia is an exception, because it has an intermediary level of government and the average size of municipalities is only 8,800.

These typically large local governments are mostly responsible for basic urban and administrative services. The scope of local functions is limited: the share of local expenditures in five to seven percent of GDP. The funding of local governments is primarily based on categorical grants and the sectoral ministries are deeply involved in service management. All these factors partly explain why the typical areas of cooperation in the triangles of cities are the utility services, environmental protection, regional cooperation in tourism, and economic development.

The actual forms and areas of cooperation within the triangles of cities were diverse. One typical motive was to overcome the *problems caused by the war* and the *new country boundaries*. For example, in the case of Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad the general problems of returning refugees, settling the disputes over their former properties, the future of their pensions, and the status of missing citizens were targeted by the triangles. But in the case of Dubrovnik (Konavlje)–Herceg Novi–Trebinje, a connected *water network* was the main issue.

In this very complicated case, water flows originate in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the network crosses Croatia to Herceg Novi, which, as a major user, has no access to major alternative water sources. The water system was built under the Yugoslav period, so all the municipal leaders reasonably claim that the capital investment was financed by their citizens. Being in a monopolistic position, the water was rationed by Croatia in the dry summer periods. Under these new circumstances, Herceg Novi did not pay the full price of transporting the water through Croatia, so a court case was initiated.

The negotiations between local leaders was supported by the respective national government officials. But a dialogue at both national and local levels was orchestrated by the Igman Initiative and various international actors to dissolve the wall between the hostile municipal leaders. Presently new forms of cooperation are being designed. They are mostly driven by international donor programs, for example, establishing a regional center for *fire protection*, opening small *border crossing* points, etc.

*Environmental protection* is another typical area of cross-border cooperation. The bay at Dubrovnik is easily polluted by the currents from the south, where city of Herceg Novi is located. In the cases of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica, cleaning the banks of the Drina River is a common task. There are plans in Bosnia and Hercegovina to join the regional landfill under construction in Serbia (in the city of Uzice). Flood protection also has been a common task for some cities (e.g., Baja–Osijek–Sombor).

Another motivation for cooperation is to *help minorities* on the other side of the new borders. In Srebrenica, which became a Muslim municipality, there are Serb minorities in some villages. They always have used the healthcare services (hospitals), the secondary schools, and the kindergartens on the Serbian-majority territories. So now, when

the new bordercrossing was established, the commuters keep coming. The services are financed by the Serbian national and local budgets, regardless of the fact that the users are citizens of another state (Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Hercegovina).

## Forms of Cooperation

The new countries of the former Yugoslavia tend to be centralized. Some of them are in the process of building national states and real decentralization was started with significant delay, only from 2000. In Serbia under Milosevic, even regional autonomy was taken away and local government property was nationalized. The management structures of cross-border local level cooperation are being built gradually under these circumstances.

In the case of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica, where the cooperation was initiated from below, there were no previous experiences establishing new cross-border institutions. They *lacked legal models* and administrative procedures for registering them. Distance to the center in these cases helped the cities to develop their own solutions, because they had the power to break the rules or to create their own forms of cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation also was hindered by the differences in the forms of decentralization in various countries. The joint programs have to be developed under *different institutional settings*. For example, in Croatia the elected county local government (*županije*) and the network of regional development agencies control the funds, while in other countries they are mostly under the ministries.

Other soft areas of cooperation (e.g., cultural events) were managed by the elected local governments. For example, in the case of Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad the founders agreed to organize consultative meetings on a rotating basis, that is every year in another member city. Joint decisions had to be put on the agenda of the respective assemblies (elected councils).

Local autonomy to create triangles of cooperation and the dynamics of the events gave a lot of flexibility to the participants. *Non-governmental organizations* were often the initiators and the driving forces of political-administrative collaboration. Thus, if after a local election the new leadership that had inherited the cooperation agreement decided not to talk to their neighbors, then the NGOs continued their own contacts. They helped to maintain a minimum level of cooperation. So the lack of standard rules also could support the active members of the joint organizations, because they could modify the procedures and the role of initiators, even if the driving forces behind the triangles might have been changed.

## Financing Cooperation

Flexibility in organizational forms and management schemes of the triangles also influenced the funding mechanisms. There were no regular forms of revenue collection for cooperation purposes. The centralized local government finances and project-based cooperation prevented them from establishing stable funding rules. However, the activity focused funding helped the triangles of cities to collect external funds, primarily from donors.

So the permanent costs of cooperation—that is the project overheads—were often charged on other initiatives. This cross-financing made the projects acceptable to other support programs (e.g., for the Igman Initiative/Center for Regionalism in the case of Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad triangle). Obviously, when the activities under the triangles of cooperation were funded by the donors, then the full costs could be recovered.

## Transparency and Publicity

Activities under the triangles of cities movement are being organized for the general public. They are aimed at to foster the reconciliation process, so they should be transparent and widely publicized. The local governments actively supported those non-governmental organizations that were able to disseminate information. Local media was invited to all the actions and events (see the case of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica). Journalists exchanged information and reported about the events in the neighboring cities.

## THE FUTURE OF THE TRIANGLES: FROM SYMBOLIC TO PRACTICAL ISSUES

The first cooperation in the present triangles of cities was launched a decade ago. It was initiated in the period shortly after the war among the nations of the former Yugoslavia. At that time, triangles of cooperation were the first formal attempts to re-establish contacts between former enemies. The emphasis was on the renewal of the local contacts between citizens, non-governmental organizations, and local governments, which used to belong to the same country. The first stage of cooperation aimed at stopping hostilities, breaking the wall of prejudices between neighbors, and slowly starting the process of reconciliation.

The new forms of cross-border cooperation had to be established in that period, when the military attacks and the killings were still in everybody's memory. As one partner in a member city of the triangles said, "We do not forget and do not forgive."

However, this attitude is slowly changing, partly thanks to the local movements like the Igman Initiative and triangles of cooperation.

Despite the shift in national politics in many countries of the region, which led to greater influence of the nationalistic forces, we believe that a new stage of cooperation is starting. The emphasis will move from the very symbolic questions towards more practical issues. The triangles of cities will prove their strength, influence, and sustainability if they are able to assist the member local governments and NGOs in solving the present problems. And these solutions are desperately needed in local public service delivery, economic development, environmental protection, etc. As the same partner said, they were fully aware of how much they could benefit from cross-border cooperation, because “You are richer if your neighbor is richer.”

It will take a long time until the hostile policies, originating from the experiences of the recent past, will be suppressed by this more pragmatic approach towards the neighbors. But the triangles of cities have started this process. Luckily, not only local populations but also international organizations have noticed the importance of the local-level cooperation in a region. The sustainability of the triangles of cooperation will be supported by various cross-border programs of the IPA and other European Commission initiatives, like the Transnational Cooperation Programme or by establishing Euroregions, as a framework for joint actions. All these instruments will work only if they will be utilized effectively by those people who once lived close to their neighbors for decades and who still understand one another’s languages.

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# Triangle of Cooperation: Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad

*Aleksandar Popov*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The towns of Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Osijek (Croatia), and Novi Sad (Serbia) belong to a common geographical, economic and cultural area. As part of Yugoslavia, they enjoyed a high level of cooperation in all fields. With the collapse of Yugoslavia and the wars waged in the region, cooperation and communication among the towns ceased. Regional NGOs—the Center for Regionalism of Novi Sad, partner organizations from Tuzla, and the Center for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights from Osijek—made efforts in the late 1990s and early 2000s to restore cooperation among the three towns. These efforts bore fruit and on January 21, 2002 in Tuzla: the three mayors and directors of three NGOs from each towns took part in a ceremony, signing the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*. This agreement became the basis for the renewal of cooperation among the three municipalities. The values of the agreement were operationalized in a range of joint efforts in areas of economics and business, ecology, information and technology, sports, and education, among others. The restored cooperation among the three towns has made significant contributions to overcoming the deep, post-war psychological barriers. It became a model on the basis of which new triangles or circles of cooperation of towns would later be formed, leading to the formalization of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia.

## HISTORY

The idea to start a project to reestablish cooperation among Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Osijek (Croatia), and Novi Sad (Serbia) was rooted in these cities' extraordinary history of cooperation across economic, social, cultural, and even political spheres. Their cooperation was strong until the commencement of war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

The long and bloody series of conflicts across the region hugely impacted the relations among Tuzla, Osijek, and Novi Sad. When the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA)

withdrew Tuzla on May 15, 1992, the army of the Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained. Tuzla was surrounded and exposed to frequent shelling that had numerous victims. Most dramatically, on the evening of May 25, 1995, a shell from Ozren Mountain landed in the main city square of Kapija, a favorite gathering place of Tuzla's youth. Seventy-one people lost their lives, mostly youth and children. This tragedy is deeply etched in the minds of the Tuzla's citizens.

Osijek, meanwhile, was exposed to attacks of by the Novi Sad army corps, which were part of the JNA, from the summer of 1991 to May 1992. At the time of the fall of Vukovar, a city in northeastern Croatia, in November 1991, Osijek was sealed off on three sides by the Novi Sad army corps and the paramilitary army of the Republika Srpska Krajina. Throughout that period, the city was exposed to constant artillery that caused total destruction and many casualties. Approximately 1,000 people were killed.

*Figure 1.*  
Regional Map: Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad



All that happened during this violence—and particularly, the echo of the Novi Sad army corps, which still resounds in the ears of the citizens of Osijek—severed relations between Novi Sad and Osijek and Novi Sad and Tuzla, even following the Dayton Agreement and termination of war. Against this traumatic backdrop, some non-governmental organizations in all three cities were moving to restore the relations broken by war. Their programs and activities encompassed the restoration of relations and the rebuilding of understanding and trust. In Tuzla, the most active NGO was the Forum

of Tuzla Citizens; in Osijek, the Center for Peace, Non-Violence, and Human Rights; and in Novi Sad, the Center for Regionalism. Another contributing factor was that, at the end of the 1990s and in the early part of this decade, the leading local authorities were relatively democratically-minded and willing to make the first tentative steps towards the revival of cooperation among all three cities.

From the moment of the introduction of a multiparty system in the former Yugoslavia to this very day, a party with a social-democratic orientation had ruled in Tuzla. Selim Bešliagić, the popular and charismatic mayor, was the leader of the city administration at the time of initiation of cooperation. The situation in Osijek was similar during the war and in the early part of this decade; the Croatian Social Liberal Party was in power, with its coalition partners the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP), and their mayor was Zlatko Kramarić. But in Novi Sad, after the local elections in 1997, the ruling coalition was formed by opposition parties, the pillars of which were the Serbian Renewal Movement (SRM) and the Democratic Party (DP). At the time the cooperation began, the mayor of Novi Sad was Stevan Vrbški from the SRM party. It is important to highlight their personal characteristics here, since all three mayors were individuals oriented towards the reestablishment of cooperation and overcoming the ballast of the recent past.

When the idea of reestablishment of cooperation among the three cities emerged at the Center for Regionalism, several problems were taken into consideration:

- overcoming of psychological barriers that remained as consequences of war, destruction and crimes against humanity that happened in this region;
- restoration of economic cooperation;
- re-establishment of other modes of cooperation (cultural, educational, information, sport, in the civil sector);
- solving the status problems of the citizens who went missing due to the war and disintegration of the former Yugoslavia (return of refugees or their properties, pensions, citizenship, and other issues);
- establishment of bus lines (e.g., even now, no direct bus line exists between Novi Sad and Tuzla) and restoration of other ways of communication; and
- overcoming visa barriers (at the beginning of the project there was visa regime between what was at that time the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Croatia).

The three cities—Tuzla, Osijek, and Novi Sad—belong to the same geographical area known as the Pannonian Plain. Even the very geographical position defined many similarities in the mentality, as well as in the level of economic and cultural development, all the more so for this region that once belonged to the Austro-Hungarian

Monarchy which, as a highly organized state, left indelible, positive traces in cities' further development.

All three cities are important industrial centers. Prior to the war, Tuzla had a chemical industry, coal mines, and a popular salt. Novi Sad was one of Vojvodina's centers for agriculture and had many other branches of industry, such as oil refining, chemicals, cable manufacturing, and other industrial capacities. Besides agriculture, Osijek had well-developed chemical, textile, wood, construction and paper industries.

These developed production capacities and the cities' proximity to one another enabled a high level of commodity exchange and cooperation in production. The cooperation of these cities should be viewed in a broader regional context, for due to the natural gravitation towards each other in the past, an intensive cooperation was implemented not just among the three cities, but also among the regions they represented—the Tuzla basin, Eastern Slavonia, and Vojvodina.

## Information on the Cities

**Osijek** is situated on the right bank of the Drava River, 25 kilometers upstream from its confluence with the Danube. During its history, it belonged to the Roman Empire, was later destroyed, then rebuilt by Ottomans, and since the end of the seventeenth century it was within the Habsburg Monarchy. In 1809, it was granted the charter of a Free Royal City and during the early nineteenth century it was the largest city in Croatia. It developed along the lines of other big cities in Europe, mostly under the influence of Vienna and Budapest. In 2009, Osijek was the fourth largest city in Croatia, the economic and cultural center of the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia, and administrative center of the Osijek–Baranja County. According to the latest census (2001), the total population of Osijek was 114,616. Croats make up more than 85 percent of the population, while other ethnicities include Serbs, Hungarians, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Macedonians, and Roma.

**Tuzla** lies at the bottom of Majeвица Mountain, on the Jala River in the northeast of Bosnia. At the end of the fifteenth century, during Ottoman rule, organized salt mining began and continued to the present. After Turkish reign, Tuzla was shortly under the Habsburg Monarchy rule, and after the First World War it became a part of Yugoslavia. Following the Second World War, Tuzla developed into one of the most important industrial and cultural centers. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was the only city in which a citizens-oriented party was in power. Tuzla is now the third-largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the seat of Tuzla Canton. According to the 1991 census, Tuzla had a population of 131,618: 50 percent Bosniaks, 15 percent Serbs, and 15 percent Croats. Due migration during and after the war, the city's population now is estimated to be 174,558.

**Novi Sad** is divided into two parts, one in the very south of the Pannonian Plain, while the other is situated on the slopes of Fruška Gora. The Danube forms a natural border between the two parts of the city, the central urban area on one side and Petrovaradin and Sremska Kamenica on the other. The city was originally mentioned in the documents in 1237 under the name of Petrovaradin, as well as some surrounding settlements. By the end of the seventeenth century, the population on the left bank of the Danube began to grow as mostly Orthodox migrants who were banned from settling in Petrovaradin settled there. Novi Sad got its present name and became a Free Royal City by Maria Theresa's decree in the eighteenth century. Since then, it rapidly developed into an economic, cultural and educational center of Vojvodina, and in 1945 it became the capital of the province. Currently, it is the administrative center of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and Southern Bačka District. According to the latest census, taken in 2001, Novi Sad is the second largest city in Serbia, with 300,000 inhabitants.

*Table 1.*  
Population,\* Area, and Economic Data

	Osijek, Croatia	Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina	Novi Sad, Serbia
Population	114,616 (2001)	131,444 (1991)**	299,294 (2002)
Croats	99,234	6,328	6,263
Serbs	8,767	13,137	225,995
Bosniaks	211	44,091	15,687
Hungarians	1,154		5,040
Montenegrins	175		1,740
Roma	124		1,144
Macedonians	178		299
Albanians	480		7,230
Slovaks			860
Romanians			2,032
Ruthenians			
Area	196 sq km	302 sq km	699 sq km
Employment rate	32.24%	23.80%	32.2%
National GDP per capita (2008)	16,100 USD	6,500 USD	10,900 USD

*Notes:* \* Figures on ethnic groups are estimates. Data are gathered in different ways, using different questions (e.g. about ethnicity, identity, mother tongue) and survey techniques.

\*\* Taking the influx of refugees into account, the city is currently estimated to have 174,558 inhabitants.

*Sources:* National Statistical agencies, 1991–2002.

Good economic cooperation was matched by many other modes of cooperation. Culture and educational exchanges also were normal among these multiethnic cities. Good interethnic relations at that time permitted a great number of mixed marriages, and consequently family ties. It also knit together these and other cities in the region. The distance between the cities was no more than three hours of driving thanks to good road infrastructure.

The first step to establish cooperation among the triangle Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad was made—due to circumstances—outside of the context of non-governmental organizations. However, relations among individuals did play an important role. Aleksandar Popov, the founder and the Director of the Center for Regionalism, had been, until 1998, a high-ranked official in the Vojvodina Reform Democratic Party. The party was social-democratic in orientation. Founded by Ante Marković, the reform Prime Minister of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), it had tried to stop disintegration of the Yugoslav state and the eventual civil war. In this context, the party and Aleksandar Popov personally, worked on the establishment of cooperation with the parties of the similar political orientation in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

The first step in this direction was to contact the Union of the Social Democrats of Bosnia and Herzegovina (UBSD), formerly part of Reform Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The party's headquarters was in Tuzla and its president was then the mayor, Selim Bešliagić. One of the steps towards reinforcement of cooperation between the two parties was the facilitation of a visit of a large group of representatives of the biggest companies from the Tuzla basin to Vojvodina in 1997. During the visit, they had an opportunity to meet their former partners, as well as some new companies that were interested in cooperation and restoring or creating new business relations. Besides Novi Sad, the economic delegation visited Vojvodina's three other large economic centers, Zrenjanin, Kikinda, and Subotica.

In October 1998, Center for Regionalism was founded. Since there was no willingness for continuation of cooperation in the platform of his party, Aleksandar Popov independently continued this cooperation at the Center.

## Return of Refugees

One of the first projects implemented by the newly founded Center was the organized return to Tuzla of refugees residing in Serbia. The project was implemented in cooperation with the Regional Committee of the Association for the Return of the Refugees of Vojvodina and in cooperation with the official authorities of the Municipality of Tuzla.

Prior to the final definition of the project, the mayor of Tuzla, Selim Bešliagić, agreed that it was essential to ensure the full cooperation of the city authorities and services. At the beginning of the project, launched by the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia,

refugees from Tuzla were invited via announcements in several daily newspapers and through refugee associations in Serbia. Thereafter, a meeting was held with approximately 130 applicants, where forthcoming activities were agreed upon. In the process of gathering the necessary data on each applicant, the standard application form of the Commissioner for Refugees in Tuzla also was filed. The following step of the project implied organizing the collective visit of all registered individuals to Tuzla, where they had an opportunity to gather information, through conversation with Selim Bešliagić and his associates, on the condition of their residential properties, and the possibilities and procedures of their return, that is, the return of their ownership rights.

However, even though the refugees were given promises and guarantees at the time of the visit, some individuals in the office of the Commissioner for Refugees and the competent municipal Secretariat for Utility and Housing Services attempted to obstruct their implementation. The obstruction was supported by some of the leaders in these authorities who had misappropriated flats of the refugees. After talks between the project representatives and Selim Bešliagić, this problem was resolved by separation of the competent secretariat in two parts—one in charge of utilities, and the other dealing with housing services. The head of the Secretariat for Housing Services effectively began case by case, with Mr. Bešliagić's full support. By the end of the project, all registered people either returned to Tuzla or managed to regain ownership of their residential units.

The project commenced in the beginning of 1998, fairly soon after the termination of the war. It was uncommon for the head of the Secretariat to visit Novi Sad but on several occasions he came in order to meet the refugees and have additional consultations. Another peculiarity of the project was that—despite the initial distrust among refugees—the number of participants increased from the 130 to approximately 150 as the project progressed. All of them exercised their rights of return to Tuzla or had their property returned. This project, started by the Center for Regionalism and was successfully implemented in cooperation with the municipal authorities, and represented a solid foundation for the continuation and enhancement of such cooperation.

## Starting Trilateral Cooperation

Selim Bešliagić paid his first official visit to Novi Sad in November 1998, arranged by Stevan Vrbaški, then president of the Novi Sad Assembly. On this occasion some actions were agreed upon as the first steps in the reestablishment of cooperation between the two cities. In the autumn of 1999, Stevan Vrbaški paid a visit to Tuzla, when the two mayors signed the first protocol on cooperation between the two cities. It was envisaged as the commencement of cooperation in the fields of trade, culture, education, sport, information, and others. Even during the war, Tuzla did not terminate its cooperation with Osijek. At the beginning of cooperation between Novi Sad and Tuzla, an idea

was born to include this Slavonian city in the cooperation, hence making the bilateral cooperation trilateral.

By broadening the cooperation to link the three traditional regional centers, cooperation was reestablished among the bordering regions of Vojvodina, Eastern Slavonia, and North Eastern Bosnia, foremost to encourage economic cooperation. At the beginning of 2000 the Center for Regionalism, with the help from its partner in Osijek, the Center for Peace, Non-violence, and Human Rights, organized a series of public discussions on the idea.

The majority of citizens who participated in the discussions supported the idea, which still needed the city administration's approval. In order to provide a concrete offer for the city administration, the team that worked on the establishment of the cooperation started to work on a document which would represent the basis of the cooperation program.<sup>1</sup> The title of the document was the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad*. Jovan Komšić from the Center for Regionalism was the author of the original text of the Agreement, which was later developed by other team members.

The basic requirements for the establishment of cooperation in the cities' triangle, articulated by this document, had been identified in previous talks with the leaders of city authorities of Novi Sad and Tuzla. The city of Osijek was represented by Tihomir Salajić, a close associate to Zlatko Kramarić, the mayor of Osijek, who was already at the time one of the key people in a network of NGOs and municipalities in South Eastern Europe,<sup>2</sup> as well as with the stakeholders from economic, cultural, and other areas.

The preamble of the Agreement contains the following chapters:

1) *Signatories of the Agreement*

2) *Objectives and principles of the Agreement*

- To establish the social framework for the activities of local self-government bodies, local public institutions, non-governmental organizations, and citizens of multicultural cities of South Eastern Europe, in all social, cultural, and educational fields, committed to the development of liberal democracy, ethnic and religious tolerance, and to the protection of human rights, in accordance with the authentic citizens' needs and with the European system of social values;
- To preserve cultural diversity, to protect the rights and freedoms of national and ethnic minorities, to cherish civic virtues and traditions of co-existence;
- To promote the European principles and experiences in the field of human rights, freedom, multiculturalism, and interculturalism, as essential preconditions of democracy;
- To oppose the language of hatred, xenophobia, prejudices, inflexibility, and all forms of ethnic and religious intolerance

- 3) *Program of activities*: cooperation of the three cities in education, culture, social events, implementation of administrative power, and organization of public services, public communication and program policy of the media that serve as a public service
- 4) *Inclusion of other social subjects in the Agreement*, like non-governmental organizations, chambers of commerce, religious groups, sports organizations, environmentalists, universities, and cultural and educational institutions

The draft text of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad was presented for the first time at a round table in Novi Sad on July 4, 2001; it received support, with some proposals, from the representatives of the Novi Sad city administration, experts, NGO representatives, and other participants. The text of the Agreement was presented in Tuzla on July 8, 2001; Jasmin Imamović, the Mayor of Tuzla, participated the discussion and fully supported the text.

The final presentation of the Agreement took place in Osijek on November 9, 2001. Besides Zlatko Kramarić, the Mayor of Osijek, this event was attended by several members of the city administration and Osijek–Baranja district. Participants in the round table supported the text and the main idea. However, a discussion ensued around “Croatianization” of some elements of the text, which had been translated into Croatian language by the city administration of Osijek.<sup>3</sup> Following the three round tables, the three cities’ administrations reached an agreement. On January 21, 2002, the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance was officially ratified in Tuzla by the three mayors and the directors of three non-governmental organizations.

*In a region fragmented by the military force of the 1990s, the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance re-established cooperation between the cities of Tuzla, Osijek, and Novi Sad. On the basis of this model, a growing number of triangles and circles of cooperation in the region of South Eastern Europe have been established.*

Public reactions in Novi Sad to the establishment of cooperation with Tuzla and Osijek were mainly positive. The whole project had been supported by the key representatives of the authorities from the very beginning. When the project entered its operational phase, there were many positive reactions in the public and media. Due to the anti-war image of the organizers of the project from Novi Sad and the support they provided to the citizens of Tuzla during the war, the establishment of cooperation was met with very good reactions. Tuzla’s media contributed to this by providing great attention to each project activity.

The most resistance was anticipated in Osijek, due to the role of Novi Sad army corps in the siege and suffering of the city during the war. However, in this city there were not any negative comments in the media and public on the establishment of cooperation with Novi Sad and making of the triangle of cooperation Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad. It is worth mentioning that media in Osijek and Croatia did not pay much attention to this cooperation's activities.

## INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Administrations of the three cities and three non-governmental organizations (Center for Regionalism, Forum of the Citizens of Tuzla, and Center for Peace, Non-Violence, and Human Rights) are equal partners in implementation of this agreement. Hence, the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* was verified by the competent authorities of the administrations of the three cities and the committees of the three non-governmental organizations prior to its ratification. This model of partnership between the public and non-governmental sector was later applied at the establishment of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe—Philia. It proved to be very good, particularly because of the periodical local elections and changes in leading political forces of the cities' administrations.

Following the local elections in Serbia in September 2004, Novi Sad city council was taken over by the Serbian Radical Party, which prompted negative reaction in Tuzla and Osijek. These cities indicated that the city dominated by the radicals was not acceptable as a partner to their administrations. But their cooperation with Novi Sad was continued through the Center for Regionalism as a second partner in the project and signatory of the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance. A year later a similar election victory in Osijek transferred the city government to the Croatian Party of Rights, and the mayor became Ante Djapić, who openly praised the fascist Independent State of Croatia (1941-1945) and Ante Pavelić, the leader of a major criminal movement that collaborated with fascist regime during the same period. Such development of events contributed to a slowdown in the scope of cooperation among the cities. Still it did not stop thanks to the active role of the NGOs in Novi Sad and Osijek, the city administration of Tuzla, and certainly the Forum of Tuzla Citizens, signatory of the Agreement. During 2007, the coalition between two ultra-right parties, administering Osijek dissolved and a new election was called. The new coalition was acceptable for cooperation with Novi Sad and Tuzla.

On May 11, 2008, general elections were held in Serbia and the coalition between the Democratic Party and the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats assumed power in Novi Sad. Shortly after the election, the city leaders announced that they were ready to renew their cooperation in the triangle. Based on the initiative of the Center for

Regionalism, the three cities' administrations and two other NGOs agreed that a meeting with signatories of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* should be held in Tuzla at the shortest possible notice. An overview of the state of mutual cooperation should be provided and a memorandum on continuation of the cooperation between the cities' administrations was signed. Thereafter, representatives of the city departments (economy, culture, information, sport, etc.) as well as interest groups and other organizations (e.g., regional chambers of commerce, environmentalists) should meet in Novi Sad, and develop concrete programs of cooperation in particular areas.

This meeting has not been held yet, since the Croatian Party of Rights reelection. Due to its pro-Fascist orientation, it is considered an unacceptable partner for local authorities in Tuzla and Novi Sad. A coalition of a democratically orientated partners is expected to win local elections in Osijek that are scheduled for May 2009, which would enable the reestablishment of cooperation in this triangle.

## Motivation of Various Stakeholders

### Local Politicians

Local politicians' motives to renew or reestablish the postwar cooperation that the cities once shared were driven by a number of different factors.

In *Tuzla*, social democrats that have been in power since the introduction of multi-party system in the former Yugoslavia, were against the war and nationalism. They were open to cooperation with the surrounding cities, including those in Serbia, regardless of the fact that the Bosnian and Herzegovinian public considered Serbia an aggressor. Selim Bešliagić, at the time mayor of Tuzla and president of the Union of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Social Democrats, personally contributed to the establishment of cooperation with Novi Sad.

As regards *Novi Sad*, it is ironic that the initiative of the Center for Regionalism was accepted not only by the Democratic Party but by the Serbian Renewal Party (SRP) as well. SRP was a coalition partner in the city authority, but at the national level had many elements of nationalism in its program and practical activities. The greatest credit for this belonged to Stevan Vrbaški, that time mayor of Novi Sad and the leader in the city organization of SRP, who enjoyed a good reputation in the city as a popular physician. He accepted recommendations for the establishment of cooperation without any delay, and during a visit to Tuzla, in autumn 1999, he signed the first agreement on reestablishment of the two cities' cooperation. He was also the first official from Serbia to commemorate Tuzla's war dead.

After Stevan Vrbaški, the process was continued by Borislav Novaković from the Democratic Party, the next mayor of Novi Sad who then signed the Agreement on

Interethnic Tolerance. The motives of the two men, as the city and local party leaders, were to scrub away the shame of Novi Sad's name, caused by the Socialists and the Radicals during their rule in the city as well as the crimes of the Novi Sad army corps. His intention was to reassert the image of Novi Sad as an open city that fosters European values.

Since the establishment of this agreement on cooperation, *Osijek* was ruled by a coalition formed by the Croatian Social Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Croatian Peasant Party. They did not have the same opinion on cooperation. Mayor Zlatko Kramarić and a fraction of the municipal team from the Croatian Social Liberal Party were aware of the fact that part of the *Osijek*'s public would not look favorably on the reestablishment of cooperation with Novi Sad. At the same time, they were confident that cooperation was necessary not just for realizing certain practical benefits, but for the improvement of the image of *Osijek* as a city that accepts European values, reflected in the tolerance and openness for cooperation, even with those they had considered enemies and aggressors. The establishment of such cooperation carried certain risks for the city's ruling group. In the short-run it could cause them losses rather than additional support from their constituencies. All the more so because their coalition partner did not openly oppose such actions, but had a restrained attitude towards the issue.

### **Politicians at the National Level**

National politicians involved in the project also had their own mixture of personal and political motives to contribute to the cities' cooperation triangle.

Direct support from *Serbia* (within FRY) direct support of the creation and functioning of the Tuzla, *Osijek*, and Novi Sad triangle was personified by Rasim Ljajić, at that time the federal Minister for Human and Minority Rights, and Goran Svilanović, then Minister of Foreign Affairs the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Rasim Ljajić, even as a leader of opposition at the time of the Milošević's regime, participated in the rallies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, organized by anti-war NGOs. On several occasions he participated in rallies in Tuzla that were organized by the Forum of Tuzla Citizens. Therefore, it was relatively easy to attract him to the project. Considering the fact that his department covered issues of human and minority rights, the improvement of interethnic relations in the cities the project encompassed, as well as the smaller areas they belonged to, logically fell under his competences.

An additional reason for him to support cooperation among the cities was his direct participation in one of the project's events that received a lot of media attention: a marathon organized as a symbolic linking among Novi Sad, *Osijek*, and Tuzla in early October, 2003 on the Novi Sad–*Osijek*–Tuzla route. Rasim Ljajić took part in the event of seeing the marathon runners off from Freedom Square in Novi Sad, where he welcomed the efforts to overcome the weight of the immediate past and improve relations in the region through the cooperation of the cities. Goran Svilanović, then

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Serbian Republic (FRY) and who also participated, was an anti-war activist at the time of Slobodan Milošević's regime. He was involved in the work of NGO Antiwar Action, and in the Civic Alliance, which was also extremely opposed to war.

From the very beginning, the Igman Initiative, under the auspices of which the program of cooperation triangle among Tuzla, Osijek, and Novi Sad was implemented, was fully endorsed by and Goran who even participated in the work of its second session, organized in Novi Sad in March 2001. On that occasion he endorsed the idea of the Igman Initiative pertaining to the unilateral suspension of the visa regime with Croatia by SR Yugoslavia, expecting the other side to respond the same way. Svilanović had publicly endorsed cooperation in the triangle of cities and even characterized it at an international meeting as one of the most successful form of cooperation within Euro-regional cooperation in the region.

As for the politicians from *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, the project was directly endorsed by Rasim Kadić, then deputy to the minister for European integrations and Nikola Špirić, at the time co-president of the Chamber of Nations of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Both politicians attended the event of official ratification of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* in Tuzla on January 21, 2002, where they gave welcoming speeches. Rasim Kadić, as a president of the Liberal Democratic Party of BiH, which acted as member of the Alliance for BiH, had a personal affinity towards this mode of cooperation. He contributed to restoration of understanding and trust. He had previously participated at the rallies of non-governmental organizations in BiH, Croatia, and Serbia, where he talked about the restoration of the relations broken by the war. He also had an obligation, as the second official of the Ministry for European Integration, to endorse all activities that would approximate BiH to the standards of the European Union.

Nikola Špirić, representative of the Party of Independent Social Democrats of Republika Srpska in the federal parliament of BiH also had participated in several rallies of NGOs in the region. He showed a commitment to the restoration of cooperation that would contribute to the rehabilitation of the aftermath of the wars. During the ratification of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* in Tuzla, he welcomed it on behalf of the BiH Parliament.

As regards politicians from *Croatia*, only then president Stjepan Mesić endorsed the Igman Initiative and the concrete activities that functioned under its auspice. Even in 2004, he agreed to host the two other presidents at its ninth session, together with the Igman Initiative, which was held in Zagreb on September 24. This was a catalyst to further summit meetings and they have been held three times since then under the auspices of the Igman Initiative. President Mesić used every opportunity to publicly endorse the actions of the Igman Initiative and the cooperation of cities such as the triangle of Tuzla, Osijek, and Novi Sad. The motive for his involvement emanates from

his orientation towards restoration of regional cooperation, primarily with the neighboring countries, as well as from his anti-Fascist stand that he frequently expressed despite the criticism of the nationalist parties in Croatia.

### **Local and Central Administration**

The motives of economic and cultural cooperation that had inspired local mayors to reestablish cooperation were similar for local self-governments, since the mayors were often the leaders of the local parties that formed the majority of the local authorities. This cooperation was endorsed by the regional authorities like the representatives of Osijek–Baranya district and the provincial authorities in Vojvodina. It was not the case with the Tuzla Canton where the Party of Democratic Action, which was the party of national orientation, formed the pillar of the power; and which was directly opposed by the Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina Social Democrats, whose party leader was Selim Bešliagić.

Meanwhile the central authorities were only marginally involved in the cooperation, except for sporadic support for some activities, such as the support of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the SRY (at the time), led by Rasim Ljajić.

### **Non-governmental Organizations**

The three cities' civic organizations were primarily interested in cooperation. They were interconnected by common projects that they used to apply for foreign funding. Within the project, the universities in Novi Sad, Tuzla, and Osijek started to cooperate on certain common programs. Eventually in Novi Sad in the autumn of 2002, three regional chambers of commerce ratified an Agreement on Cooperation, which resulted in cooperation on a series of subjects in the following years.

Without direct international support it would have been difficult to initiate these cooperation initiatives. Foreign foundations and international institutions such as the OSCE mission to Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb provided substantial funding and they frequently ensured logistical support for some activities.

Neither the Igman Initiative, representing the broader institutional framework of cooperation, nor the triangle of cities had solid, institutionalized management structures. The center of coordination of all the triangle's activities was the Center for Regionalism, the main initiator of cooperation. The concrete activities were arranged at the level of the directors of the three NGOs and authorized representatives of the local self-governments.

## MODES OF COOPERATION

Following the official signing of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad in Tuzla on January 21, 2002, the document was ratified by the assemblies of the three cities. Prior, the document had been adopted by the executive boards of the non-governmental organizations participating in the project. The Agreement itself was developed on the basis of voluntary involvement, thereby its final provisions did not stipulate the suspension of membership of any of the signatories, but endeavored to increase the number of the subjects involved in the cooperation.

### *Box 1.*

#### **Article 15 of the Agreement**

The signatories of the Agreement have a desire to consolidate and expand cooperation among Novi Sad, Osijek, and Tuzla through the involvement of new social actors, civil, cultural and political organizations, including other municipalities in the neighboring regions and states.

Thereof, besides the multicultural cities, as new subjects and equal participants in the cooperation process initiated by this Agreement, it may include non-governmental organizations, cultural associations, media, and institutions that are proven promoters of human rights, multiculturalism, and interethnic tolerance.

This provision also reflected the participants' intention to develop this cooperation into the basis for a new Euroregion, Europannon. The region would encompass north-eastern Bosnia (Tuzla Canton, Brčko District, and four municipalities along the Drina River), eastern Slavonia (Vukovar-Srijem and Osijek-Baranya District), and Vojvodina, plus the municipalities of Šabac, Bogatić, Loznica, and Mali Zvornik.

In this micro-project of the Igman Initiative the same fluid management structure was adopted to further the functioning of this movement of non-governmental organizations. By avoiding solid institutional frames, this method proved to be very effective in enabling the Igman Initiative and its partners to overcome crises without major disruption if some of the partners or founders were no longer acceptable for the others.

For example, the Democratic Alternative Forum from Sarajevo was dissolved due to internal problems and instead, a new partner from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Forum of Citizens of Tuzla was accepted by the member of the Igman Initiative. Similarly disintegration of the triangle of cooperation was avoided when the political parties in power in Novi Sad and Osijek were unacceptable to the other partners.

Hence, cooperation of the triangle was managed by a steering body made up of partners from NGOs and authorized representatives of the three cities' administrations. General coordination and record-keeping became the responsibility of the Center for Regionalism. Formally, Novi Sad was represented by one of the vice presidents of the Novi Sad City Assembly, Osijek by a member of the city administration in charge of the international cooperation, and Tuzla by a member of the city administration in charge of social activities. Non-governmental organizations were represented by their directors, their presidents, or their authorized representatives.

Led by the principle of flexibility, the only document that regulated this cooperation was the Agreement itself, thus no rules of procedures for decision-making were adopted. All decisions were made at the steering meetings regulated by the Article 13 of the Agreement.

*Box 2.*

**Article 13 on the Management Scheme**

All participants, the Agreement signatories, shall, through their representatives, give consideration to the implementation of the Agreement once a year and adopt a framework plan for the forthcoming joint activities. These working and consultative meetings shall be held every year in another city as part of cultural events and actions and their participants shall be from Novi Sad, Osijek, and Tuzla.

At the meetings, all the decisions were made by consensus, and there were no cases recorded in which a member of the coordination team, after the discussion, had a different opinion from the other members. Proceeding from the principle of mutual trust, each member of the coordination—according to the general principles of coordination—then represents this triangle in his or her communication with other subjects. In case there were certain arrangements that implied concrete obligations of the other participants in cooperation, their prior agreement shall be sought.

As regards to reporting on cooperation to the competent municipal authorities within the Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad triangle, the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* did not stipulate that it was compulsory; however, Article 12 regulates that:

“...city councils or city assemblies shall investigate problems and the conditions for improvement of international relations according to their programs of work and the actual situation. Accordingly, they shall endeavor to put these issues on agenda of the local authorities once a year.”

The public was informed about the triangle of cities through the regular activities within the cooperation and at press conferences or other public events, facilitated from time to time by the cities involved in the cooperation. Reporting to foundations or donors was done in accordance to rules of the foundations, or contracts concluded with them. One should bear in mind for these funds or particular projects within the cooperation that mainly those non-governmental organizations applied which had participated in the cooperation were obliged to submit reports to their donors.

There were not any external evaluations or control of the cooperation except in cases of implementation of concrete projects, the evaluation of which was often performed by the donors.

## Financing of Cooperation

As regards to financing and other issues related to the institutionalization of the Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad triangle, one should consider the fact that the establishment and functioning of other triangles of cooperation were built upon the experiences of this one. Thus, for example, a triangle of cooperation at the tri-border point of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia, just started to function in 2008, following seven years of effort by the Igman Initiative and the EastWest Institute,<sup>4</sup> and was fully formalized.

The level of formalization is directly proportional to the level of initial suspicions and distrust of the parties involved in cooperation. Since within the Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad cooperation triangle—specifically, among the people who carried it out—there were no traces of distrust. On the contrary, they had extremely good personal relations, reflected in the spontaneity of their relations.

In this respect, the parties involved in the cooperation did not have to seek or allocate funds, because of the Center for Regionalism's role to manage institutional support for the Igman Initiative. Making a common fund was not an option, as securing funds for particular projects was believed to be a better option. Subsequently, the municipalities and the NGOs, outside of the projects, only financed the travel and other costs as functions of the cooperation's coordination as well as some public events. However, human resources potential that was made available, as well as offices and the equipment used for the activities in the triangle of cooperation, could be considered in-kind contributions.

This method of financing was applied throughout the cooperation. Accordingly, neither the local self-governments levied any specific taxes nor allocated any funds for financing this mode of cooperation. This triangle, unlike other ones that were established later (Dubrovnik–Trebinje–Herceg Novi), did not develop projects to resolve

infrastructural issues. Nor did it apply for large foreign-sponsored projects. And no technical assistance was requested from foreign donors.

This was a consequence of a four-year delay in cooperation that occurred due to unwillingness of certain political parties in Novi Sad and later in Osijek. Following the last local elections in Novi Sad and Osijek, this problem was overcome. We can expect that, with the complete change of political climate and experiences gained in this triangle until now, the scope of cooperation will be expanded and larger, more costly projects will be put on the agenda.

As regards administrative costs, the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad covered the main part of the costs through institutional support received from the US-based Rockefeller and James Stewart Mott foundations.

## Activities and Projects

Since the triangle of cooperation Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad was the first in the region, it was, in a way, a pilot project on which experiences for further work on establishment of new similar triangles or circles of cooperation were derived. This was also one of the reasons this cooperation was characterized by spontaneous provision of initiatives and minimum formalism. Along these lines, we could talk about two kinds of activities or projects that were performed under the umbrella of the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance. The first kind encompasses projects or activities initiated by the local self-governments or partnering non-governmental organizations, while the second one encompasses initiatives of the organizations and interest groups from the three cities that were directed towards carriers of the cooperation.

## Cultural and Sports Activities

The first group includes the following projects and activities:

- *Cultural Cooperation*

The inaugural event “Novi Sad Days of Culture” was held in Tuzla from May 18–20, 2000, under the auspice of the Assembly of the City of Novi Sad and the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia. Following this success, various cultural programs flowed between the two cities. This mode of cultural exchange lasted till 2004 when Radicals came to power in Novi Sad. In the field of culture, cooperation between Osijek and Tuzla was not interrupted upon the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, except during the period of the war when the two cities were under siege.

- *Agreement on Cooperation between Tuzla Cantonal Television and TV Apolo*

Tuzla Cantonal television and Apolo television in Novi Sad signed an Agreement on Cooperation in the middle of 2002, under the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*. Based on this agreement, programs produced by the two televisions were exchanged as well as information on events in the two cities. The agreement ceased to function when Radicals came in power in Novi Sad and the whole leadership as well as the programming of Apolo television changed.

- *Novi Sad–Osijek–Tuzla Marathon*

The athletic marathon Novi Sad–Osijek–Tuzla aimed to symbolically link the three cities through sports. Intercity sports had been disrupted by the war and this event contributed to the reestablishment of competition. At the same time it was designed to create among the general public a climate that would be favorable for more cooperation. The marathon, in which twenty marathon runners from the three cities took part, started at Freedom Square in Novi Sad. An hour before the beginning of the marathon, *tambura* orchestras from the three cities played one after another on the stage, helping to attract a greater number of citizens and provided them with an opportunity to enjoy beautiful music specific to the Pannon Plain all three cities belong to.

Prior to the marathon, the runners and the gathered citizens of Novi Sad were greeted by Aleksandar Popov, Director of the Center for Regionalism; Borislav Novaković, President of the City of Novi Sad Assembly; Rasim Ljajić, then Minister for Human and Minority Rights in FRY; and Mark Davison, Deputy Chief of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. Like the marathon participants, they wore shirts printed with “*Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad*” on one side, and “Athletic Marathon on the Peace Paths” on the other. Upon the concluding their speeches all four of them, together with approximately one hundred children from Novi Sad elementary schools, ran in front of the marathon. Since the marathon runners attracted the attention of numerous media, their pictures were published on the front pages of of four national dailies in Serbia. In Osijek, the citizens organized a ceremonial reception for the marathon runners, and they were especially greeted by the deputy mayor of the city. The marathon runners stayed in Osijek and continued their trip the next day in the direction of Tuzla, where their reception was part of the city’s anniversary program. Both in Osijek and Tuzla, the local media paid great attention to this event, and achieving the main objective of the organizers, to relax mutual relations and set the stage for other activities and projects within the triangle.

## Business, Academic, and Environmental Cooperation

The second group includes the following projects and activities:

- *Agreement on Cooperation of the Regional Chambers of Commerce of Novi Sad, Osijek, and Tuzla*

In the fold of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad, the three regional chambers of commerce signed an Agreement on Mutual Cooperation at the end of 2002. As stipulated by the Agreement, exchanges of economic delegations from Osijek and Novi Sad were organized on several occasions. Members of the Chamber of Commerce of Novi Sad also participated in the conferences in Osijek, where they presented their programs. Delegations from Osijek and Novi Sad were regularly invited to visit the annual Tuzla fair held in April.

Chambers of commerce cooperation was reflected in exchange of information on positive legal regulations and experiences that were important for their members. Unfortunately, data banks of the mentioned regional chambers of commerce do not contain any exact information on the scope of cooperation among economic subjects from the three cities.

- *Cooperation of the Universities of the Three Cities*

In 2003, the University of Novi Sad signed an Agreement on Cooperation with the University of Tuzla. Based on this Agreement, the two universities and their students' organizations cooperated together for over five years. Professors from the department for German Language of the Faculty of Philosophy already have been teaching at the University of Tuzla for four years and there has been a continuing exchange of the teaching staff between the Faculties of Technical Science in Novi Sad and Tuzla. Within the mentioned agreement, the UNESCO Department for Entrepreneurship in Novi Sad has cooperated with the Center for Innovations of the University of Tuzla, and conferences and symposia have been held as part of the regular exchanges of the two universities.

There has not been any agreement of cooperation between the University of Novi Sad and the University of Osijek, yet even without this formal document, the exchange of professors has been carried out in the form of cooperation between the UNESCO Department for Entrepreneurship of the University of Novi Sad and the same department in Osijek. It has been common practice for students from Osijek to do their doctorate degree at the Agricultural and Technical Faculties of Novi Sad.

Cooperation was not interrupted between the universities of Tuzla and Osijek after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, and simply continued after the

end of the war. Hence this cooperation has been much larger and encompassed almost all faculties of the two universities, as well as the students' organizations.

- *Cooperation between the Young Conservationists and Environmental Organizations of the Three Cities*

Cooperation between the Young Conservationists from Novi Sad and related organizations from Osijek commenced in 2003 and included two organizations: the Allergy Association and Compost Center. Partnership with the Allergy Association within the project "Living without Ragweed" had several objectives: informing and educating citizens, environmental inspectors, physicians, utility services, and journalists about invasive ragweed, which triggers severe allergic reactions in more than 20 percent of citizens of all ages.

Ragweed plagues all the countries of the Pannonian basin and common posters and educational materials were distributed in coordination with a series round tables in Osijek and Novi Sad, with the participation of experts from Austria, Slovenia, Croatia (Zagreb and Osijek), Hungary, and Romania. A further number of seminars, meetings, and joint activities were held with the cooperation of environmentalist organizations from the three cities.

An elementary school in Tuzla also held a conservationist, eco-camp in the mountains of Fruška Gora in 2005 with the participation of a group of children and their teacher Ahmo Ibišević. The children enjoyed seven days of ecological education and companionship in nature.

## Transparency

The books and records of the cooperation triangle have been fully open to the public throughout. This was in the best interest of all the signatories of the *Agreement on Inter-ethnic Tolerance* and coordinators of cooperation, for a more favorable public climate was created for understanding that this cooperation, despite the burden of the recent past and war that led to the termination of cooperation, could work. Public transparency was ensured in several ways. Firstly, before signing, the Agreement was promoted at several public forums that were covered by the media. Afterwards, when implementation of cooperation based on the Agreement started, there were also several public presentations in all three cities where the citizens had an opportunity to be familiarized with the progress and results up to that time.

Members of this triangle of cooperation made efforts to have all activities within its framework covered by media. It was of a great help that a certain number of journalists,

primarily from Novi Sad and Tuzla, were directly involved in creation and promotion of the cooperation. As regards Novi Sad, we should firstly mention local television Apolo, which under the auspice of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* signed the Agreement on cooperation with the cantonal television from Tuzla. One of the independent electronic media that should be mentioned is Novi Sad Radio 021, which regularly followed the triangle's events and even organized a special forum in Novi Sad dedicated to this topic, attended by the three cities' representatives.

Good media coverage was also provided by the two Novi Sad daily newspapers, *Dnevnik* and *Gradanski list*. The news on this cooperation was sporadically published in some Belgrade media, such as daily newspapers *Politika*, *Novosti*, and *Blic*. In Tuzla, the activities within the triangle of cooperation were regularly covered by cantonal and local television, local radio Kameleon, and by Tuzla's newspaper. Occasionally, information on the topic was announced on BiH television, and in daily newspapers *Oslobodjenje* and *Dnevni avaz*.

The situation was the worst in Osijek where local media were under control of extremely right-wing political allies. The media rarely issued information on this cooperation, and rarely wrote about it in the regional daily newspaper *Glas Slavonije*. In the national Croatian media there was almost no information on this cooperation. In Novi Sad, meanwhile, the Serbian Radical party brought to a halt much of the city-founded TV Apolo's public information programming after being elected in 2004.

## Sustainability of Triangles of Cities

As previously emphasized, there were two periods in the development of this triangle of cooperation. The first one included the idea of its *establishment* and activities linked to this, as well as the activities that ran until the time of the signing of the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* on January 21, 2002, and until the coming into power of the Radical Party in Novi Sad and Croatian Party of Rights in Osijek. This period was the most intensive for this cooperation and the three cities' administrations participated in their full capacities.

The period that came after this one was the period in which *cooperation continued* thanks to municipal administration of Tuzla and non-governmental organizations, signatories of the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance, and other organizations, which prior to that time had joined the cooperation. Yet, the official cooperation between Novi Sad–Osijek and Novi Sad–Tuzla did not completely cease during that period. Just after the political change in circumstances in the two cities in 2008, the perspective opened for involvement of the two cities' administrations in the activities of the triangle of cooperation again.

Several other facts pertain to triangles of cooperation of cities. Even though the model that was created within this triangle of cooperation was used at the establishment of other triangles, experiences showed that each triangle is different and the specificities should be carefully taken into account during the establishment of triangles, and while their activities are planned and run. As an illustration, priorities differ when setting up cooperation among cities from the former war zone and from those cities with no negative mutual experience in the recent past.

## SUMMARY

### Accomplishments

One of the main accomplishments of Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad triangle is its contribution to the establishment of a model that other triangles of cooperation and later Philia itself were built upon. It is necessary to mention several accomplishments here. First, this triangle of cooperation indicated the advantages of the model in which main partners in cooperation are not just city administrations, but local non-governmental organizations as well. Thus, their *sustainability* was achieved even after local elections when political groups were elected that did not support the cooperation or were unacceptable to the other partners. This cooperation is significantly enriched by partnership of the civil and public sector, bringing the project closer to the citizens and their needs.

The other significant moment is that this triangle of cooperation generated the very *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad, which later on, with certain modification, *became a model* for other triangles of cooperation and the basic program document of Philia. This document received high praise from the representatives of the Council of Europe, who participated in the founding assembly of Philia in Zagreb in July 2005. This triangle of cooperation, as well as the other ones that were established later, proved to be the best model of cooperation that contributed to overcoming of the burden of recent past and psychological barriers from the war.

However, cooperation within the triangles of cities, and even within Philia itself as an umbrella of the whole cooperation, was attributed to the creation of diplomacy among the cities. Namely, normalization of relations among the countries of the Dayton Agreement has had good but also many bad moments, and under such circumstances the cooperation among cities is a constant struggle to overcome stalemates in the normalization of relations.

People in cities, especially in the border regions where they depend on one another, are interested in the most *liberal methods* to regulate certain issues such as the flow of people and goods across the border. Through their joint pressure on national state au-

thorities, they quicken the establishment of conditions that will make their economic, cultural, and other ways of cooperation easier and remove barriers that stand in the way to their development.

Finally, regions that still suffer from the effects of war and that also may be burdened with a transitional economy or society, cooperation of cities and non-governmental organizations is able to create a better overall climate and environment.

## Obstacles

Since the Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad cooperation triangle was the first of its kind, its establishment and development was accompanied by initial mistakes and difficulties. As previously mentioned, all the participants in the project opted for a flexible model of cooperation. This option clearly had some advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of the model was that local political changes in Novi Sad and Osijek did not trigger complete termination of the project, but it was continued, although with less intensity than before.

Such a model was a reflection of the reality in the three cities: their administration did not express willingness to implement any higher level of institutionalization, as opposed to the cities at the tri-border point Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia. Namely, only the local authorities in Tuzla were governed by one party, but Novi Sad and Osijek were ruled by a coalition of parties, where all coalition partners shared the same view regarding the cooperation.

This loose structure had certain weaknesses, since it *lacked systematic planning*, and accordingly did not develop a greater number of joint projects, which could have been attractive to donors. Therefore, some segments of cooperation were arranged individually, the activities all had the elements of *spontaneity* in planning and implementation, while the representatives of the three cities and the three NGOs mainly had coordinating roles.

Still, with the above-mentioned weaknesses, it has been proved that the most important thing was to create a favorable climate for the reestablishment of the cooperation that was severed by the war and to have the attention of potential partners in the other two cities.

Since the cooperation in this triangle lasted in its full capacity just over two years, there was no chance to upgrade or development better planning, organization of joint projects, or applications to donors. Therefore the greatest loss of this project was the *defeat of the democratic powers* at the local elections in Novi Sad and Osijek that disabled the future development of this triangle of cooperation and upgrading of its initial ideas.

Just after the political change again in Novi Sad and Osijek in 2008, a perspective was opened for continuation of the cooperation from the point where it had ceased

in 2004. This new start can use experiences of other triangles of cooperation—such as such as the one at the tri-border point Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia—that has built upon the initial experiences and program elements of the Tuzla–Osijek–Novi Sad triangle.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The pillars of the teams were Jovan Komšić, Aleksandar Popov, and Stanislava Pribiš from Novi Sad; Vehid Šehić, Mirjana Mišić Jugović, and Franjo Kovačević from Tuzla; and Tihomir Salajić and Katarina Kruhonja from Osijek.
- <sup>2</sup> For example, the Citizens' Pact for South-Eastern Europe, founded in 2000 by the Inter Church Peace Council (IKV) from the Netherlands.
- <sup>3</sup> Specifically, the greatest debate concerned the “Croatianized” version of the title of the Agreement, which was translated in the City Administration of Osijek as “*Sporazum o etničkoj snošljivosti*.” Though *snošljivost* and *tolerance* are close in meaning, some participants thought that former implies merely “putting up with each other.” *Tolerance*, which is used in international documents, suggested interaction. Finally, the text remained as it had been originally proposed.
- <sup>4</sup> The EastWest Institute is an international, not-for-profit organizations “focused on confronting critical challenges that endanger peace.” See: <http://www.ewi.info>.



# Truth, Responsibility, and Reconciliation: Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica

*Boban Tomić*

*The establishment of cooperation between Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica—the scene of one of the greatest crimes committed in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a symbol of the atrocities of war—may become a model for overcoming the consequences of war and hatred, on the basis of joint activities of non-governmental organizations and local authorities in these two municipalities.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bajina Bašta, a municipality in Serbia, and Srebrenica, a municipality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are divided, or linked, by the Drina river. Cooperation between these two municipalities while part of the former Yugoslav federation was extremely good, including a high level of interaction in economic areas. During the wars of the 1990s, an estimated 7,000 civilians were massacred in a few days in July 1995 in Srebrenica. A site of one of the greatest mass crimes against humanity since the Second World War, the town became a symbol of suffering. Srebrenica was in fact shelled from the territory of Bajina Bašta municipality—more precisely, from the slopes of the mountain of Tara in Serbia. Thus, many in Srebrenica have resisted renewing cooperation with their neighbors after the cessation of war. However, seeking to overcome recent tragedies, local civic organizations took the lead in re-building ties. In 2005, upon the initiative of Agora, an NGO from Bajina Bašta, and the Center for Regionalism, from Novi Sad, representatives of the two municipalities—including local officials and NGOs—signed an Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance. This agreement served as the basis for reestablishing intermunicipal cooperation in a range of areas, based on principles of tolerance and trust. Among the most important cross-border initiatives has been the creation of a Cross-Border Development Agency, which has made strong economic linkages between the two municipalities as well as with neighboring municipalities on both sides of the Drina. The renewal of economic cooperation has been a crucial step in dismantling rigid barriers that were created during war.

## Traditions of Cooperation

The municipalities of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica are neighbors on the border of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, situated in the middle part of the border strip along the Drina River. Both municipalities are characterized by rather similar structures, resources, and problems. What differentiates them to a great extent is the ethnic structure: Bajina Bašta, on the Serbian side of the border, has an approximately 96-percent Orthodox Serbian population, while Srebrenica, on the Bosnian side of the border is a multiethnic municipality. Before the war it was approximately 70 percent Muslim Bosniaks and nearly 25 percent Orthodox Serbian.

Figure 1.  
Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica

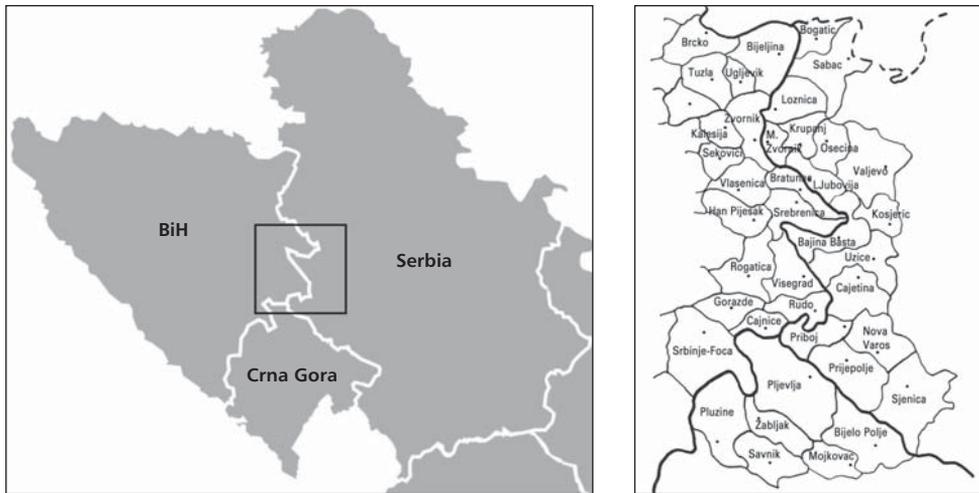


Table 1.  
Demographic Data: Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica

	Popula- tion	Population by gender		Population		Age (years)			
		Women	Men	Rural	Urban	<20	20-30	30-50	>50
Srebrenica, before war*	36,000	52%	48%	78%	22%	18%	12%	41%	29%
Srebrenica**	6,000	53%	47%	76%	24%	15%	8%	41%	38%
Bajina Bašta***	29,900	51%	49%	61%	39%	18%	12%	31%	39%

Sources: \* National Census, 1991, SFRY.

\*\* UNHCR, approximate census in the field, 1996.

\*\*\* Census of population, 2002, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

In the era of state socialism, Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica were closely connected both by physical, geographical, and social ties. The Drina River presently is the border between these two countries (Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the two municipalities; however, that was by no means an impediment to construct the largest Yugoslav hydroelectric power plant (HPP) there. For years, the power capacity of Bajina Bašta HPP exceeded that of the Yugoslav part of the Đerdap HPP on the Danube River. From 1961 to 1965, people and companies throughout the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) participated in the construction of Bajina Bašta HPP; this included locals from the municipalities of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica. Some time later, a Reversible Hydroelectric Power Plant was also constructed here, which was the first of its kind in Yugoslavia, where the efforts in the construction and subsequent benefits were shared among the inhabitants of these two municipalities.

These two municipalities have also had joint projects in the field of infrastructure development. One extension of the waterworks network from Bajina Bašta passed across the bridge on the Drina River, supplying potable water to approximately 20 percent of the territory of Srebrenica. The electrical energy and telephone network from Bajina Bašta also covered some parts of the territory of Srebrenica where it was not possible or economically profitable for Srebrenica to construct these networks. A large number of people living in Bajina Bašta went to work every day in the municipality of Srebrenica, especially from the area around the village of Skelani. Also, every morning several thousand people would go from villages around Srebrenica and Skelani to Bajina Bašta to work in local factories.

The majority of workers were employed in the wood-processing industry (*Crni vrh*), construction industry (*Razvoj* and *Elektroizgradnja*), the public utility company (*12 Septembar*), clothes manufacturing (*Konfekcija Tarateks* and *Kadinjača*), electric energy distribution (*Elektrodistribucija*), and other factories. A smaller number of people, around 200 of them, were employed in the public sector in schools, healthcare clinics, and public administration. These workers generally had very low or no qualifications at all.

A great number of secondary school students in Bajina Bašta came from villages in the area of Srebrenica, whereas healthcare services, including the maternity hospital, were common for all inhabitants of Bajina Bašta and one half of the municipality of Srebrenica.

A part of the Srebrenica municipality bordering the municipality of Bajina Bašta was very poorly connected to the center of Srebrenica municipality by 45 kilometers of poor mountain roads. For that reason, inhabitants from that part of Srebrenica used to cross the river to reach Bajina Bašta (two kilometers of paved road), where they received healthcare services, education, found jobs and enjoyed other civil rights that met their needs.

Almost half of the inhabitants in Srebrenica were born in the hospital of Bajina Bašta, thus obtaining the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia. The capacity of the health center in Bajina Bašta was sufficient to receive all these people. Schools had a sufficient

number of classrooms, whereas factories, sport centers, and public facilities in Bajina Bašta were constructed under the assumption that inhabitants of Srebrenica, inclining towards this area, would also use them.

Most of the jointly resolved problems were examples of good cooperation among the closest of neighbors. Local political and social elites efficiently controlled all development projects, including the and mutual financial and material assistance for the construction of churches and mosques for Serbs and Bosniaks, respectively. The social life in both municipalities was unthinkable without the participation of all friends, irrespective of their religion and national affiliation. A great number of Serbs and Bosniaks had mixed marriages, which only proved that, in practice, there existed a strong citizen orientation of Serbs and Bosniaks in both municipalities.

## History

*“I have extended a hand of reconciliation and that is my revenge. After being kept in prison and tortured, my goal is to achieve benefit for all citizens and overcome the recent horrifying events, and this may only be attained through an honest approach and cooperation.”*

—Abdurahman Malkic, Mayor of Srebrenica

Before the beginning of the Bosnian war, people in this area lived peacefully, building their communities, villages, and municipalities in harmony. No one feared the memories of past conflicts, because faith in the contemporary world and modern processes was far stronger—although in the collective consciousnesses of Serbs and Bosniaks there are strong mythological concepts of national fights for survival in the past. This consciousness is deeply rooted in the Middle Ages, when conflicts between Orthodox Serbs and Muslim Turks spread throughout the Balkans. However, the Serbs and Bosniaks who lived in the Tito era neither fostered nor encouraged their sensitive national notion of historical injustice. They lived in a harmonious, communist pattern, in which the national identity was closely associated with the proletarian ideas of communism, brotherhood, and unity.

When the war broke out, the old wounds opened, and the spirit of the past irretrievably confronted recent friends and good neighbors. Differences became insurmountable and visions of the future could no longer coincide. After the fall of the communist regime (when Tito died, and in particular prior to the beginning of the dissolution of SFRY) in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the existing democratic procedures did not suit the future of all these potentially new nations.

Instead, as early as in the late 1990s, the region was struck severely by nationalism and a strong xenophobic environment emerged. Strong nationalist ideologies were deeply rooted among a confused populace of peasants, workers, and clerks. The bitter fruit of war brought suffering, persecution, genocide, and collective trauma. Being greater in number and provided with moral and financial assistance from Serbia, Serbs were superior to Bosniaks living in the area of Srebrenica and its surroundings. They soon took over the control of this territory, leaving over 15,000 Bosniaks surrounded in two small enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa. During the war, these enclaves were under United Nations protection.

These havens were not effectively protected and, on the contrary, perhaps they were even sacrificed. Towards the end of the war, Bosnian Serbs, under the command of General Ratko Mladić, took control over both enclaves, causing over 8,000 Srebrenica Bosniaks to perish. This bloodshed reached a climax in the hostilities between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, although, towards the end of 1995, both countries signed the Dayton Agreement in order to cease further bloodshed.

The world characterized the massacre in Srebrenica as genocide, with General Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, the leader of Bosnian Serbs at the time, as perpetrators of this crime. Bosnian Serbs, as well as Serbs in the rump state, have denied their involvement in this massacre till this time, and they still deny it. Not all the perpetrators have still been brought to justice and many are at large.

At the end of 2000, Milošević's nationalist regime collapsed in Serbia, and in the "October Revolution" the democratic powers, gathered under the Democratic Opposition of Serbia, also won the elections at the local level in Bajina Bašta. Reform-oriented parties managed to win the majority votes in the local assembly and assume a proactive course regarding the problems that existed at that time in the municipality. In addition to a great number of projects aimed at rehabilitation and development of communal infrastructure, as well as the economic development, the local authority in Bajina Bašta promptly started investigating the possibility to reestablish ties with the municipalities with which it had cooperated in the socialist era.

First of all, contacts were made with Bajina Bašta's closest neighbor, Srebrenica, to be followed by its sister-municipality of Krško in Slovenia. The cooperation with Srebrenica was a historical and practical necessity, as these two municipalities are naturally connected, allowing them to resolve their problems together in a much more harmonious manner. Apart from numerous problems that emerged during the war, it was to reestablish the fundamental trust among ethnic groups that could only be achieved by the process to determine the truth of what actually happened, then to establish the responsibility for what happened, in order to eventually reach the reconciliation and trust. Political elites at the time had no problems recognizing the common values and agreeing about these issues.

The problem was only the fact that common citizens still had not grasped the essence of what happened during the war, and consequently had a difficult time

understanding the level of responsibility as well as bearers of it. Political leaders of these two municipalities had no disagreement regarding this issue. However, in order to establish a full and proper cooperation, it was necessary to gradually transfer the good and positive energy that was a characteristic of the municipal authorities of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica to the political establishment, entrepreneurs, NGO sector, citizens, and the entire of society.

In order to reestablish the cooperation between Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica and develop it to the full extent, first of all it was necessary to build the capacities for cooperation at the local self-government level regarding the economy, non-governmental organizations, and the media. In this respect, authorities in both municipalities determined the activities that were to gradually create the conditions for a comprehensive cooperation, which used to exist between them. Considering the fact that neither of the municipalities had the resources and institutional mechanisms required for such a serious activity, it was necessary to address international donors for assistance and support of the proposed intermunicipal cooperation.

The Fund for an Open Society–Serbia was the first organization that fully grasped the situation in the field, as well as the tasks ahead. During the war, the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia provided financial and material assistance to the processes of information exchange in the cross-border area, by supporting the activities of the local independent Radio Television (RTV) Bajina Bašta. This cooperation provided the basis for defining the courses of action in the field of information exchange and cultural exchange between Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica that were initiated during 2001, with the support of the Fund for an Open Society.

In 2002, the process of institutional strengthening was joined by the Citizens Forum of Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad (Serbia). These two organizations had very important roles in that period, by providing support and encouragement to the people in the field. These organizations have been promoting and supporting the ideas of cooperation, good neighbor relations, and postwar rehabilitation even before and during the conflict.

They, with the local politicians, non-governmental organizations, and independent media, implemented the project of developing a cross-border NGO and an economic and information exchange. On two occasions, the Fund for an Open Society supported these projects, which resulted in developing the cross-border cooperation agency, which is expected to start its work in the near future.

But how did the citizens of Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta feel about the reestablishment of cooperation between these two areas? In the first phase of cooperation, starting in 2001, the majority of citizens still did not have enough of the required information; however, they felt ready and willing to heal the wounds of war and start new lives. The main problem encountered was related to the perception of Serbs, when it came to the process of establishing responsibility for the genocide of Bosniaks, which was well underway at The Hague International Tribunal. The feeling that they would be col-

lectively punished and stigmatized was stronger with Serbs than the feeling of reality, which posed a great impediment.

The nationalist Serbian ideologues who were not eradicated in the “democratic revolution” in 2000 were the source of threats and intimidations towards activists and the political leaders of the municipality of Bajina Bašta, with the undoubted message that there should be no cooperation with Srebrenica. However, the cross-border cooperation supporters and protagonists were not intimidated by those threats, but responded by taking more actions.

Still, these tensions among the Serbian part of the population have not diminished until today. On the contrary, the assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003 additionally complicated the situation to the disadvantage of progressive forces. Since 2004, the conservative government of Vojislav Koštunica in Belgrade restrained the reforms and reactivated old communist personnel. It has aggravated the interethnic relations towards Serbia’s neighbors, particularly towards Muslims. This became the millstone around the neck of local activists from Bajina Bašta, and local politicians and entrepreneurs who spent the previous years trying to reestablish the fragile relations with Bosniaks from Srebrenica. Vojislav Koštunica led to a comeback of nationalists and Milošević’s followers, whereas NGO activists and reform-oriented politicians were out of favor. After 2003, any form of cooperation between Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica became unstable, particularly when the new, strengthened nationalists in Bajina Bašta relieved the reform-oriented president of his post in the municipality. He was replaced because of his efforts to establish cross-border cooperation with Srebrenica.

The perception of the local Bosniak public in the municipality of Srebrenica was quite different, and generally moderate in respect of the problems present in Bajina Bašta. Local self-government of the multiethnic municipality of Srebrenica (comprising Serbs and Bosniaks) understood the problems in Serbia and Bajina Bašta. Their position in the period after 2004, when the reform-oriented local parties lost their leading position in Bajina Bašta, was neutral. The authorities of Srebrenica responded to events and certain minor activities initiated in Bajina Bašta by the NGO sector. However, in that period there was no direct or official cooperation between the two municipalities. Primarily due to the fact that there were no positive signals coming from the newly-elected, conservative local authorities of Bajina Bašta. Representatives of Bosniaks and Serbs in the Srebrenica Assembly made constant contributions to the activities of cross-border cooperation between the two municipalities.

## INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Cooperation between the municipalities of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica in the period immediately following the Bosnian war and at the beginning of the democratization process in Serbia was based on the incentive that the two municipal leaders restore the

old ties and improve the relations between institutions and citizens. However, this new era brought along new challenges for the actors of cooperation between the two municipalities in the form of numerous common problems, ideas, strivings, and visions.

In accordance with the transition processes that had already become their reality, Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica had to find their own, local response to the challenges of transition. Apart from the tragic war, both municipalities had hundreds of unemployed people, social services were on the verge of collapse, and almost all areas of public life still were unregulated. In early 2000, the population of Srebrenica was less than 5,000, of which some 1,000 inhabitants lived in the town, while the remaining population lived in the surrounding settlements. The population was mainly Serbian, since Bosniaks only reappeared from exile to their former, prewar homes very slowly.

The factories were destroyed, and apart from one factory, “11Mart,” there was no industry. Catering, trade, agriculture, and the public sector were the only business activities in operation. The municipality was living on donations from the international community. In Bajina Bašta, the economy was ruined owing to a poorly-conducted privatization processes, causing almost all factories to stop operating overnight. Only large public enterprises kept functioning in the field of forestry and hydro-electric energy production. The number of the employed used to be 8,500 and was reduced by half, and the number of the unemployed increased by more than half, from 2,000 to 4,200.

Public finance management was quite critical, as both kin states (Serbia and Republika Srpska, BiH) were just preparing their fiscal and monetary systems for European integration. The fiscal decisions were centralized and local authorities lacked the human resources, as well as the material and other conditions of finance discipline. High poverty and unemployment rates among the population were a serious problem. There was a complete separation of the lower and upper classes, particularly the local elites who illegally and under dubious circumstances came into possession of substantial capital and consequently accumulated much social power and influence. These problems were equally present in both municipalities, putting the burden mostly on ordinary people. The middle class almost disappeared in the period of war destruction and social stratification.

## Political Developments

The idea of initiating joint actions between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta was in many ways significant, but most of all, it was to demonstrate the political maturity of local reform-oriented politicians and the determination of local authorities to start resolving the accumulated problems. Most local politicians were willing to be involved in joint actions of the two municipalities but their opinions were split. Reformists clearly were distinguished in both municipalities: their basic orientation was the modernization of

society on the principles of Euro-Atlantic integration and acceptance of the responsibility for the future of the local community.

Local authorities in Srebrenica comprised Serbs and Bosniaks. The Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA), which was constructive party at national level, was the majority party of the Bosniaks. Serbs were represented by Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), burdened by the war's heritage of nationalism, along with a smaller number of representatives of the reform-oriented SNSD party (Party of Independent Social Democrats). The majority of the council in Bajina Bašta was comprised of reform-oriented parties of the opposition.

On the other side there were nationalists who, at first, did not obstruct the processes of cooperation and joint projects. However, their influence started to grow after 2003. Following the reform-oriented democratic leaders in Bajina Bašta, the cooperation with Srebrenica was questioned. Later, the reformists regained control over the key municipal functions in Bajina Bašta, which led to the continuation of cooperation.

Nevertheless, in the relation of local politicians towards cooperation of these two municipalities, one may notice both the strong nationalist policy and xenophobia of the Serbian population in both municipalities, being isolation-oriented and regressive in respect to their Bosniak neighbors. Serbian nationalist politicians in the local community were consistent with the implementation of radical and nationalist ideas that were the basis for the Bosnian war and genocide. The only purpose of the occasional pacification of nationalists in the period from 2000 to 2003 was to mislead the reformists and strengthen the nationalists.

The policy of disagreement and misunderstanding caused a lot of damage to all forms of cooperation and progress in cross-border cooperation. Their actions were directed against organizations in the non-governmental sector like *Drina Mreže* (The Drina Networks) and *Agora* from Bajina Bašta, as well as against the independent media like Radio-Television (RTV) *Prima* and individuals who were the key persons when it came to cooperation with Srebrenica.

That period was characterized by frequent anonymous death threats, open political attacks on NGO sector activists, speeches of hatred in the local council of Bajina Bašta, media campaigns, and economic repression, manifested in a number of job dismissals. The activist Vladimir Jevtić was dismissed from his position as a primary school teacher by a hidden "suggestion" that "he should not be socializing with Muslims." The former president of the Municipality of Bajina Bašta, Mr. Boban Tomić, was dismissed from his function as the president of local parliament by nationalists, which was followed by frequent threats, police surveillance, various searches, and framed court charges against him.

Nationalists acted legally through the speeches they delivered in the Municipal Assembly of Bajina Bašta. They told untruths and referred to the cooperation between these two municipalities as an act of treason against Serbs, thereby sending a call for public

justice. There were also frequent anonymous threats to activists, as well as graffiti writings on the walls of the Municipal Assembly and RTV *Prima* buildings in Bajina Bašta.

Nevertheless, owing to good organization and support, mostly provided by international organizations, all nationalist pressures were successfully blocked. Support provided by international donors (Balkan Trust for Democracy and Fund for an Open Society) included the provision of funds for three projects of cross-border cooperation implemented by Agora NGO and Radio-Television Prima from Bajina Bašta. The donors granted the funds that were used to organize joint open forums, public discussions, and radio and television shows promoting the culture of interethnic dialogue, cooperation between the two cross-border municipalities, truth, responsibility, and reconciliation.

On the territory of the municipality of Srebrenica, the resistance towards cooperation between the two municipalities was manifested in a latent form by the most extreme nationalist policies of Serbs and Bosniaks. However, there were no cases of open actions or hate speech. Instead, despite of disagreements, the atmosphere of tolerance prevailed in Srebrenica, and all the activities for cross-border cooperation were accepted in an unreserved and cordial manner.

The dominant religious group in Bajina Bašta is Orthodox Serb, while in Srebrenica the religious groups include Orthodox Serbs and Muslim Bosniaks. In terms of cooperation between these two municipalities, the representatives of the Islamic religious community and Serbian Orthodox Church had no problems in their relations. On the contrary, their resistance towards this cooperation was unnoticeable. The clergymen participated in public events and they always undoubtedly supported the peace events and cooperation.

The cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, although slightly decreased in 2004, was quite intense in the field of municipal administrative cooperation. Since the start of cooperation in 2001 until the present day, the two municipal administrations have maintained a high level of cooperation, particularly when it comes to certain actions or concrete needs of citizens or organizations. All administrative, as well as general affairs, are performed without obstacles; therefore, this form of cooperation is considered to be excellent. The cooperation of municipal administrations is significant, but its character is only formal, as it involves only clerks, without the participation of politicians or decision-makers.

## Civic Cooperation

NGOs and their representatives were intensely involved in the cooperation, primarily linking the local organizations with active participation of women and the youth. In Srebrenica, during 2005, organizations like *Biznis forum* (Business Forum), *Želja* (Desire), *Žene Podrinja* (Women of the Drina Basin), and *Orhideja* (Orchid) organized

joint actions with the partner organizations from Bajina Bašta. They received financial support for environmental actions from the Regional Environmental Center in Budapest. In Bajina Bašta, non-governmental organizations like *Ekološki pokret* (Environmental Movement), *Drina Mreža*, *Agora*, and *Tara Biosfera* (the Tara Biosphere) took part in these actions and have maintained a good relations until the present day.

In particular, environmental activists and like-minded fishermen from Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta cooperated to conduct numerous joint actions on the Drina River. These efforts were supported in 2007 by the CARE International's Drina Valley Tourism Development Program, funded by the Netherlands in the period from 2005 to 2008. The river has rebounded due to the removal of illegal landfills and the protection of precious fish species. In addition to this, public security was strengthened as the game and fish wardens acted to discourage the cross-border smuggling of goods, drugs, weapons, and people across the river.

Cooperation among entrepreneurs has not yet reached its potential level due to a lack of institutional conditions. There are private business owners in both municipalities who would like to cooperate in the field of agriculture, craftsmanship, services related to tourism, and in particular, wood processing. However, they lack joint institutions, they do not know how to register their organizations, due to the fact that they belong to two different states. This constitutes a formal, but very significant impediment, for in order to enhance the cooperation, an institutional form for such cooperation has to exist.

## Economic Relations

Resources for the production of agricultural products, organic food, and tourism-related services are underexploited though they have huge economic potential to drive growth in the area. In both municipalities there is an idea of establishing joint capacities in production and processing, especially with the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) agreement in force, and numerous benefits related to the cross-border economic cooperation. Still, support and encouragement from the central authorities of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina/Republika Srpska are insufficient.

Until now, Srebrenica's special interest in cooperation was represented by growers of raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries; trout breeders; and factories that process beech timber. Their market is in Serbia, and they would like to establish a better cooperation than what exists so far. In Bajina Bašta people are interested in the export of beef and mutton, as well as dairy products, and some consumer goods to Srebrenica, because this town, together with its neighboring municipalities, makes a good market for their products.

## International Support

In the previous period, international donor organizations were involved in this cooperation and they have had a special place and role among the actors of cooperation of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica. The greatest financial support so far has been provided by the government of Norway, which provided substantial funds, through its embassies in Belgrade and Sarajevo, to be allocated for projects related to environmental protection. Under the auspices of this program, the Drina River Committee was established, whose first activities were implemented in the municipalities of Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, and now extending to 29 municipalities along the Drina River. This project resulted in substantial investments to clean the surface waste from Lake Perućac, shared by both Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta. The Regional Environmental Center from Budapest was the implementer of this project, with offices in Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Banja Luka. Cohesion has been fostered by the environmental awareness of the municipalities' inhabitants, motivating them to join together to preserve their natural resources and climate.

The most important donor has been Care International, which established their offices in Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, with the aim to develop a three-year support program for small and medium-sized initiatives in the field of sustainable tourism. Financed by the funds from the Netherlands, the program has had outstanding results, and remains one of the most propulsive programs of the international community in these municipalities.

The Fund for an Open Society–Serbia provided the financial support to non-governmental organizations from Bajina Bašta, namely to *Drina Mreža* and *Agora* NGOs, with which the cooperation was first established during 2001. That was the time when these two NGOs, together with the local independent Radio Television “Prima,” initiated an action to stimulate the local public and politicians to establish and start the cooperation between these two large and important municipalities.

The Fund for an Open Society also provided assistance to programs implemented by the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad with local non-governmental organizations in both municipalities. That support, though only at the beginning was crucial, as it was provided at the time when none of the international donors were present in this area. At the formal level, this resulted in signing the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance in 2004 by representatives of these two municipalities.

## Individuals

The importance of personal commitment cannot be stressed enough in the establishment of this cooperation.

In Bajina Bašta, the president of the municipality was Boban Tomić, a representative of the Democratic Party and who was in the opposition during Milošević's regime

and one of the holders of democratic changes in this municipality in the period after the fall of Milošević.

Likewise, the president of the municipality of Srebrenica was Abdurahman Malkić, who was also willing to establish cooperation with Bajina Bašta, irrespective of the fact that grenades were fired at Srebrenica from Bajina Bašta and his own tragic, personal experiences during the war. Dramatically, at the time of the genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995, he managed to avoid execution by swimming across the Drina and hiding in the woods near Bajina Bašta for some time. After a while, he was caught by Serbian security forces and imprisoned in Bajina Bašta, where he was tortured. Fortunately, he survived the war, to become the president of the municipality of Srebrenica when the war ended.

When presenting the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance* at the round table organized in Bajina Bašta, he stated the following: “When I was on my way to Bajina Bašta, for the first time after almost ten years, my colleagues asked me why I was going there after everything that had happened to me. I told them that I was going there to seek revenge. My revenge would be to extend a hand of reconciliation and tell them that they had been forgiven for everything.”

The attitude of the central authorities towards the cooperation between Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica has remained very problematic. Signals were sent from local communities, asking for the support for establishment of the institutional mechanisms and capacity building needed for the cross-border cooperation, but the central authorities did not respond adequately to those calls. Both sides expect their governments to engage more effectively in the programs aimed at strengthening the partnership, friendly spirit, tolerance, and understanding, in order to speed progress in both communities.

Sarajevo and Belgrade are unfamiliar with the problems of local communities beyond their immediate borders. Local progressive structures (NGOs, reform-oriented politicians, and individuals) have always proposed various forms of cooperation. However, the problems arise when it comes to regulations in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as cross-border cooperation has been insufficiently defined by these neighbors. Indeed, nobody knows how to formally establish and to register cross-border institutions. For example, where to register the cross-border development agency or where and how to register a farmers’ association, youth organization, or business forum? This administrative issue should be regulated by the two states, in order to establish the conditions and mechanisms that would facilitate concrete networking of people.

## Form of Cooperation

Both municipalities used the rights and possibilities provided to them within the legal regulations of their kin states, as well as those parts of the municipal statutes that concern the international cooperation of municipalities, in order to establish their cooperation.

None of the municipalities had problems when designing and signing the agreement on mutual cooperation with the neighboring municipality, as legal regulations in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were very clear and affirmative in this respect. It was particularly convenient that Republika Srpska, as an entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina including Srebrenica, already had signed a bilateral agreement with Serbia that allowed the establishment of all forms of cooperation among local self-governments.

Respecting their decision to jointly better the living conditions of all their citizens, in particular, to build future cooperation on the principles of true and full cooperation, the two municipalities agreed that a vital prerequisite of cooperation includes respecting the right of the other side to have their own perception of the problem, as well as its solution. In that respect, the municipalities adopted a clear plan and unambiguous decisions.

In the first phase of the cooperation initiation, Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica failed to draw up a special document in the form of agreement or protocol of cooperation, but signed the special protocol for each field in which a project was applied. For instance, a special cooperation agreement was signed concerning the cleaning of surface waste from Lake Perućac on the Drina River, with municipalities being the promoters and main sponsors of activities. The idea of signing a special cooperation agreement or charter has not been implemented because political turbulence in Serbia resulted in changes within the local authorities in Bajina Bašta, so the signing of an agreement was postponed until further notice.

On the basis of mutual understanding and special agreements for each individual area, it was established that each municipality or organization would be entrusted by the municipality to participate in certain areas of cooperation. It also would be allowed to withdraw from the cooperation if the activities were contrary to the declared goals, values, and principles of cooperation adopted by the municipalities.

In that respect, municipalities followed a very flexible procedure that did not bind any municipality officially to ask for the termination of cooperation. However, this never happened, because the principles of participation were observed and the political leadership on both sides wanted to further develop and improve the cooperation. As far as mutual agreements and decision-making processes are concerned, municipal authorities fully agreed that the holders of the most relevant activities should be the presidents of the municipalities (they are called municipal mayors in Bosnia), whereas decisions are to be adopted by the consensus of the participants in meetings. Both municipalities were represented by the president/mayor of the municipality, presidents of municipal assemblies, heads of municipal administrations, and one representative of a local non-governmental organization.

In the meetings of the working body, minutes were taken by the municipality that hosted the meeting and these minutes contained a short overview of discussions, as well as conclusions that were adopted. Meetings between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta

municipality presidents were more frequent until 2004, whereas formally, meetings were only called for quarterly in both municipalities. The topics of their meetings were mainly concerned with the cities' current activities, as well as exchange of information and experiences.

Cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta has always been carefully presented and promoted in the local media and for the broader public. Managers of the services and the implemented projects had to provide a greater level of transparency regarding their projects. Both municipalities used the services of their local media to disseminate the messages containing the results of activities and good practices of intermunicipal cross-border cooperation in the field. A special working body, being in charge of the dissemination of news and messages on the joint activities was not established, but a responsible person was nominated.

The implementation of a cooperation project always included efficiency research and monitoring; the evaluation of cooperation was performed for each individually organized and approved project. Considering the fact that municipalities did not have strictly formalized administrative structures and bodies, there was no integrated financial management. Instead, each municipality individually funded the joint actions taken on their respective territories.

The main obstacle to establishing a joint institutional framework (working bodies, joint funds, etc.) was found in the insufficient regulations of the kin states. There was no model for an organization that would be able to straddle the border and sufficiently protect the interests of both municipalities. For example, it was difficult to determine a model by which a joint committee would be registered and bank account opened. The lack of formal legal solutions slowed down the process of formalizing the cooperation, establishing joint bodies, and organizing finances. However, the municipalities expressed their willingness to establish an optimal model of joint institutions that could be formalized in the future.

In the discussion about the potential forms of cooperation, the two municipalities easily detected a common problem that originated from the level of central authorities of their kin states. Neither Serbian legislation nor the legislation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska contained the relevant laws that would allow municipalities to establish cooperation with the neighboring municipalities and to develop more solid norms and institutions. In this sense, it was not possible to provide answers to a number of formal questions, although these questions were of crucial relevance and significance for further cooperation, with both sides willing and ready to resolve the existing dilemmas.

For example, the question of the formal registration of joint bodies has remained unresolved until today. However, there are more dilemmas related to managing the joint resources, finances, and potential property that would be acquired by both municipalities in the course of cooperation. All these issues affected, to a great extent, the outcome of

cooperation in the formal legal sense. In this context, in spite of their good will, neither municipality managed to resolve the dilemmas, mostly because the legal environment of their kin states was neither favorable nor sufficiently flexible and creative.

## Funding Cooperation

The municipalities of Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta established those forms of cooperation and joint activities that could be entirely financed by each municipality or by international donors. The projects funded by the municipalities were entirely financed by one municipality, due to a lack of institutional possibilities to establish joint funds. But the implementation of certain actions was funded by the international community, governments of other countries, as well as donors. These actions were financed in both municipalities, with the funding implemented in the direct communication between international organizations and municipalities or other organizations involved in pre-determined projects.

The funding of activities was always implemented on the basis of the combined participation of a large number of project participants. For example, a project was financed through direct funds supplied by the donor, while the municipality provided the transport vehicles and petrol, and the non-governmental sector provided the voluntary or paid engagement of activists in the field. In this respect, there were a number of multiple combinations of positive participation by all actors in the cooperation process.

In the cooperation so far, the municipalities have yet to introduce a local fee or financial contribution to be allocated for some forms of cooperation between the two cross-border municipalities. The main obstacle is a lack of coordination and a very rigid position of state regulations towards the institutions of cross-border cooperation. On many occasions, like at joint meetings and evaluations of previous projects, the municipalities expressed their willingness to act in order to create favorable conditions for the introduction of local financial contributions that would be allocated for cross-border projects. In addition, the municipalities seem to be quite ambitious, as they are aware that the financial contribution of citizens ensures the establishing of not only a new quality of life, but also personal trust among citizens and their respective ethnic communities.

In previous cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, international donors and governments recognized the need and significance of the cooperation between these two municipalities, and played the crucial role in funding. Although the importance of this cooperation extended to a great number of social spheres, from ecology to political and security-related stability in the region, international organizations seemed to have the greatest affinity and sensibility for the problems of the people living in these two municipalities.

Before the war, each municipality had its own financial contributions for the construction of local infrastructure and institutions of public interest. Nowadays, however, neither of the municipalities have a public financial mechanism for local fund-raising. The idea was that both municipalities should join and make a decision that all the citizens contribute to cross-border activities and interests by allocating symbolic amount of funds for this purpose. So far such a project has not been implemented, but there is continuing interest.

Unfortunately, governments of the kin states or the business sectors of both countries have provided only insufficient encouragement and incentives to this cooperation. A strong and direct effort must be made to convince the governments of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska to pay greater attention to cross-border cooperation if it is to succeed. The kin states should recognize that the projects implemented by the two bordering municipalities are the keys to resolve citizens' economic and social problems. One of the future projects in both municipalities could concern the lobbying directed towards governments, in an attempt to force and encourage them to think in a way that would lead to promotion of the cross-border cooperation of neighboring municipalities to the greatest possible extent.

## TYPICAL ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

In the first years after the war, the two municipalities made the first efforts to launch projects to support the flow of information and to strengthen institutional resources and capacities for future stability. With the help of other international donor programs, the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia and the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad funded and supported the activities of independent media. These activities were implemented under the motto of “Truth, Responsibility, and Reconciliation” and were aimed at reestablishment of dialogue about what creative and positive forms of cooperation were possible in the post-conflict environment.

In 2001 and 2002, *Agora* and *Drina Mreža* NGOs from Bajina Bašta, the Women's Association from Srebrenica, the Citizens Forum from Srebrenica, as well as the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad, organized a range of open, public events. These local debates were on the common future, on overcoming the burden of war crimes and building trust and a modern local society based on European and global standards. These open debates included the members of the above-mentioned NGOs, as well as a large number of citizens and experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Some participants were also the leaders of movements that were integration and reform-related, such as the Igman Initiative and the Dayton Triangle, including well-known activists and scholars like Vehid Šehić, Jovan Komšić, Aleksandar Popov, Živorad

Kovačević, Čedomir Čupić,<sup>1</sup> and others. Many open public debates and exhibits were organized for promoting these new social values and ways to reestablish cooperation and trust among neighbors. Special emphasis was placed on the younger generations, particularly those groups that were very interested in the cooperation.

## Organizing Public Discussions

The first project launched in 2001 within the cooperation framework between the two municipalities was the project of public open debates and an accompanying media campaign named “Truth, Responsibility, and Reconciliation.” Considering the fact that a committee for establishing the truth, responsibility, and reconciliation already existed at that time in Serbia, similar to bodies established in other post-conflict areas around the world, there was a concrete need to discuss these issues in the field, as well. *Agora* NGO activists and journalists from RTV *Prima* from Bajina Bašta covered some sensitive issues that troubled the citizens of both municipalities. Search for the truth meant the identification and clear establishment of the guilty parties and all those responsible for the suffering, violence, and genocide of the Bosniak population in the region of Srebrenica during the Balkan wars.

This was not an easy process. On the contrary, for Serbian nationalists it meant the loss of national dignity and degradation of national heroes who had already been largely characterized as war criminals. Under such circumstances it was very difficult, almost impossible, to fight for the truth and establishment of responsibility. It was a heavy burden for the activists of this campaign.

Nevertheless, the campaign was carried out, with the series of three public open debates organized in Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta. All open debates were recorded for broadcasting locally on television and radio. Although difficult and exhausting, this campaign produced some results. Despite the fact that it instigated and stirred the nationalistic emotions, this campaign managed to draw the attention of the local public to organizations and individuals who were making persistent efforts to ensure a normal life, justice, truth, and punishment of those who were guilty of war. This is fundamental for the common future of Bosniaks and Serbs, as well as for the genuine reconciliation of these two nations.

This campaign was financially supported for two years by the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia. It was implemented by *Agora* NGO and the independent RTV *Prima* from Bajina Bašta, the NGOs Citizens Forum of Srebrenica and Association of Women of Srebrenica, the NGO Citizens Forum of Tuzla, and the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad. The two municipalities provided their support to the project by ensuring the necessary logistics. Implementation of this project was monitored by a great number of domestic and international organizations, particularly those dealing with human rights and cross-border cooperation projects in this region.

In 2005 and 2006, the project of public open debates and dialogues on new social values and tolerance in the region was implemented by *Drina Mreža* NGO in cooperation with Drina Press International from Srebrenica, under the auspices of the Balkan Trust for Democracy. The aim of this project was to raise awareness and to promote the culture of dialogue on burning issues in the local communities and society at large, as well as to improve the forms of cooperation between the two municipalities. For six months, open public debates and media shows were organized in Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, with the participation of a great number of experts and representatives of prominent civil sector organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

### Ecological Initiatives: Cleaning a Local Lake

In 2003, the government of Norway, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed its interest in supporting the cooperation projects between the two municipalities, as well as between their NGOs and business organizations. In the decade of wars, there were a large number of practical problems for public services. One of the most serious was the accumulation of waste and the poor waste management policy in both municipalities. These municipalities are situated in an area of extreme beauty, but it was seriously threatened by devastation and destruction.

Lake Perućac, situated behind a dam on the Drina River—the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta—had accumulated ten year of surface waste from towns and villages situated upstream. As there was no technical possibility to allow this waste to flow further down the river, the entire amount of waste soon flooded extensive parts of Tara National Park.

The two municipalities soon came to recognize the significance of this problem. In addition to providing jobs to a number of unemployed, cleaning the lake would also allow the whole area to develop its tourism, hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities. Both municipalities asked the government of Norway the assistance, and it allocated substantial funds to finance several projects of cross-border cooperation between these two municipalities, as well as in the whole basin of the Drina.

This issue, and this project for that matter, provided the basis for establishing the Drina River Committee in 2005, including the participation of all 29 municipalities from three countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) situated in the basin of the Drina. It was a unique case, as the cooperation between Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica produced a greater incentive for developing a better and more extensive cooperation in the cross-border region.

In the period from 2004 to 2006, the government of Norway, through its partner, the Regional Environmental Center in Budapest, provided the equipment and manpower for cleaning the surface waste. The project participants included the Tara National Park

and two municipalities, which provided the manpower, energy, and communication. In the second phase of this project, recycling equipment was provided, significantly increasing the overall impact.

In 2006, the Regional Environmental Center from Budapest organized an awards competition for the most successful bridges of cooperation among local NGOs that helped to design waste cleaning projects, education, and prevention. The purpose was to strengthen the NGOs and provide assistance in the process of establishing the cooperation not only among the citizens of Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, but among other municipalities in the region, as well. This was again the case when the cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta extended to other neighboring towns, since it was used as a model of joint activities in the cross-border area. The government of Norway was the most significant individual donor for activities related to establishing the cross-border cooperation in the field of environmental protection and institution building.

## Improving Border Crossing

In 2004, the leaders of the two municipalities implemented a project concerning the rehabilitation of the border crossing at Bajina Bašta–Skelani. It aimed to establish cooperation among citizens and border services, as well as to develop trust and to improve working conditions at the border post, what used to be a small, non-functional border post in poor condition. With insufficient facilities and public lightning, nearly ignored, this crossing was practically unserviceable. The bridge connecting the two riverbanks was terribly unstable..

The two municipalities decided to apply for USAID support to provide the basic infrastructure of border services in the best interest of the citizens. The aim was to reconstruct the old bridge, to pave the roadway, to illuminate the entire border crossing with quality public lighting, and to include two border police units in the process of establishing the cooperation. USAID financed the project with enthusiasm, so at the end of 2004 the border crossing was rehabilitated and put into operation, in the presence of the highest USAID officials working in this region, along with the representatives of diplomatic authorities of the USA in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. It was a crowning achievement for the two municipalities, making their common border a better place for the two municipalities and two countries to meet and exchange communication, people, commodities, goods, services, and capital.

## Training and Capacity Development

In 2005, cooperation between the two municipalities reached a phase when it was faced with a lack of personnel and ideas, but the donors were still very interested. In order to improve the human resources and to provide institutional capacities for NGO projects, the two municipalities moved in the direction of personnel training and education. The Association of Women of Srebrenica, in cooperation with USAID in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the municipality of Srebrenica, organized a training in 2005 on strategic and action planning of cross-border cooperation projects between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta. The seminar was organized in Tuzla at Lake Modrac and representatives of local self-governments, municipal leaders, NGOs, and civil servants attended. The seminar included action planning and drawing up of development strategies in the border region. A valuable event, it provided the applicable knowledge subsequently used by many people when applying for different cooperation projects along the Drina River.

## Economic Cooperation

With consultative support from the Center for Regionalism in Novi Sad, Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica have engaged in number of activities to enhance and stimulate local economic initiatives. For instance, local businessmen have gathered at small business events, where they exchange their business experience and identified various forms of cooperation. Additionally, feasibility study was produced for the establishment of the cross-border cooperation agency would operate as a business generator. In 2004, the Joint Economic Development Agency of Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica was established. Among other accomplishments, the agency produced a study of the strengths and capacities of the markets within these two cities and formulated novel approaches as to how these communities can jointly approach third markets.

International actors also expressed their interest to provide support to just such a cross-border cooperation agency between the municipalities of Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta. This program has not yet been started. But these two municipalities intend to organize and stimulate the relevant activities to be taken by their entrepreneurs, which would provide the basis for their economic development. Both municipalities recognized that the development of a common policy on land and natural resources management would be beneficial to both of them. More cooperation also is expected in the standardization of goods and services, in agriculture and tourism as the two most promising spheres of local economic development. Attracting foreign investments may be additionally enhanced by establishing a joint free trade zone, as well as by convincing entrepreneurs to operate on the basis of the recently-signed Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA).

## Joining Philia

In 2007, the two municipalities participated in the establishment of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia. Those who initiated this activity included the prominent members of the Igman Initiative and experts of the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad, with special emphasis on the contributions provided by Živorad Kovačević, Jovan Komšić, Vehid Šehić, Zoran Pusić, Saša Popov, et al. The two municipalities were accepted as members and founders of Philia, a symbol of recognition of their previous cooperation. Representatives of the NGO sector from Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, together with representatives of municipalities, are in the same delegation and as authorized members they participate in all programs of the Association.

## Tourism Development

From 2006 to 2008 one of the projects with the most significant contribution was the development of tourism in the valley of the Drina River. It was implemented by the CARE International, based on the funds provided by the government of the Netherlands. A three-year program to support local NGOs, public authorities, and entrepreneurs, CARE International promoted the culture of togetherness on both sides of the Drina and improved the business practices and market-oriented tourist economy of the region. This project was conceived by the leaders of the two municipalities. In the course of project design, it was decided to apply it additionally to other, neighboring municipalities, as an example of a more comprehensive project-oriented development of tourism.

## TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLICITY

The process of cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta happened simultaneously with a grievous and painful national reconciliation. That process essentially marked the beginning of cooperation between these two municipalities, and it is hard to understand anything that happened later, unless we know the background of this cooperation. Although burdened by suffering and a painful heritage, the two municipalities found their common values and interests. They united their strengths to resist forces that were against any kind of cooperation or thought of such cooperation as betrayal.

The authorities of the two municipalities reached a full and undoubted consensus on the need to establish and continually strengthen all forms of cooperation between local communities, organizations, and citizens. This is why it was crucial to establish partnerships and friendly relations among all potential actors and participants. It was obvious that the public would have a key role to play in this process and that the

outcome of this cooperation would greatly depend on the way the cooperation between the two municipalities would be perceived by the public.

Municipal authorities paid great attention to all programs and actions that were leading to strengthening the capacities of civil society, particularly to raising awareness of the need to develop a closer cooperation between the municipalities. Therefore, there was a great need to achieve the maximum level of transparency and flow of information concerning the cooperation that existed. Therefore, municipal authorities of the two municipalities agreed to provide support for joint and individual activities performed by local NGOs and local media that were responsible for the dissemination of information.

Local journalists in both municipalities reported the activities of cross-border cooperation, particularly the projects implemented and supported in the framework of cooperation between Bajina Bašta and Srebrenica. Whenever a project was launched, teams of journalists from Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta prominently reported on these events. The relationship of journalists and their editorial boards were positive and constructive, as media agencies were among the first to be involved in all forms of cooperation.

Local media cooperation always included the exchange of relevant information between journalists from Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta. As a result, various shows, news, and journalists' contributions from *Radio Srebrenica* were always broadcast at the frequency of the neighboring radio station *Primus* from Bajina Bašta, along with the RTV *Prima* from Bajina Bašta, which often reported on events that took place in Srebrenica. Newspaper articles, published in local newspapers by journalists from both municipalities, were particularly significant, as they contained positive attitudes towards all aspects of cooperation between these two municipalities.

Key incentives for this type of cooperation were provided by the journalists from Bajina Bašta, who had been cooperating with their colleagues from Srebrenica for years. The director of the RTV *Prima* was elected president of the municipality of Bajina Bašta. This enabled his engagement in the greatest possible promotion and fostering of cross-border cooperation with Srebrenica. The participants of this cooperation were very much aware of the fact that without a proper public support, the two municipalities would not achieve good cooperation, so the importance of journalists, as well as all social structures taking part in spreading the positive atmosphere and information about intermunicipal cooperation, was crucial.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The future cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta may be envisaged in the context of the results achieved so far and in the light of general political trends in the region. Political tensions in the region, in particular the growing complications of the

political situation in Serbia until 2008, largely affected the quality of cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta. On a number of occasions, the political tensions from the central authorities, in particular the political tensions from the neo-Nazi organizations, posed a significant threat to the intermunicipal cooperation between Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta.

In this respect, it is important to further strengthen the institutions of a free civil society, united citizens, and entrepreneurs who are able to clearly identify their interests and who are eager to cooperate, irrespective of the destruction that threatens them. It is crucial to provide the protagonists of cross-border cooperation with clear and concrete support, from the side of the international community, as well as the central authorities of their kin states. The area surrounding these two municipalities is quite problematic, economically undeveloped, and burdened by the conflicts from the past. Therefore, it makes it more difficult to pursue cooperation and the development of democratic institutions and capacities.

All the protagonists of cross-border cooperation have to accept this fact, as well as the authorities of their kin states and the relevant international organizations, particularly those dealing with Euro-Atlantic integration. This cooperation was in the process of being established in the past decade, demonstrating that it may be the beginning and a model of cooperation to be followed by other border-area municipalities. It also provided the models of cooperation for future Euroregions. In this respect, the support that organizations of local and regional authorities will provide to this cooperation in the future might be particularly helpful. If this approach is applied in practice and encounters a receptive response by the people living in the area, the future cooperation between these two municipalities will improve. Srebrenica and Bajina Bašta, as the initiators of the future Euroregion, are part of the future in which the Drina River will not only be an administrative border, but also a factor of cohesion.

## NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> The core of the group were: Vehid Šehić, president of NGO Citizens Forum Tuzla from BiH; Jovan Komšić (professor at Novi Sad University); and Aleksandar Popov, members of the Center for Regionalism; and Živorad Kovačević, president of NGO European Movement from Serbia.

# Cross-border Neighborhood Program: Baja–Sombor–Osijek

*Gojko Mišković*

*Taking into consideration all activities that have been carried out so far in the area occupied by these typical Pannonian and Central European cities, we keep experiencing déjà vu. There are numerous and convincing reasons, since they stem from the sphere of everyday life, history, and common legacy. As well as at many other points in Central Europe, here as well, the lucid thought of Alfred Moser, “Borders are scars of the past,” comes to the fore.<sup>1</sup>*

At the beginning of the “short twentieth century,” mass media in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia helped to fan the centrifugal forces of nationalism—strengthened by wars and totalitarian ideologies. Insisting on differences and conflicts, instead of similarities and intertwinement, it resulted in the extinguishment of a centuries-long tradition of coexistence within the same multid denominational and multiethnic states, within the biological lifespan of two generations of inhabitants of cities like Sombor (Serbia), Baja (Hungary), and Osijek (Croatia).

The long period of rule by the Habsburg Monarchy—that is, the Austro–Hungarian Empire—dissolved when our cities became constitutive parts of the new states built upon its ruins in the first half of the twentieth century. The internal and foreign policy of these new states was built upon a false hostility and the suppression of experiences acquired during the Austro–Hungarian Empire. In addition, Osijek and Sombor were found within the borders of the state of the southern Slavs, which had been transformed into the first and second Yugoslavia. This was the reality for most of the twentieth century and which was completely transformed by the fall of the Berlin Wall and almost parallel bloody disintegration of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

## HISTORY

### Baja

The present city of Baja was settled by Avars as late as the fourteenth century. The city acquired its name from the famous landlord, Balint Bajai, whose family held it for more than two centuries. The first written records of Baja date back to 1323. The Battle of Mohac was a significant event in the past, when, due to Turkish conquest, the Hungarian population was decimated and the settlement became the center of Baja District (*nahija*). The travelogue of Evliya Cselebi from 1664 reports it as a “double-purpose village and fortress situated around the main square,” with around twenty households.

As the gathering place of the imperial army, Baja had a very significant role in the wars against the Ottoman Empire. After the expulsion of Turks, in the summer of 1686, Baja was annexed to the Austrian Empire. Emperor Leopold I, at the very end of seventeenth century, issued a Decree on the Free Lowland City of Baja at the request of the population. In remembrance of the liberation day, he awarded Baja with a special insignia: the seal and coat of arms with the characters of Adam and Eve. Later, the landlordship was established, this time within the Grassalkovich family; that brought about a time of accelerated development.

Baja owned a small area of city land, which restricted agricultural development, while trade and crafts were growing. The Golden Age in the history of the city was the end of eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Throughout those years it had become the most significant harbor for transport and trade of grains on the Pannonian plain. In legal terms, 1873 symbolized the period when this city was given the privileges of adopting its own documents, with the power of law. It additionally proved its role as administrative, cultural, and spiritual center of the region. At that time, schools and modern administrative institutions were being built.

Waves of planned migrations of Bunjevac, Šokac, and Serbian inhabitants in the seventeenth century, as well as of Swabs in eighteenth century, increased the population. In the immediate vicinity of the Danube River, the town placed the focus of its economic activity on fishing, fish trade, knitting of fishermen’s nets, and similar trades. After World War I, more precisely from 1921 till World War II, Baja was the center of Bács–Bodrog County. It is the second largest city in the Bács–Kiskun County today, the county seat being in Keckemet.

## Sombor

Situated beyond the borders of the former Roman Empire, Sombor came into being during the Middle Ages. Peace, relative stability, and conditions for ever-lasting life were provided by the state of Hungarian kings (from the eleventh century onwards). Except for the Tatars' invasion of 1241–1242, this area did not experience major devastation and population reduction, as was the case elsewhere.

The first records of Sombor date back to 1360 when the settlement of Czobor Szent Mihály was established on the manor estate of the noble family Czobor. Despite its wall fortifications, the Ottoman invasion caused its fall in 1541. In an administrative sense, Sombor belonged to the administrative district (*sanjak*) of Szeged and was the seat of administrative units of *nahija* and *kadiluk*.<sup>2</sup> In 1566 Sombor had the status of a town with the three Muslim (*mahala*) wards and one Christian ward, along with a settlement (*džemat*) of Roma. The writer Evliya Cselebi called it an “old parish.”

After the expulsion of Turks, Sombor became a part of the Austrian Empire in 1687 and reached its zenith in terms of its glory, reputation, and significance. In 1702, it was included in the Military Frontier of Tisza and in 1717 it was granted the status of *oppidum militare*. The first captain of the military garrison was the Count Jovan Branković during the Great Migration of 1690.

As a consequence of the evident support that Serbs provided to the army of the Austrian Empire on the territory of Kosovo, at the time of its campaign against the Ottoman Empire, there was a threat of mass retaliation by the Turks after the withdrawal of Habsburg military units from that territory. The then head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch of Peć, Arsenije III Černojević, became the leader of a movement for the mass relocation of dozens of thousands of Orthodox Christians, Serbs, to the territories of southern Hungary and the military border. Over 800 Serbian families settled here, preceded by a few years earlier (1687) by members of Bunjevci ethnic group who inhabited the area. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Sombor was the most populated settlement in Bačka County.

In 1745, the Empress Maria Theresa abolished the Military Frontier of Tisza, the leading administrative positions were gradually assumed by the Hungarian nobility, and the Serbian frontiersmen of Sombor left for Sirmium County towards the Turkish border. In 1749, the people of Sombor paid 150,000 golden Rhine forints to the imperial treasury and were awarded the Charter of Liberation that paved the way to the status of “free imperial city,” from which Sombor greatly benefited. The city was given 11 hills, upon which, over the time, homes arose and developed. A new privileged status brought about the increased settlement of Serbs, and after the city of Sombor had been chosen as the seat of Bács–Bodrog County (1786), Hungarians started settling in this area to a more significant extent. In the second half of the eighteenth century Germans started colonizing neighboring territory.

The nineteenth century was characterized by the development and economic growth of the city. Sombor became the administrative, social, spiritual, and cultural center. The recently-constructed Great Canal of Bačka was used for irrigation and transport (1802). Education received a significant boost from the establishment of “Norma” (later known as the Serbian teachers’ school), Hungarian grammar school, a school of commerce, a Serbian girls’ college, and a Hungarian school of Roman Catholic female teachers.

Toward the middle of the century the city had the population of 23,000, more than Belgrade and Zagreb. The development of Sombor was further promoted by the railway to Subotica and Szeged (1869), and a year later (1868) the Savings Bank of Sombor was established. The first city park was established in 1871. The Hungarian middle-class association and Serbian Reading Room were founded in 1845 and 1847, respectively. Furthermore, the Historical Society of Bács–Bodrog County and Sombor Sports Association, with gymnastics, fencing, swimming, and athletics, were also established. The first printing house and the city library were opened and the theater dates back to 1882, and continues to host plays in Serbian, Hungarian, and German. Several important periodicals were started, in which Miloš Crnjanski, Jovan Dučić, Aleksa Šantić, Vojislav Ilić, and others published their first literary works. At the turn of century, the giant of Central European modern painting was born in Sombor, the maestro Milan Konjović (deceased in 1993).

Sombor became a part of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in November 1918. Since 2007, Sombor has recovered the status of a city within the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the Republic of Serbia; it has been the center of west Bačka administrative county since 1990.

## Osijek

The settlement and locality of the present-day city existed since the fourth century BC under the Illyrian or Celtic name of *Mursa*; its existence continued into the period of the Roman Empire. The name was first mentioned in the written sources in 1196. The present name of *Osijek* is of Croatian origin, whereas there are also other versions, such as the German (*Essegg*), Hungarian (*Eszék*), Latin (*Essec*), and Serbian (*Osek*). The settlement’s name is related to the word “*oseka*” (ebb), which points to a place that is always dry and suitable for construction.

The conquering army of the Ottoman Empire occupied the city in 1526 and Turks remained in Osijek for a century and a half. Osijek and eastern parts of the present-day Croatia became a part of the Habsburg Monarchy. In the period from 1712 to 1721, due to strengthening of the city strategic position, the *tvrđja* (fortress) was erected. Inside the walls, the row of houses with distinguishable Baroque characteristics was built. Its central part is occupied by Holy Trinity Square, with the monument of the identical

name dating back to the eighteenth century. Due to military concerns, the population settled to the west (upstream of the Drava River—*uptown*) and to the east (downstream of the Drava River—*downtown*).

Economic and social development in Osijek resulted in the unification of its three city municipalities into a single entity in 1786. As early as 1729 the Latin grammar school was founded and the printing house had started. The privileged status of “Free Imperial City” was awarded in 1809, thereby symbolizing the commencement of a new development period. Notable progress was evident uptown, where in 1846 the impressive Parish Palace was built and then the Croatian National Theater. Another landmark is Ante Starčević Square, dominated by the neogothic St. Peter and St. Paul’s Parish Church.

At the turn of nineteenth to twentieth century, as big boulevards were being built in Budapest and Vienna, Osijek was building a string of public buildings and private palaces in a Secessionist and Eclectic architectural style along its European Avenue. In 1874, one of the most beautiful and largest hospitals in this part of Europe was built in the downtown.

Following the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, toward the end of 1918, the city of Osijek became a part of newly-established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia since 1929). After the disintegration of the country in April 1941, Osijek became a part of the territory of the independent state of Croatia. In the middle of 1945, after the collapse of Fascism, all parts of Croatia were integrated into Yugoslavia.

Today, Osijek, along with its neighboring settlements, has a population of around 115,000, thus being the fourth-largest city by its population in Croatia. The city is financial, economic, judicial, and administrative hub of Slavonia. It is also the seat of Osijek and Baranya County.

## PAST INSTITUTIONS SUPPORTING COOPERATION

The “triangle” of Osijek–Sombor–Baja is an irregular and asymmetrical shape and type. This is in part because the main initiatives were directed from Sombor towards the other two actors. Also, the significant distance between Osijek and Baja plays a part in this asymmetry. In fact, Osijek’s more natural and compatible counterpart (in terms of population and university and county center) is the Hungarian city of Pécs. Also, the construction of bridges on the Danube and Drava rivers, which has facilitated communication among people as well as the movement of goods from different sides of these major Pannonian rivers, was relatively recent.

Official and extensive cooperation between Baja and Sombor began during the socialist period, despite “imperfect” relations between the regimes of Yugoslavia and

Hungary. Intermunicipal cooperation was organized around managing the Danube River and flood defenses. An agreement signed in Sombor (Box 1) brought together employees of the local water management companies as well as local self-government officials in both cities, thereby establishing cooperation between the two cities.

*Box 1.*

**Agreement between the Baja City Council and the Municipal Assembly  
of Sombor on Establishing Fraternal Relations**

As a result of previous friendly relations, the representatives of both areas decided to extend mutual communication, enhance good neighbourly relations and develop manifold cooperation so as to contribute to the improvement of socialist development of both areas, on the basis of exchanged experiences, as well as to strengthening of the friendship between the people of the People's Republic of Hungary and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

For the Executive Council  
of the City of Baja

President  
Farkas László

For the Municipal Assembly  
of Sombor

President  
Jovan Vasiljević

December 14, 1966

The program that was drafted at the time envisaged meetings and cooperation of social, political, and economic-business actors on both sides. One of the most important goals defined under this program was opening the border crossing Hercergszántó—Bački Breg, which promptly took place in 1967. Although the agreement formally applied to the city of Baja and municipality of Sombor, from the very beginning it was emphasized that it included the district of Baja, too. This gesture of mutual aspirations occurred during a period of distinctive state-administrative-organizational-territorial models, when cooperation was developed within two broader and, in terms of size and population, similar territories.

What started with seven events in 1966 had reached 37 by 1974! Particularly impressive was the exchange of symphonies from Sombor and Baja, organized at least biannually in each city.

Four decades later, in 2006, the political setting had changed dramatically. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the SFRY, Serbia became an independent state again. Hungary joined the European Union and NATO. But, due to the efforts of local leaders and communities, cross-border cooperation withstood the test of time.

Relations between Sombor and Baja clearly exemplifies Eric Hobsbawm’s syntagma about the short twentieth century, from the start of World War I to the fall of socialism, as a time of extremism and exclusiveness that brought about immense human suffering.<sup>3</sup>

*“If humanity is to have a recognizable future, it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present.”*

—Eric Hobsbawm

*The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century*

The formation of new states in the Central Europe after the Great War in 1918 also brought about dramatic changes in everyday life for a great number of individuals and families who spoke Hungarian as their native language. An excessive number of civil servants of the Hungarian state became *unwanted* as the borders of newly-established states were demarked and populations were exchanged after World War I on the territory of the former Austro–Hungary. Further ethnic homogenization resulted on both sides of borders of the newly-established countries (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Hungary)

In addition to state-sponsored population exchanges, there were also ongoing ethnic migration and national homogenization on both sides of the new border. Communication lines in the direction north-south, such as the railway and inland transport routes between Sombor and Baja like Franz’s Canal (present-day Bezdan–Baja Canal), the Great Bačka Canal, and the Danube River itself, which had been managed for centuries and systematically developed, were losing their significance dramatically. An uninterrupted chain of economic and social difficulties in the interwar period brought development to a standstill in “the new state peripheral areas” of the First Yugoslav Republic and post-Trianon Hungary.

The Second World War and its disastrous repercussions—enormous civilian casualties, material and economic devastation, and the division of European countries and their populations into opposing “blocks,” to name a few—as well as subsequent events in Central and South Eastern Europe—created grave obstacles for cross-border relations between Sombor and Baja.

Yet, there were moments of engagement. A popular and bloody uprising against Soviet rule gripped Budapest in 1956. Thousands of refugees from Hungary fled to the border area of Sombor. In this quite delicate case, the policy of Yugoslavia proved to be uncommonly flexible and pragmatic. At the highest level, it collaborated with the Soviet Union: leaders of the uprising, who were hiding in the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest,

were extradited. At the same time, the Yugoslav regime, which was far more liberal and open than that of its neighbors, also made dramatic efforts to assist refugees reach the countries of their own choice. In 2006, fifty years' later, this local victory of humanity over the totalitarian ideology was honored by dedicating a plaque to the citizens of Sombor in recognition of their contribution.

Relations between Osijek and Sombor did not have a firm political-institutional framework, mostly due to the fact that both cities were parts of the same state from 1918 to 1991. The interests of the single-party policy of "fraternity and unity" in the Second Yugoslav Republic dictated that city of Sombor twin with the city of Šibenik in Dalmatia. This was a distortion of the actual intertwinement between the Croatian and Serbian ethnic community influenced by Venice and Vienna, respectively.

By the beginning of the 1970s, gradually museums, galleries, archives, and magazines assumed a cultural form of cooperation among Subotica, Sombor, and Osijek, resulting in regular cultural events that took place until 1991. Osijek's university was considered very attractive destination for rigorous higher education, even by citizens in Sombor, who also cooperated to produced joint radio broadcasts for the area.

The end of the Warsaw Pact and bloody disintegration of the SFRY entirely changed this part of the Pannoninan Basin: the Danube and Drava marked lines of conflict between Serbia and Croatia. The creation of new state borders—that is, their ethnici- zation—was the priority of the war that began in the early 1990s. The city of Osijek became a war zone in the truest sense. Traumatic memories and traces of those times are visible. They re-emerge in the Slavonian collective memory as waves of ethno-nationalist rhetoric, xenophobia, and suspicions of conspiratorial movements.

Meanwhile, the territorial hinterland of Sombor was turned into a chaotic territory under an undeclared state of war. Preparations for a violent statewide response on the part of Serbia to the challenge of Croatian independence were made. And, an "antibureaucratic revolution," which having abolished the autonomy of Vojvodina and destroyed the institutions of Vojvodina, then ruined the backbone of Sombor's development. The last decade of the twentieth century was a period of total collapse for everyday urban life.

Similar to the role of Sombor during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, at the turn of the twentieth century the city of Baja was "the harbor of salvation and encouragement" (1991–2000) during the disintegration of Second Yugoslavia and subsequent war. Thousands of refugees were moving north. The position of Hungary was extremely sensitive: foreign policy concerns demanded fast recognition of newly-established states, but not at the expense of the total breakup of relations with Serbia, since the victims of such a course of action would be the Hungarians of Vojvodina.

International sanctions by the United Nations in 1993 against the state personified by Slobodan Milošević, as well as hyperinflation and shortages of basic goods in Serbia, additionally complicated the situation in the border area. Having retained a visa-free regime at the border crossings, Hungary facilitated the everyday provision and subsistence of Serbian citizens. Relations between the local authorities of Sombor (the Socialist Party of Serbia led by Slobodan Milošević and the Serbian Radical Party led by Vojislav Šešelj) and Baja were strictly reduced to humanitarian and charity efforts.

Only toward the end of 1996, after the local power was assumed by the anti-Milošević coalition *Zajedno* (Together), did it become feasible to think about an alternative in Sombor that would start rebuilding cooperation in the region. Leading local government officials welcomed the change of government in Sombor with unconcealed pleasure, preparing, on that occasion, a memorable ceremonial welcome for the delegation of the twin city.

From this perspective, it has been extremely difficult to estimate the extent of material, moral, political, and logistical support that arrived from the territory of Hungary for the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe–Philia, opposition political parties, and other opponents of the regime of Slobodan Milošević, Mirjana Marković, and Vojislav Šešelj. It was also in those years that documented informal contacts were made between the officials of Osijek and Sombor on the grounds of third countries, most often when international symposia were organized.

At the level of valuable local initiatives, which during the war years called for an immeasurable amount of personal courage, what needs to be pointed out are the contacts of peace activists of the association of Ravangrad from Sombor and managed by Mrs. Manda Prišing as well as of other similar civil organizations from Osijek.

Only after the completion of the military intervention of NATO forces in Kosovo (mid-1999), did most citizens of Serbia realize that they had to actively participate to change the ruling regime, if they wanted the real prospects of normal lives. Within such a climate, at the sitting of the Assembly of Sombor Municipality, by a majority vote of more than half the councilors, a document of strategic and historical significance was adopted. Political will that was undoubtedly expressed therein was an actual legitimate ground for initiatives of cross-border cooperation that would ensue in the following decade. At the time of its adoption, that was the only official document of full support to the Stability Pact for South-East Europe by any political authority in Serbia (Box 2).

*Box 2.*

**Declaration of the Municipal Assembly of Sombor  
on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe**

The Municipal Assembly of Sombor, held on October 4, 1999, upon the discussion of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe, adopted the following:

**DECLARATION**

1. Having considered the fact that current government in Serbia attaches extremely little importance to the Stability Pact and almost ignores its existence, and that its fundamental nature is of great significance for the entire region as well as for the citizens of FRY, the Municipal Assembly (MA) deems that all possibilities envisaged by the Stability Pact must be supported and accepted.
2. MA of Sombor agrees to the clearly-defined goal of the Pact which is supporting South-East European countries in their attempt to enhance peace, democracy, respect for human rights, and economic prosperity so as to achieve stability in the entire region.
3. MA of Sombor, by insisting on fostering of the traditional principles of cohabitation and national, cultural, and religious equality in Sombor and Vojvodina, expresses its ambition toward positive democratic changes that will introduce the culture of cohabitation and openness to the world to the entirety of Serbia.
4. By democratizing Serbia, the door of the international community will become open for us and Serbia will be welcomed as an equal member of the Stability Pact. Good cooperation with neighboring countries stipulates the economic prosperity and thereby, Serbia will take its position in the Stability Pact, which is kept for it in the Articles of Association.
5. MA of Sombor calls on all municipal assemblies across Serbia, as well as Provincial, Republic, and Federal Assembly to inform the citizens of the meaning and significance of the Stability Pact and commit themselves to positive promotion and recognition of the Pact principles, since good neighborly relations and cooperation with the world are prerequisites for the future of all our citizens.

Councilors of the Sombor Municipal Assembly

A doyen of diplomacy, long-standing Ambassador to China and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the FR of Yugoslavia in the Government of Milan Panić, Mr. Ilija Đukić, honored the representatives of citizens of Sombor by his direct presence at the session and some of his suggestions were put forward in the the draft declaration.

## IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

### Cross-border Cooperation and Reconciliation between Sombor and Osijek: A Selection of Initiatives

The Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance, as well as involvement in the activities of the Center for Regionalism and Philia, provided a framework and atmosphere that allowed for accelerated and concrete cooperation between Baja and Sombor. This framework, rooted in values of mutual respect and tolerance, also ensured the high quality of intermunicipal relations.

Sombor and Osijek, as founding members of Philia, were among the first cities in the wider South Eastern European region to initiate mutual communication. Their early engagements resulted in some of the first projects that had visibly positive results. A certain extent of communication between the cities existed prior to the establishment of Philia, owing largely to the efforts of the Center for Regionalism. However, despite the best efforts of those involved with the Novi Sad-based NGO, the approach to cross-border to cooperation was limited. Communication was irregular and perhaps best characterized by suspicion.

Good will on the part of city authorities to overcome any distrust and cooperate was vital for moving intermunicipal cooperation ahead. As well, an informal network of actors from different sectors provided opportunities for a more relaxed dialogue and actual realization of needs. Local NGOs and civic associations played a special role. They launched a number of initiatives and were recognized as important partners by municipal authorities.

Activities to facilitate cross-border interaction between Osijek and Sombor varied widely, in terms of their form, the kinds of range of participants, and the positive involvement of the media after 2000. One particularly important stage in advancing intermunicipal cooperation was the project “Strengthening Local Democracy in South Eastern Europe,” which lasted for 16 months through 2005 and 2006. From the very beginning, crucial support for this project was provided by the local self-governments of Sombor Municipality (and the Municipality President Dr. Jovan Slavković) and the city authorities in Osijek. According to the decision of the funding party, two leading non-governmental partners were chosen: the NGO Green Osijek and the NGO Green

Network of Vojvodina. As a result of agreement among all actors, a Cross-border Council, the Project Program Committee, was established. Cooperation and reconciliation between Sombor and Osijek and the establishment of the advisory body was part of a larger project, initiated simultaneously in seven areas throughout the former SFRY that experienced direct armed conflict. The entire project was conceived and financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), relying on the field experience and logistic capacities of other organizations, as well as the respective local self-governments.

Strengthening interethnic reconciliation and local democracy in Sombor and Osijek was set as the major goal by encouraging activism in communities aimed at the use, enhancement, and promotion of environmentally-friendly recreational, cultural, and tourist capacities on both sides of the border. A number of joint activities have been implemented in pursuit of these goals.

### **Via Pacis Pannoniae Cycle Path**

This initiative has its roots in major plan to develop a network of bicycle routes within the Pannonian regions of Croatia, Serbia and Hungary, under the banner of the Pannonian Peace Trails, or *Via Pacis Pannoniae*. The project was conceived in 2004 by the Green Network of Vojvodina and Green Osijek, and developed initially as community-based initiatives supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy. The Osijek-Sombor trail began as a project called “The Cross Border Cooperation and Reconciliation” financed and supported by CRS (Catholic Relief Services) and USAID (United States Agency for International Development). Several organizations assisted with the coordination of activities, including the Ecological Association, Green Osijek and Green Network of Vojvodina, local authorities of Osijek and the Municipality of Sombor.

Beyond creating a cycle path, the underlying idea of the Pannonian Peace Trail was to connect people, preserve natural and cultural values for sustainable development in the Danube region. It was envisaged to contribute to cross-border cooperation, building tolerance and democracy and helping demilitarize this region once engulfed by war. The route represents a communication and cooperation bridge connecting the regions of Pannonia (Baranja and Slavonia in Croatia and Vojvodina in Serbia). The bicycle route along the Osijek–Sombor Pannonian Peace Trail is the third cross-border peace route in the world.

The greenway from Novi Sad in Serbia runs along the Danube, linking Novi Sad to Futog and Backa Palanka. Next, it crosses the Danube and the Serbian–Croat border to Croatia. In Croatia, the greenway passes through Ilok and Vukovar to reach Osijek with its surroundings (including the marshes of Kopački Rit). The greenway arches back to Serbia, across the Danube, to reach Apatin and Sombor. The route continues on to Subotica, and returns to Novi Sad (Cenej District). This route stretches through some of the best preserved nature areas on the Danube River, including Kopački Rit Nature

Park and the Gornje Podunavlje Nature Reserve, and links together many different ethnic communities, which still live in a traditional way. Travelling along the route, visitors can enjoy local cuisine, discover traditional handicrafts, explore cultural and historic sites, and take advantage of boating, horse carriage rides and photography opportunities.

The bicycle route in Osijek begins on the right side of the road heading north, just beyond the bridge over the Drava River. The starting point in Sombor is located by the Saint Florian monument in Batina street.

### **Tambur Camp and Workshop of Young Musicians of Osijek and Sombor**

The School of Tambur Music from Sombor, under the instruction of Mr. Đura Parčetić, and members of the Cultural and Art Society Pajo Kolarić, with Ms. Željka Grgošević as the conductor, were the partners and participants in this cooperation. Valuable advisory support was provided by Mr. Zvonko Bogdan, a famous singer and cultural ambassador of the tambur, who is highly respected in both Serbia and Croatia. Additionally, an original pageant was performed by the duo of Branislav Bane Krstić and Dr. Miroslav Miša Ilić, who, aside from playing tamburs, also presented and explained the origins of the song that had found its way to the listeners on both sides of the Danube, in the most severe times of war.

Bearing in mind the generally favorable reception of tambur orchestras in Vojvodina and Slavonia, it was this project that received maximum support through launching of a special campaign in the local media, primarily in Sombor, where the camp was organized. As a result of the engagement of media professionals, the one-minute radio jingle was produced which rephrases the words of the legendary tambur virtuoso Janika Balaž, "I'm not much of a speaker...and therefore I play."

During one week, the tambur camp was promoted on local radio stations (*Radio Fortuna* and *Radio Spektar*). Even fishermen on the Danube, twenty kilometers away, found out about the event. Furthermore, the television performance of the participants and creators of the music workshop harmoniously fitted in the promotional campaign. In addition, the information about the organization of the camp was also announced in the printed media in Sombor (*Somborske novine Dunataj*), as well as in the editorial column of the prestigious daily *Danas*. The Green Network of Vojvodina announced the tambur camp in the daily *Gradjanski list* in Novi Sad. This minor media campaign resulted in an excellent attendance record both at the music workshop of Branislav Krstić and at the concert of young musicians.

Owing to the efforts of the President of Sombor, the tambur camp was mentioned as a successful model at the annual conference of the Community of Municipalities (*Gemeinsam Gemeinde*) in Romanshorn, Switzerland (June 16–18, 2006) as well as at Philia's second conference in Podgorica, Montenegro (July 5–7, 2006). Furthermore, a case study of the project appeared in the agenda of the Ninth International Seminar for Strengthening of Democracy in Konjic, Bosnia and Herzegovina (July 9–15, 2006).

The tambur players from Sombor and Osijek held a concert in September 2006, on the occasion of formal presentation and opening of the cycle path Via Pacis Pannoniae.

### **Organic and Biological Agriculture**

Having represented organic farming methods for over a decade in the region, the BIOPA Association from Osijek was invited to host a one-day presentation on its systematic program to introduce and educate farmers. An interested group of students and farmers came to Sombor, with the support of Megatrend, a private university, and its Faculty of Biofarming.

This Association since has become a major partner not only for producers across Slavonija, Baranya, and the rest of Croatia, but also for the state authorities (e.g., Ministry of Agriculture), in the process of complicated negotiations with the competent bodies of the European Union.

Informing and educating farmers has a major role in re-positioning agriculture's future in the Pannonian region. For example, the Osijek market agreed to "positively discriminate" in favor of organic products, along with the BIOPA shop of certified products also at the market.

BIOPA also organized a visit to a traditional sheep farm in the picturesque area of Zlatna Greda, at the heart of Kopački rit National Park that presented this program's efforts to enhance and preserve traditional lifestyles threatened by scrupulous EU regulations concerning animal hygiene, grazing, and feed.

Though this program is poorly funded, its realistic and consistent plan made up for the lack of funds. *Dunataj* and *Danas* media outlets both covered the events. There is an obvious compatibility of interests between this association and the NGO Green Network of Vojvodina.

### **Sports Events**

In the field of sports events, a friendly tennis tournament between tennis players from Sombor and Osijek (November 2005) as well as matches between football clubs Osijek and Radnički (May 2006) were organized. In both cases, the matches were held in a friendly atmosphere.

## **Good Neighborhood Programs between Serbia and Hungary**

As the brief overview of projects suggests, a positive example of regional cross-border cooperation may be found in the model of inter-municipal cooperation. After relations between these cities had been suspended for nearly two decades, *Philia* played an important role in re-establishing communication channels through seemingly "simple" processes—by

arranging exchanges in which students visited colleagues in neighboring cities, holding joint press conferences, implementing sharing news and information, and facilitating exchanges and frequent meetings among mayors and local decision-makers.

For Baja and Sombor, a personal visit was an important step in moving cooperation to a higher level. At the initiative of Municipality of Sombor and General Secretariat of Philia, a full-day study tour to Baja was arranged on May 22, 2006. Philia was represented by a distinguished professor from the University of Novi Sad, Dr. Jovan Komšić.

Dr. Péter Széll, Mayor of Baja, welcomed the guests. They visited the self-government office of the German minority, which is housed in the city center, then proceeded to the premises of the Serbian minority self-government, where a joint press conference and roundtable on the perspectives of interethnic relations was conducted.

It became clear that cooperation between Baja and Sombor could have very concrete benefits—namely, in terms of accessing much-needed material and financial resources that would benefit both cities. The cities decided to apply jointly for EU funding, which was available specifically for cross-border projects. Several projects within the EU “neighborhood” framework have been accepted for funding. Some, in fact, received the largest amount of financial support available at the time of submission. A brief overview of a few projects includes the following:

- Culture and Nature for Better Quality of Life: Stimulating the development of tourism in the regions of Bács–Kiskun megye in Hungary and West Bačka District in Serbia through the creation of a database and Internet resources on tourism opportunities.
- Enhancing Foreign Direct Investments in the West Bačka District: Facilitating foreign investment by developing an “investment guidebook,” a multilingual database of business opportunities, and a website with relevant information for potential investors.
- Hungarian–Serbian Cross-border Cooperation Project in the Field of Waste Management: Contributing to the improvement of waste management as a region issue, through awareness-raising and extensive evaluation of problems, opportunities, challenges, and solutions of the issue.

In addition to advancing regional development and cooperation, these projects must be seen within the process of EU integration. Specifically, they have been part of an overall strategy to build support and strengthen local capacities for EU membership. This view was taken by the Regional Agency for Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Entrepreneurship of Sombor, headed by Dr. Saša Bošnjak from the Faculty of Economy in Subotica, which played a lead role in advancing cross-border cooperation. The vision was that inter-municipal cooperation between Baja and Sombor would improve the position of these smaller urban centers and contribute to the process

of decentralization and to balanced regional development—elements that were in-line with EU standards.

Additionally, the agency and its devoted staff placed great emphasis on bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, including consultants, civic groups, local officials, representatives of local businesses, and individuals from educational institutions to attract support for and enhance cross-border cooperation. That is, attention was placed on the multi-sectoral *process* of cross-border cooperation. Stakeholders on both sides of the border learned about how cooperation can be (and is!) beneficial for local communities over the long-term. They also had their say in the formulation of cohesive, local or regional development strategies. This inclusive approach likely helped garner attention and support from the EU and other international actors. The case of Baja and Sombor exemplifies the value of partnership between different sectors and actors, namely NGOs and the local self-government. Because a multi-sectoral approach was taken, cooperation gained broad-based legitimacy.

Building broad-based support for cross-border cooperation is one issue. Another issue relates to concrete project development and implementation, in which the Regional Agency for Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Entrepreneurship of Sombor also played a leading role in many cases. One very important and necessary element in the projects discussed above was systematically locating strong partners across the border, including partners within the local governments. A significant amount of effort was put into analyzing potential partners and modes of partnership and cultivating alliances in different fields: foreign direct investment, tourism, nature protection, and secondary education, and waste management. In many cases, municipal museums, public schools, and tourist agencies were identified as partners, because they displayed significant institutional capacity and also could facilitate long-term cooperation.

Finally, the case of Baja and Sombor exemplifies the values of partnership between the non-governmental sector and the local self-government. Because a multi-sectoral approach was taken, cooperation gained broad-based legitimacy. Also, the realization of a number of specific initiatives improved the position of smaller urban centers and specifically contributed to the idea of decentralization and balanced regional development, completely in line with the standards of the European Union.

## The Danube Triangle (Donaudreieck)

In the period following the change of the dictatorship in Serbia in 2000, the Association of the Danube Basin Swabs/Germans made clear that the state and its institutions have to stand behind the development and efforts of civil society initiatives. In one case, a linguistic minority group in the region was a key player in bringing attention to opportunities for civil society-government cooperation, specifically in terms of cross-border cooperation.

The sensitive task of preservation and strengthening of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identity of the remaining Danube Basin Germans, a regional German-speaking minority, would have been impossible without establishment of effective mechanisms of cross-border cooperation. Toward these ends, the Institute for Foreign Relations (*Institut fuer Auslandsbeziehungen-IFA*) from Stuttgart, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Auswaertiges Amt*), and the Cultural Endowment of the Danube Swabians of Baden-Wuerttemberg (*Donauschwaebische Kulturstiftung des Landes Baden-Wuerttemberg*) became involved in the Baja, Sombor, and Novi Sad area.

Specifically, IFA expert Peter Kratzer brought about benefits for the whole region during his three-year assignment (2005–2008). With a high motivational level, decades-long involvement in neighboring transition countries (Hungary and Romania), knowledge of a number of European languages, and a capacity to create team spirit, he advanced the performance of local NGOs—first in Sombor, as well as in the larger area. Prior to his involvement, the numerically small ethnic community of Germans living in Vojvodina were internally divided. The involvement of IFA helped build ties within the community; it also had a much larger impact.

It is important to note that the establishment of the *regional office* of the Institute for Foreign Relations in Sombor, and not in Novi Sad or Belgrade, was significant. Its location made it accessible to citizens, and thus helped mobilize people, spread knowledge, and build capacities at the very local level. Development was driven locally, rather than “from above.” This experience, much different from the common model of “centered action” of international organizations based in Belgrade and Novi Sad, suggests an efficient way to assist countries experiencing political, social, and economic transition. A realistic assessment, selection, and engagement of available human resources, and particularities of the local community, coupled with a direct, carefully managed, long-term program of a foreign donor, are more demanding, but they can yield better, more intrinsic development and stabilization. On a practical level, this means much smaller individual amounts of seed money are used, the final effects of which are far easier to be controlled. Here, the potential for corruption is reduced, which the foreign donors may inadvertently encourage due to their bloated programs poorly administered from the center.

An example was the International Conference of the Cultural Network (*Kulturnetzwerktreffen*) that was held on February 17–19, 2006 in Sombor. The event gathered around 60 participants from Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, and Germany. The aim was clear: to show the vitality and benefits of continuing to support the use of the German language. A great number of institutions of the City of Sombor (the mayor’s office, library, museum, the school of music, foreign-language schools) made their own contribution to this event. One of the participants put it: “There was the feeling of togetherness.”

Another prominent example of improvement of cross-border cooperation in only three years (2005–2006) is the Regional Conference of the German National Minority.

As of 2009, there were four such events that were organized in Apatin, Baja, and twice in Osijek). The annual event has become so popular that it attracts the general public, regardless of their nationality, not just the German ethnic community in the countries of the Danube Triangle.

In addition, the excellently conceived and regularly updated website of the Danube Triangle, [Dunaudreieck.eu](http://Dunaudreieck.eu).<sup>4</sup> The website addresses a range of current issues and events in the region with information in German, Hungarian, Serbian, and Croatian.

## SUMMARY

Taking into account the historical and political tides of the last century that engulfed the cities of Osijek, Sombor, and Baja—two world wars, the collapse of socialism and emergence of three independent, newly democratizing states, a devastating civil war accompanied by international sanctions and the military intervention of NATO, shifting geopolitical interests, new systems of local and national governance, and dramatic changes in the region's ethnic and linguistic demographics—cross-border cooperation has one of the few remedies to political and economic isolation.

From the above-mentioned examples of the implemented projects, the international community's presence was clearly evident, and as such provided the “catalyst” for cooperation: reliable rules, financial assistance, permanence, and predictability.

There are obvious differences in the values and preferences of the international community in the three neighboring countries: Hungary is a member of and Croatia clearly lean towards the European Union; both participate in NATO; Serbia's relations with the European Union and Russia fluctuate, while military-security neutrality is preferred over NATO membership. Local self-governments are far from autonomous in Serbia and they have limited autonomy in Croatia. So it is not easy to express local interests that may not coincide with the accepted “policy of the state.”

Additional shortcomings are reflected in the impoverished, incompetent, and politically-controlled Serbian city administrations that lost the properties that they had acquired for over three centuries to the central state. Unfortunately, until the present day, the central authorities (government of Serbia) have not proposed a law that would provide for the restitution of property to the Province of Vojvodina or other cities and municipalities in Serbia. Local government assets were seized during communism and once more during the 1990s by the regime of Slobodan Milošević. Another disadvantage has been Serbia's refusal, up until now, to emancipate and empower the “homegrown non-governmental sector.” Therefore, everyday life for this “the third sector” is concentrated on providing for its mere existence, instead of focusing on “building society.”

In addition, it is also surprising that the region around the city of Sombor is not a place under special state care in every conceivable aspect. It has been unsuccessfully

struggling for years for an extension and re-categorization of the major border crossing at the 50-kilometers border with the European Union (Hungary). Proposals and attempts to enhance and rehabilitate the road and railway infrastructure running to Sombor and the northern tri-border point of Vojvodina and Serbia toward Central Europe are treated with the similar “centralist contempt.” It is considered that adoption of the Law on Regional Development, stipulating the need for positive discrimination of border regions, will contribute to further enhancement of these interactions. It will provide the legal framework in compliance with the EU standards, which would facilitate the further development and regional connections on all grounds.

We emphasize the superiority of a “supranational concept” of the cross-border cooperation. This example of organization and program goals of the Danube Basin Germans, which is about German assistance to German minorities abroad, within an overall framework on EU principles. Following the mass persecution of Germans from Central Europe after World War II, the usually benign effect of the German language, civilization, culture, and everyday life regressed. The constitution and empowerment of the supranational European Union created the conditions that rehabilitated all benefits personified in the “pacifist German spirit.”

It is actually the character of this, essentially “domicile social capital” that brings about this preferable “sustainability of modernization initiatives.” The sense and scope of assistance provided by Germany through its national minority in Vojvodina, will essentially enable a greater presence of the German language and culture in Vojvodina and Serbia, which would be an additional correction to the (essentially anti-European) discourse about Greater Serbia .

## REFERENCE

Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes: the short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Alfred Everts, an expert on issues concerning Euroregional cooperation, during the “Banat Forum” (*Banatski forum*) Conference on European Regions, Zrenjanin, October 30–31, 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> Several *nabijas* composed one *kadiluk*. the difference between these two units is that, at the time of the Ottoman Empire, *kadiluk* represented the judicial and administrative area (*srez*).
- <sup>3</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: the short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994.
- <sup>4</sup> More on this initiative can be found at: <http://www.donaudreieck.eu>.



# Local Cooperation in the South Adriatic Region

*Živorad Kovačević*

## INTRODUCTION

Soon after its establishment, the Igman Initiative decided that one of the key directions of their activities to overcome the consequences of wars, hatred, and the absolute absence of mutual trust should be the development of cross-border cooperation of cities and municipalities in the frame of the so-called “*triangles of cooperation*.” Within a decade after the war, this cooperation began to grow in terms of both the territory, participants, and content through circles, and even quadrangles, of cooperation that involved more cities and extended beyond the three countries of the so-called Dayton Triangle. This network was the basis to establish a new organization named the Association of Multi-ethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe—Philia, gathering a number of cities from all the countries of the wider region of the South Eastern Europe.

The first triangle of cooperation was established in 2001–2002 among Osijek (Croatia), Novi Sad (Serbia), and Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Assemblies of these three municipalities adopted the *Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance*, which subsequently became the basic program document of Philia.

Encouraged by the initial success in this triangle, at its fourth session held in Dubrovnik on October 19–21, 2001, the Igman Initiative, founded in the wake of the Dayton Agreement, in cooperation with the EastWest Institute, launched an initiative to establish a new triangle of cooperation among Dubrovnik (Croatia), Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Herceg Novi (Montenegro, at that time within Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). The idea was to renew neighborly contacts (ruptured during the war) between local authorities, local agencies, non-governmental organizations, cultural groups, and individuals in fields of common everyday interest like fire protection, water management, waste disposal, tourism, culture, and the like.

## THE THREE CITIES

The most famous of these three cities is *Dubrovnik*. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Dubrovnik was the only city-state (Republic of Dubrovnik–Republic of Ragusa) in the eastern Adriatic area, a competitor with Venice for its wealth and trade. A number of monuments of that era make the entire city a vast museum that was acknowledged and added to the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage sites.

Dubrovnik is now one of the most prominent tourist destinations along the Adriatic Sea, an important harbor and the seat of Dubrovnik-Neretva County. In 2001, there were 43,770 inhabitants living in Dubrovnik (as opposed to 49,728 inhabitants ten years earlier). Around 90 percent of the population are Croats. When Croatia declared independence, in early October 1991, the Yugoslav Army (composed of Serbs and Montenegrins) besieged Dubrovnik for seven months.

Dubrovnik was heavily bombed, over a hundred of its inhabitants were killed, and many were wounded. Many buildings and monuments were severely damaged and their restoration was completed by 2005. Members of paramilitary formations from Montenegro ravaged the area surrounding Dubrovnik, particularly Konavle. The main culprits have been convicted by the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, but memories of these incidents are still fresh, slowing down the establishment of normal relations between Dubrovnik and cross-border cities in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

*Trebinje* is a city in Herzegovina and the southernmost municipality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1991, its population was 21,870, while this number has slightly decreased by today. Over two-thirds of the population are Serbs and one-fifth are Bosniaks. The city lies on the Trebišnjica River and is considered one of the most beautiful cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the signature of the Dayton Agreement, the prewar municipality of Trebinje was divided into two municipalities: Trebinje, which became a part of the Republic of Srpska, and Ravno, which became a part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Until 1992, Trebinje was a highly developed city in terms of its economy, with metals, clothes, foods, and a hydroelectric power on the Trebišnjica River as the main industries. During the war and in the period that followed, this region fell into isolation, facing a sudden fall in employment (with unemployment rate over 20 percent). A large percentage of the population capable of work has moved or been banished from the city. Trebinje is situated in the tri-border with Croatia and Montenegro, providing it with a number of advantages and possibilities. It is around 15 minutes of car from the seaside. There are two lakes in the vicinity of Trebinje—Lake Trebinje and Lake Bileća, with huge potentials in terms of tourism and economy.

*Herceg Novi* (Montenegro) is situated in a significant and attractive geographic location between the highest mountain of the Dinara Massif—Orjen (1,895 meters)

and at the entrance to Boka Kotorska (the Bay of Kotor), which was, in 1997, included in the association of the 28 most beautiful bays of the world. The population of the municipality of Herceg Novi is 39,000, and 20,000 live in the city center. The city was founded at the end of fourteenth century. The Turks conquered it in the late fifteenth century and ruled the city for two centuries, interrupted by a short period of Spanish rule in sixteenth century. After the Turks, the city was conquered by the Venetians, who remained in power until the decline of the Republic of Venice in 1797. Since that period, there have been frequent changes in Herceg Novi's administration (Austrians, Russians, French, Austro-Hungarians). Since 1918, Herceg Novi was a part of Yugoslavia.

These three cities are one hour's drive from one another. During the tourist season, the roads are clogged and drivers face many delays. When a rather time-consuming border-crossing procedure is added, very long queues of vehicles are formed, another obstacle for citizens living in these cities wishing to travel to their neighbors. The road between Trebinje and Herceg Novi was in a quite bad condition, but was modernized in 2008. The three cities have many issues in common, which they, unfortunately, have not resolved together.

One of the most urgent problems is *fire protection*. Fires regularly devastate the forests and other vegetation every year in the period of hot summer days, spreading across the state borders, where there is usually very little joint action or mutual assistance. In 2007, a fire broke out in Trebinje, devastating Herzegovinian and Croatian territory and reaching the city of Dubrovnik, but no joint actions occurred on this occasion. Due to a very strong wind at that time, the fire destroyed the entire coast of Dubrovnik, leaving a spooky image of black remnants of burnt trees, instead of lush green vegetation, in its wake. *Pollution of the sea* and water courses is also a significant problem requiring joint action. Increasing and improving *tourism* could be a common opportunity to work together, though little has been done in this regard.

Before the war in the 1990s, citizens, city administrations, economic entities, and tourist organizations of these three cities cooperated as units in one common country. The war, however, brought drastic changes. These three cities became parts of three different countries, with their borders closed for a long time, and relations between the newly-established countries being far from friendly and normal, with the eerie shadow of absurd conflicts, victims, destroyed dwellings, lost property, internal and external migrations, and distrust cast over the entire area.

Under such circumstances, only the most persistent enthusiasts from the Igman Initiative could have believed that it was possible to rehabilitate the broken relations and establish the necessary cooperation in this rather small, but highly divided and hostile area, as was the case with antiwar NGOs of these three countries that later began to cooperate.

## INCENTIVES FOR COOPERATION AND THE FIRST STEPS

The response of the civil sector from these three cities to the Igman Initiative's session held in October 2001 in Dubrovnik was encouraging. There were ten representatives from Dubrovnik, eleven from Montenegro, and nine from Trebinje. They came from non-governmental organizations—mainly youth, environmental, and cultural organizations—chambers of commerce, tourist associations, and agencies, scientific institutes.

The session included the active participation of the Deputy High Representative in BiH, the Head of the UN Liaison Office, Croatia, a representative of the UN for BiH, and representatives of the OSCE, Council of Europe, and the Spanish Agency for Cooperation. Representatives of the *EastWest Institute* aimed to be the preeminent catalyst for innovative policy solutions to emerging security problems, especially where a high level of collaboration among states, communities, businesses, and NGOs is crucial.

However, none of the mayors or high officials from the three cities responded to the invitation. Nor did representatives of the three states attend the session, although they were invited. However, among the participants were a number of respectable individuals from the three neighboring countries, who were well-known in the region, including scientists, eminent individuals in the field of culture, journalists, and antiwar and human rights activists, which added great significance to this session that was accompanied by substantial media coverage. Mr. Ivan Šprlje, Head of Dubrovnik–Neretva County, addressed the meeting and participated in the work of session. Other officials from the three countries who attended the session included Mr. Sejfudin Tokić, Vice-President of the Assembly of BiH, Mr. Miodrag Vuković, Adviser to the President of Montenegro, and Mr. Nenad Čanak, President of the Assembly of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Serbia.

The participants decided to form a working group for cooperation among the three cities. The group took advantage of the available time and held three sessions dedicated to issues of cooperation in the field of natural resources management (environment, water, and fire protection), the economic sector (tourism, small and medium-sized enterprises), and youth and cultural cooperation.

The group adopted two types of conclusions. In the general conclusions, participants stated that cooperation between the cities in the southern Adriatic triangle was of vital significance for prosperity, security, and peaceful coexistence in the region, as well as for integration into a wider European political and economic environment. It was emphasized that an intensified and systematic cooperation at the local cross-border level would be in the best interest of the three communities, but it should be developed in the framework of a wider perspective of European integration.

In addition, it was underlined that there were major political impediments to the cross-border cooperation, mostly arising from consequences of the war, and which should not be underestimated, as they require a special treatment within each of the

three communities. “Even technical and practical cross-border cooperation in such a vulnerable region has certain political implications,” the participants emphasized.

Therefore, it is vital to involve all relevant actors in the development of coordinated cross-border strategies—i.e., NGOs, representatives of private sector, educational, and cultural institutions, the media, as well as local and regional authorities. A special invitation was extended to the mayors of these three cities, regional authorities, and competent ministries of the three countries to actively engage in the drafting and implementation of cross-border strategies that are in the interest of all. The role of the local media in ameliorating the lack of information concerning the cross-border area has been particularly emphasized.

Concrete actions were recommended, including the recording of all existing (bilateral and trilateral) initiatives in the fields of their interest and/or jurisdiction and identify the key factors in each field, in order to establish highly representative and specialized working groups to convene in the very near future. The Center for Communication from Kotor offered to be the host of the working group for youth and cultural cooperation, the Chamber of Commerce and Tourist Association of Trebinje were hosts to the group for private sector development, whereas Dubrovnik–Neretva County agreed to host to the working group for natural resources and cultural heritage.

## Implementation of the Conference Conclusions

The meeting held on March 27, 2002 at the Cultural Center of Kotor was dedicated to youth and cultural cooperation, and in addition to representatives from Dubrovnik and Trebinje, it included the participation of representatives of cultural and youth NGOs, the media and student associations from Herceg Novi, Kotor, Tivat, and Podgorica. Representatives of youth organizations did not fail to mention and to discuss the consequences of the war.

Although this topic was emotional issue, particularly to representatives of Dubrovnik, the young participants concluded in the end, that among of all social groups, the youth suffered the greatest losses because of isolation on all sides of borders after the war. The new generation was subject to a decade of propaganda concerning the neighbors, disseminated through the media and in school curricula, too. The present participants insisted that their very participation in the meeting was a sign indicating that they were open and liberal, but the majority, however, were not ready for an open dialogue quite yet.

In the conclusions to this meeting, the youth and their representatives living near the border regions stressed that the peripheral position of these territories, compared to their respective national capitals, was the main reason why these areas should be interdependent, if they intend to stop their mutual isolation.

Two problems affecting youth were particularly emphasized: *employment* was nearly impossible to secure after completing their education and an increase in drug addiction was also worrying. They clearly saw that the main obstacles to cooperation were the lack of information in the cross-border area. City administrations, the media, and public institutions only declared their support for projects aimed at reestablishment of trust and reconciliation, without any true commitment, for fear of losing political support if they should launch such initiatives. Non-governmental organizations were seen as weak, lacking political or financial support, and unable to be good partners for joint projects. The postwar social and economic malaise also led to a high rate of all types of crime. Irrespective of all the obstacles, the youth were determined to carry on with joint initiatives in the following four fields—media, education, culture and environmental protection.

On June 3, 2002, a seminar was organized in Dubrovnik by the EastWest Institute and with the participation of the OSCE, and dedicated to tourism and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Approximately thirty participants, mainly representatives of tourist agencies, discussed their common problems and interests. It was proposed to create a *common cross-border website* to include all crucial information; to develop a network and the cross-border marketing of micro-business products and services; to organize small cross-border fairs; to establish subgroups based on sectors; and to conduct an analysis of the visa and customs procedures, as well as other barriers to cross-border trade and investments, so the appropriate proposals could be submitted to the central authorities aimed at achieving the liberalization of the visa and border regime.

A conference of the Forum of Cross-Border Cooperation in the South Adriatic Area was held in Dubrovnik on September 28–29, 2002. It was based on the proposal of the Igman Initiative. Representatives of the EastWest Institute, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, and the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, as well as a great number of representatives of non-governmental organizations, cities, regional and central authorities, scientific institutes, and individual experts attended.

Fire protection, water management, waste disposal, small and medium-sized enterprises, tourism, and youth cooperation remained at the top of the agenda since local or central authorities of the three countries continued to ignore these “soft” issues that could bring about cooperation. However, a range of concrete conclusions was adopted, concerning the forms of cooperation in any of the above-specified fields.

A round table on water and environmental protection was held on January 25, 2003 in Dubrovnik. The only representative from Croatia was a representative of Dubrovnik-Neretva County (no one represented Dubrovnik or Konavle), although the round table was organized in Dubrovnik. The discussion mostly focused on water supply problems

in Herceg Novi. A halt in negotiations between Herceg Novi and Konavle, through which the pipeline passes, transporting water from Trebinje to Herceg Novi, indicated the severity of the situation. As there was no representative from Konavle present in the round table, operational conclusions could not be adopted. It was emphasized that this issue could not be resolved without the help of the central authorities.

The participants also agreed to create a regional cross-border register of pollutants, to adopt a joint emergency plan, and establish teams to respond to environmental incidents, including pollution of the sea, water, and soil. Such teams already exist in Croatia, so the presence of such teams could be extended throughout the entire region.

The last event regarding regional cooperation was held on March 1, 2003 in Trebinje, with the topic concerning *municipal waste*. None of the eleven representatives of the city of Dubrovnik and the Dubrovnik-Neretva County attended the seminar. Representatives of Trebinje informed the participants that they were engaged in relocating the existing landfill, whereas the landfill in Dugonja, used for waste disposal from Herceg Novi (for which a monthly fee was paid) was closed by a decision of the competent ministry. It did not comply with sanitation standards.

The seminar concluded that the most efficient solution would be of a regional character, implying that a common landfill in concert with a recycling initiative should be established. It was also concluded that the Croatian side should be informed about the proposal, and if it agrees, a concept of a bilateral solution could be made. It would be based on a study and project jointly prepared and developed by experts from the two municipalities.

Following the conclusions of the session held in Dubrovnik, special seminars and round tables were organized in 2002 and 2003, concerning particular issues of regional cooperation, financed and directed by the EastWest Institute. Cities and institutions from Croatia kept a noticeable distance. Actually, things have not moved any further from these seminars and their respective conclusions, as the appropriate mechanisms for their implementation have not been provided. As a matter of fact, these were gatherings of good will, without an institutional set-up; therefore, only appeals and general recommendations, not specific decisions, were sent.

## WATER SUPPLY IN HERCEG NOVI

One of the most urgent problems that needed to be solved was re-establishment of the regular water supply in Herceg Novi. The water source is within the water system of the Trebišnjica River in Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The water reaches the water treatment plant in Herceg Novi, passing through a low-pressure gravity pipeline, which passes through Konavle and is connected to the pipeline at the hydroelectric power plant in Croatia.

*Figure 1.*  
Tri-border Area of Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina



The construction of a pipeline from Plat to Herceg Novi before the war was financed from self-contributions of the citizens of Herceg Novi. The investor reimbursed the owners of the property through which the pipeline extended for any potential damaging of trees and crops. At the time when the entire system was under construction, all the locations were the territory of a single country (then the SFRY); therefore, there were no cross-border problems whatsoever. The situation in the region, however, changed

drastically in early 1990s, with the establishment of new countries. Nowadays, the main source for water supply in Herceg Novi is situated in three different countries, bringing together historical and cross-border cooperation issues.

During and after the conflict, severe water supply problems were experienced in Herceg Novi. The supply was cut, then re-established in 1993, with occasional interruptions still occurring. A contract between municipalities of Konavle (Croatia) and Herceg Novi (Montenegro) was finally concluded on August 7, 1996, in the presence of the observers of the European Economic Community.

The contract obliged the Konavle Communal Society, Cilipi (*Konavosko komunalno Društvo–Ćilipi*) to provide all necessary conditions for transport through the main water pipeline. The amount of water should be made available to the maximum of its capacity, according to the consumption needs. The main water pipeline should be regularly maintained, provided that the Herceg Novi Water Supply Company has paid for the general repair of the pipeline. The Herceg Novi Water Supply Company was obliged to pay to the Konavle Communal Society for the transportation of the water and the maintenance of the pipeline to the amount of 0.10 Deutschmarks (DM)/m<sup>3</sup> of water in 1996, which was to be gradually increased each year to the amount of DM 0.30 by 2000. It was also obliged to pay for the installation of water meters in Plat and Debeli Brijeg.

The contract was signed, but both sides were unhappy. Frequent disagreements resulted in periodical water shortages in Herceg Novi, which considered the Croatian charge for the water transit very high. According to their claims it was beyond the financial possibilities of the city, so they simply stopped meeting their financial obligations. The arrears accumulated. Consequently, the water supply often was interrupted, a substantial problem, particularly in the tourist season. There have been attempts to find a mutually acceptable solution, through direct contacts between Herceg Novi and Konavle, but none of them were ultimately successful.

In 1999, the government of the Netherlands paid all the accumulated water debts of Herceg Novi, as well as the transit costs for the following 12 months, hoping that, in the meantime, a lasting resolution would be reached. A new contract was signed in May 2000 and it was envisaged to have a duration period of five years. Herceg Novi agreed to pay a lump sum of DM 50,000 per month for the transport of water and the maintenance of the pipeline in the period April 2000–April 2001. After this period the price of water would rise to DM 0.22 or EUR 0.112 per cubic meter (which would not include depreciation of the pipeline). Instead of two, only one water flow point (at Debeli Brijeg) was envisaged. In case of arrears, the municipality of Konavle was authorized to stop the transport of water until all water bills are paid. The contract was to come into effect after Herceg Novi meets all its obligations. If this would not be the case before April 1, 2001, then the price of a cubic meter of water would be calculated on the basis of the average flow of water of 300 liters per second (777,600 m<sup>3</sup> for

30 days to the amount of 17,072 DM per month). However, this contract was not observed by any of the sides, so the situation has remained unchanged.

The political parties in power at that time were HDZ (*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*, or the Croatian Democratic Party, founded by Franjo Tuđman) in Dubrovnik and Konavle, SNP (the Socialist National Party, which supported Slobodan Milošević) in Herceg Novi, and SDS (the Serbian Democratic Party, founded by Radovan Karadžić) in Trebinje. This obstructed and made compromise nearly impossible. Whenever there was a cut in water supply, mayors of Herceg Novi and Konavle exchanged mutual accusations in public, creating an unfavorable atmosphere for achieving sensible agreements.

At its fourth session, held in early June 2002 in Kotor, the Igman Initiative concluded that the attempts to reach a resolution to the water supply problem in Herceg Novi, had not broken the deadlock:

“As it is quite certain that the authorities of these municipalities still stick to their positions, thus not contributing to reaching the final resolution, the non-governmental organizations from these three cities, whose representatives participated in the session, are offering their good practices and services.”

Thus, they proposed the establishment of an independent three-member expert group, including experts in water supply and legal and economic affairs.

Members of this expert group should not come from any of the countries governed by the Dayton Accord in order to achieve the maximum impartiality. The task of this expert group was to document and determine the situation and propose the appropriate solutions within three months. The proposal was submitted to the OSCE Office in Podgorica, along with the request for assistance in finding the experts and donors to finance the project.

In general, the OSCE does not engage in issues of this kind, but this time they agreed to provide their assistance because of the potential for conflict between the communities on both sides of borders, as well any violation of fundamental human rights. At the request of the OSCE, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation agreed to send one expert and pay the costs of his mission. The mission worked in the field in the first half of September, held a number of discussions, gained an insight into the legal and technical documentation, and submitted the report.

The report contained an objective and thorough estimate of the financial aspects and the technical condition of the pipeline and waterworks, pointing to huge water losses due to their poor condition. It also reported on the non-observance of the signed contract, according to which the maintenance of the pipeline and its installations should be undertaken by Konavle, only after the owner of the pipeline, Herceg Novi, has completed the entire repair of the pipeline and installations.

The reports also stated that that “the problem was rather sensitive, as it combined rational elements with personal opinions, non-related to any financial or technical

aspect.” The experts’ opinion was that “a resolution may be reached if both sides should agree and consider the problem in an objective manner, and then began dealing with it, starting from the most urgent technical aspects.”

The experts provided concrete proposals. It seemed that the objective platform for an agreement was finally defined. Representatives of the Igman Initiative visited the two mayors and insisted on reestablishment of the negotiations on the basis of the experts’ report. Still, there were no results, and the two sides continued to accuse one another of obstructing the agreement.

The complex relations between the municipalities on the opposite side of the border have required careful and planned actions of all those participating in the process of reconciliation and the creation of the prerequisites for actual and concrete implementation of projects aimed at improving the life of citizens, regardless of their ethnic group. The obstructions caused by particular actors conversely inspired the attempts to find the alternative methods that would motivate all representatives of local authorities to start a dialogue and reach a resolution.

One way out was to find higher levels of authority, this time in ministries of foreign affairs. After holding two regional conferences, organized by the Center for Regionalism, under the auspices of the respective three ministries of foreign affairs, things started to move in a positive direction. The influence and power of ministries provided the necessary incentives to the local authorities and under their auspices, political differences were reduced.

In addition, local authorities, using persuasive arguments for the necessity of regional cooperation, the improvement of the quality of life, and opportunities for new markets, began to act. The long-awaited dialogue was finally initiated. In brief, after holding several meetings with municipal representatives, in which each municipality delegated one or two members to deal with the issues of cross-border communication and cooperation, a mixed committee was established to engage in defining the priorities in their newly-established relations and drawing up regional project proposals to be submitted to international financial institutions and donor organizations.

## RESOLVING THE ISSUE OF PREVLAKA PENINSULA

Among the unresolved border issues between the newly-established countries, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), particular attention is paid to the issue of the Prevlaka Peninsula, which used to be under the jurisdiction of the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA). The issue of Prevlaka Peninsula has been open since 1992 when a United Nations’ mission was established by Security Council Resolution No. 779 from October 6, 1992. Later, the UN Mission of Observers (UNMOP) was

established on February 1, 1996. The Security Council renewed the mandate of the mission every six months.

An agreement on normalization of relations between the FR Yugoslavia and Republic of Croatia was signed on August 23, 1996. In this agreement, the two countries recognized each other as independent states within their international borders. It envisaged resolving the issue of the border in an amicable manner in the spirit of the Dayton Agreement and good neighborly relations.

Nevertheless, the two governments had different positions : the Yugoslav government considered this to be a *territorial dispute* (the dispute on sovereignty over the peninsula) and a *security issue*, whereas the Croatian government considered it to be *exclusively a security issue*, implying that Croatian sovereignty over the peninsula was indisputable, and the agreement should resolve the issue of the security of navigation in the bay. Given these circumstances, it was impossible to find a minimum starting point required for negotiations, and the Prevlaka Peninsula has since become one of the most severe impediments to achieving a normalization of relations between the new states. Compounded by the already hostile relations in the South Adriatic triangle, it caused a lot of problems for the population living near the border.

Figure 2.  
Vicinity of Prevlaka Peninsula



Citizens in the frontier area had intensive contacts before the armed conflict, particularly those who had properties on the other side of the border. They needed visas to cross the border, which could be obtained only in capitals of the two countries. Long queues of automobiles and buses waited to pass through the very strictly controlled bordercrossing. The same held for tourists who intended to see both Dubrovnik and Herceg Novi. Nautical tourism, leisure, and sports were seriously affected. Fishing was unregulated in this zone.

However, after a shift in democratic attitudes, the governments of Croatia and Yugoslavia began to find a solution in an friendly way. They agreed, in a pragmatic manner, that the agreement would not identify and set the borderline. This was issue on which the two sides took opposite positions, so they decided only to define the regime near the border. A cooperative and sensitive attitude of both sides facilitated the adoption of a temporary agreement that managed to remove this sensitive issue off the agenda for a while. All solutions were considered temporary. That is, they would not prejudice a final resolution that would be defined in an agreement on the border in the future.

This provided an opportunity to resolve, in an amicable manner, some important issues, which were of great relevance for the normalization of relations and daily life. On the basis of the adopted agreement, a complete demilitarization was implemented: in Yugoslavia three kilometers from the line, and in Croatia five kilometers away from the line. Temporary border traffic was established, allowing the inhabitants of municipalities of Herceg Novi, Kotor, and Tivat in Yugoslavia and the municipalities of Župa Dubrovačka and Konavle, as well as the City of Dubrovnik in Croatia to cross the border with only their ID cards or a border pass.

Alongside the existing bordercrossing in Debeli Brijeg, another interstate bordercrossing was established at Konfin. The two sides agreed to develop and encourage comprehensive cooperation in a number of fields, namely tourism, the coast guard and emergency services, and sea-borne pollution. During the tourist season (April 1 to October 31) it was agreed not to conduct border control on nautical tourists, leisure, or sports. The agreement also included cooperation on air traffic between Dubrovnik and Tivat.

The agreement also regulated fisheries in this zone. It should be emphasized that Croatia and Montenegro agreed several years ago, to build a joint tourist-recreational center on Prevlaka Peninsula. This agreement was signed by presidents of Croatia and Montenegro, Mr. Stjepan Mesić and Mr. Milo Đukanović, and presented to the UN General Secretary, Mr. Kofi Annan, who promised to fully support it.

Despite some negative responses in both countries, the wider public actually welcomed the agreement and considered it as a good sign of resolving the disputable issues between the two countries. This international agreement resulted from the efforts and cooperation between the two interested governments, without any interventions of the international community. This fact has been particularly important and encouraging

for the entire region, where the international presence and direct intervention, as well as pressure, are visible to a great extent.

The Prevlaka Agreement not only made life easier for citizens living near the border, but also showed what an incentive it would be to find an amicable resolution to the issues that are in the interest of the local communities situated in the tri-border area.

## CHANGING THE STRATEGY: FOCUSING ON NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

The Igman initiative invested a lot of effort to encourage cooperation in the South Adriatic triangle, but the concrete results were rather modest. The EastWest Institute provided its immeasurable contribution in organizing and financing the follow-up events, taking place after the session in Dubrovnik held in October 2001. During 2002 and 2003, a number of regional meetings were held, at which useful and concrete conclusions were adopted, but no one was willing and able to implement them in practice.

The Igman Initiative could state the following:

- *Non-governmental organizations and business entities* (particularly related to tourism) provided their full support to the need of cooperation within the triangle in a number of fields in the interest of all;
- *International institutions and organizations* provided significant political, financial, and logistic support to the civil sector initiative;
- *local (particularly national) media* covered the regional initiatives insufficiently, resulting in low publicity; moreover, they were most frequently adding fuel to fire when it comes to mutual accusations and ethnic conflicts;
- as in other cases, the Igman Initiative counted most on the *local authorities* for the support of reestablishment of trust and cooperation in implementation of concrete initiatives and projects; however, this support was entirely lacking, with mayors most often contributing to a further deterioration of precarious inter-relations;
- *the central authorities* provided only their verbal support to cooperation, without any serious commitments, although the professional services of the three countries in the field of environmental protection, tourism, fire protection fire, infrastructure, and so forth, actively participated in searching and proposing the solutions for joint projects.

Based on these findings, the Igman Initiative concluded that it was unwise to expect that NGOs would be able to stimulate other crucial actors to undertake joint actions.

Therefore, the strategy had to be changed: it was impossible to make a breakthrough without the local authorities. As a general preposition, non-governmental organizations

have had a trailblazing role in the process of the alleviation of tensions in the aftermath of war and the encouragement of the cross-border cooperation. Their strongest allies were municipalities and mayors in border areas.

However, in case of the South Adriatic triangle, mayors were the staunchest opponents to the cooperation, with a support of the good part of the local electorates. The relations between central governments were better than at the local level. Political parties in power were more ready to foster normal cooperative relations with the neighboring countries than their local chapters in border areas. However, the central authorities, i.e., the party leaders, could make a decisive impact on them.

Thus, with the assistance of international organizations (the OSCE and High Representative to BiH in particular), it was necessary to address the central authorities of the three countries. First, because their general position was developed in a positive sense towards good neighborly relations, particularly in the context of joint efforts and striving towards European integration. In the three cities, the inhabitants' attitudes began to soften and they slowly became more willing to start cooperation with their recent enemies.

After a great deal of patient work, effort, and meetings organized with senior state officials from 2005 to 2007, the Igman Initiative managed to obtain the support of the three ministers of foreign affairs. In the mean time, Montenegro declared independence, and thus became the third partner in negotiations, replacing the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. It was particularly important that Croatia accepted to take an active part in encouraging cooperation within the triangle. The Croatian authorities used to be most reserved, regarding cooperation with the two former enemies with suspicion.

## Extending the Range of Participation

After consultations with the ministers of foreign affairs from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, staff from the Igman Initiative came to the conclusion that other local and regional communities should be included, in addition to Dubrovnik, Herceg Novi, and Trebinje, primarily because the majority of them were directly involved in resolving problems in their joint interest (water supply, fire protection, and opening borders, among others).

In this sense, the cooperation mechanism involved Neum and Ravno from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the municipalities of Konavle, Župa Dubrovačka, and Dubrovačko Primorje, as well as Dubrovnik–Neretva County from Croatia and Kotor and Tivat from Montenegro. As a result, the number of participants increased from three to eleven participants.

*Ravno* is one of the southern-most municipalities in Herzegovina. Until 1997, it was a part of the municipality of Trebinje, belonging to the territory of Republika

Srpska. Unlike Trebinje, Ravno is a part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is very small. According to the census conducted in 1991, it had 198 inhabitants, mostly Croats.

*Neum* is a town, tourist settlement, and the only municipal center at the Adriatic Sea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The town has around 2,500 inhabitants and the whole municipality around 5,000. The Adriatic Highway passes through Neum, connecting it with Split, Dubrovnik, and the entire Adriatic coast. In addition, an electric railway passes through the Neretva valley, from Sarajevo and Mostar, to Ploče. Neum has been developed as a tourist area in the region that used to be a rural and fishing area.

*Konavle* is a small municipality, situated southeast of Dubrovnik. Its population is a little over 8,000 (96.5 percent of them are Croats). The center of the municipality is Cavtat. Konavle is actually a very narrow area between Snežnica Mountain and the Adriatic Sea, from Cavtat to the border with Montenegro at Prevlaka. Konavle is a wealthy municipality, and has always been one of the ten wealthiest municipalities in Croatia. The most developed economic branches here are tourism and agriculture. Dubrovnik's airport is situated on the territory of Konavle (in Čilipi).

*Župa Dubrovačka* is a municipality with 6,500 inhabitants (93 percent Croat). It is situated in the area between Dubrovnik and Cavtat. The center of the municipality is the popular Srebreno holiday resort. The most developed part of the local economy used to be agriculture and provision of agricultural products to Dubrovnik; nowadays, it is tourism. There is a range of beautiful resorts along the coast, attracting a great number of visitors and tourists.

The municipality of *Dubrovačko Primorje* was established in 1997, and is the second biggest municipality in Dubrovnik–Neretva County, spreading over an area of 197 km<sup>2</sup>. Its population, however, is very low (only 2,500 inhabitants), living in 20 settlements, of which the settlement of Slano is the largest, with 500 inhabitants. This municipality was devastated in the recent war, and later by an earthquake in 1996, and is now the area is administered under special state care. The municipality has established its development targets: building a tourist resort in Rat (for which they need a potential investor), construction of a business zone of 17 hectares, construction of wind farms, the airport, golf courses, and the tourist zone.

*Dubrovnik–Neretva County* is the southernmost Croatian county. Because it borders with Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is divided in two parts at Neum—the Dubrovnik part with Korčula and the Neretva part. There are five cities (Dubrovnik, Metković, Korčula, Ploče, and Opuzen) as well as seventeen municipalities. The county has 123,000 inhabitants, of which 93 percent are Croats. According to the official records, during the war in 1990s, a total of 14,194 houses were burned and looted. The most important economic branch is tourism, along with maritime transport. The oldest European saltpan is located in Ston, dating back to the fourteenth century, which is still used for traditional salt gathering and production. People living in the Neretva valley and Konavle are mostly

occupied with agriculture, and animal husbandry to a smaller extent. At the peninsula of Pelješac and the island of Korčula, the most important economic areas are viticulture for the production of autochthonous wine varieties, olives, and shipbuilding.

*Kotor* is situated in one of the most beautiful bays in the world—Boka Kotorska. It has 5,500 inhabitants. Throughout the history, Kotor has been a city of merchants and famous seafarers. Now, its most important economic branch is tourism. The old quarter of Kotor is one of the best preserved medieval urban centers, typical for cities established in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Its medieval architecture and a large number of monuments lead to Kotor being added to the UNESCO list of World Cultural and Natural Heritage sites. Kotor resembles Dubrovnik in many ways and attracts a great number of visitors. Carnivals and festivals are organized every year, making this beautiful city even more magnificent.

*Tivat* is the most recently established municipality, with the smallest area in Boka Kotorska. It occupies an area of approximately 46 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of around 13,000. Its greater development and growth as an urban center began only towards the end of the nineteenth century. The main airport on the Montenegrin coast is situated on the territory of Tivat. This city attracted a number of investors. The construction of a large marina for yachts is currently ongoing.

## A New Chapter in Intermunicipal Relations

During 2006, the Igman Initiative was persistently lobbying, with the support of the OSCE and the EastWest Institute for a meeting of foreign affairs ministers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro, with the aim to stimulate cooperation in the South Adriatic area. The meeting was, at last, organized in Neum on April 27, 2007. Ministers Mr. Sven Alkalaj (BiH), Mr. Milan Roćen (Montenegro), and Ms. Kolinda Grabar Kitarović (Croatia) signed a joint statement, agreeing, among others, on the following:

“Cross-border cooperation is one of the prerequisites of regional development, just like the regional cooperation is a stimulus to development of our countries and is an integral part of the European process in which our counties take part. We encourage the improvement of the cross-border cooperation, support joint projects aimed at improving and developing this cooperation, as this is all an integral part of our mutual good neighborly relations and European visions that we share.”

It was agreed that the three respective countries, each for the period of one year, would coordinate the activities of public and local authorities in the process of

implementing the tri-border cooperation. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro was the first chairman for 2008.

After that, representatives of local authorities were supposed to sign a memorandum that would be the basis for operationalization of that cooperation. Unfortunately, the memorandum remained unsigned, its text was not fully harmonized among the signatories, and this contributed to the absence of a number of representatives of the tri-border local authorities from this meeting.

In order to provide a new incentive to continuation of the initiated cooperation process, a preparatory meeting was held on April 14, 2008 in Zagreb, including the participation of assistant ministers of foreign affairs of the three countries responsible for bilateral relations, as coordinators of this process for the country they represented, along with mayors and representatives of municipalities of Dubrovnik, Konavle, Neum, Trebinje, Kotor, Tivat, and Herceg Novi, ambassadors of Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and representatives of the Igman Initiative, the EastWest Institute, and the UNDP Mission to Montenegro.

At the meeting in Zagreb it was agreed to hold another meeting of foreign affairs ministers in Dubrovnik on May 5, 2008. The Igman Initiative and the EastWest Institute agreed to make all the necessary arrangements and hand out a revised text of the memorandum for the establishment of a joint commission for natural resources management and cooperation in the field of natural and other types of emergencies.

Meanwhile, the Igman Initiative came up with the idea to organize a meeting of *religious leaders*, who would provide support to the process of reestablishment of trust and reconciliation in this area. The initiative was accepted by Bishop Grigorije of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who invited the Catholic bishop and the imam of the Islamic religious community to attend a meeting in Trebinje and called for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.

At the proposal of the Igman Initiative, the Municipal Assembly of Trebinje adopted a statement that underlines that Trebinje and Dubrovnik were connected in many ways throughout their mutual history (Box 1).

*Box 1.***Statements of Regret**

*“Trebinje was a natural hinterland to Dubrovnik, whereas Dubrovnik was Trebinje’s window to the world.”*

Good economic and trade cooperation has been fostered between these two cities for centuries, as well as strong interpersonal relations, the evidence of which may be seen in numerous God-parenthoods existing until the present day... Evil times that fell upon some parts of the former Yugoslavia in the previous decade did not avoid this region. The war brought along horrible crimes committed on people, along with huge devastation and the breaking up of the connections that had been fostered for centuries. Unfortunately, this happened between Trebinje and Dubrovnik.

A part of terror that happened to Dubrovnik came from the side of Trebinje, and we, the councilors of the Municipal Assembly of Trebinje, would like to express great regret for what happened. To admit to your mistake is grand, but we also know how magnificent it is to forgive. This is why human languages contain wonderful words and phrases like “I am sorry” and “forgive me.” Uttering these words is, first of all, in the interest of the citizens of Trebinje and Dubrovnik, as well as in the interest of future generations that will come after us, which is why we need to look to the future. Being the first neighbors to one another, we have a range of common interests, whose harmonization will be to the benefit of our citizens, as well as common problems whose solving will contribute to development and progress in both cities and the wider region that we belong to.”

The president of the Municipal Assembly of Trebinje, Mr. Nikola Sekulović, who has been an activist in the Igman Initiative since its establishment, conveyed this apology at the meeting in Dubrovnik, and stated, with regret, that a part of the terror that happened to Dubrovnik did come from the side of Trebinje. “We express deep regret for what happened. To make mistakes is human, as is to commit a sin against someone else, but it is even more human to admit to your mistake and try to fix it,” Mr. Sekulović stated.

At the same meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, Mr. Milan Roćen said that his country “would like to express regret for all the pain, all atrocities, and all material losses” suffered by the citizens of Croatia, specially Konavle and Dubrovnik, that were inflicted upon them by particular citizens of Montenegro. “Dubrovnik was a victim of aggression and destruction where the innocent were killed and highly valuable assets were severely damaged.”

These messages conveying apologies were welcomed in Dubrovnik, substantially contributing to creating an amicable atmosphere and developing the cooperative spirit. The meeting in Dubrovnik was for the first time attended by mayors and representatives of all cities and municipalities, as well as of Dubrovnik-Neretva County, who signed a joint statement. The statement says that it is not a legally binding document and the participation in the work of the joint commission they established will be based on a volunteer basis.

*Box 2.*

**Decision on Establishing the Joint Commission**

*Excerpts from the Decision*

”Commissions for cooperation in the field of natural and other types of disasters and natural resources management, hereinafter referred to as the Commission, shall be established on the basis of the Statement signed on May 5, in Dubrovnik by representatives of local authorities from the tri-border area between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia, and activities shall be implemented in accordance with the provisions and in the spirit of that statement. [...]

Article 2

In the framework of the set goals and fields of work, the Commission’s concrete tasks will include the following:

- Collection of the existing projects of cooperation in previously specified areas of cooperation,
- Initiating new projects,
- Final verification of projects to be submitted to donors,
- Presenting the verified projects to the donor community,
- Monitoring the activities concerning the implementation of the accepted projects,
- Initiating and coordination of all other forms of cooperation in the tri-border area of these three countries.

Article 3

All decisions of the Commission shall be made on the basis of harmonization and consensus....

The goals of the joint commission for natural resources management and cooperation in the field of natural and other types of emergencies include the following: to provide support to joint cross-border projects, to exchange communication and information about the issues in the joint interest, to develop the projects in the interest of all and apply for EU funds, to plan and agree on the strategy of protection and development of the cross-border area at the sea and the interior, to cooperate and provide assistance in the event of natural disasters and environmental incidents, and to develop the region in compliance with the concepts of the European Union.

Potential fields of activities to be undertaken by the commission were established:

- 1) *natural resources management*: utilization and protection of water resources, monitoring and protection of the sea, environment and environmental protection, energy and waste management;
- 2) *cross-border interventions in urgent situations*: fire protection, other natural disasters and environmental incidents;
- 3) *enhancement of the economic cooperation*: regional development of tourism, re-establishment of other forms of economic cooperation and establishment of passenger transport lines between the signatory cities/municipalities; and
- 4) *demining*.

## Formalizing Cooperation by the Commission

The commission is composed of three groups of representatives: one representative of each local community that are appointed by the corresponding local authorities, one representative of each of the three governments, and the expert working group in identified fields of cooperation. The commission decisions are made by consensus. If the commission needs to meet more frequently for the project purposes, it may operate with a reduced number of representatives of the interested local communities. Representatives of the Igman Initiative and the EastWest Institute, which agreed to cover the costs of the commission's meetings, are involved in the work of the commission. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs agreed that their assistants in charge of bilateral relations would assume the role of coordinators of these activities.

At the commission's session held on June 23, 2008, chaired by the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, the Rules of Procedure—drafted by the Igman Initiative—concerning the commission's work was to be adopted. Still, due to a misunderstanding in preparation of the session, representatives of local communities from Croatia did not attend the session, so another meeting had to be scheduled, which was held on July 21, 2008 in Herceg Novi.

This time, the commission was in full force, the Rules of Procedure was adopted and discussion was initiated on the possible joint projects. The meeting was characterized by a constructive working atmosphere. The greatest attention was paid to *fire protection* (exchange of information, fire alerts, video surveillance, demining, aircraft used in aerial firefighting entering the territory of another country, establishment of a regional center for procurement of equipment, and the possibility of obtaining the EU support).

The necessity of starting a joint project to *regenerate the surrounding devastated forests* was underlined. *Utilization of water resources and water supply* was also the topic of discussion. In addition to reaching a solution for the disputed water supply between Konavle and Herceg Novi, the project of constructing a new pipeline was proposed. One of the topics that attracted the attention of all participants was cooperation in dealing with the issue of *municipal waste*. A joint expert group will consider various solutions—from a joint landfill for waste disposal to construction of a waste recycling plant. It was proposed to establish a regional center to be in charge of solid waste management.

*Regional development of tourism* was the next topic on the agenda. Several proposals on joint projects were made, including the creation of a common tourist product. It was concluded that a joint proposal should be submitted to establish new *bordercrossing points* in the Dubrovnik-Herceg Novi-Trebinje triangle. The Igman Initiative proposed the *border regime monitoring* project, in order to increase the efficiency of crossing the borders. The participants also agreed on the proposal that the international musical and sport event called “Games without Borders,” involving young people from different regions of the world and which has already been organized by the Igman Initiative in Mostar, Priština, and Gračanica, also be organized in cities of the South Adriatic area.

The participants agreed that joint expert groups prepare the relevant projects. It has to be considered and adopted at the commission’s session, prior to applying for funds from the European Union and other potential donors at the meeting of foreign affairs ministers. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to establish a close cooperation with the newly-founded Regional Council for Cooperation (which replaced the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe) seated in Sarajevo, whose representatives should be invited to all sessions of the commission. Active support also should be sought from the High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The next meeting of the Commission was held on November 2, 2008 in Tivat. On this occasion, approximately ten projects, jointly prepared by expert groups of the tri-border municipalities, were verified. These projects include the following:

- Regional center for fire protection
- Automated fire surveillance
- Promotion of cultural heritage for the purpose of sustainable tourism
- Water supply: maintenance and increase of regional waterworks capacity

- Establishing the new small bordercrossing points
- Civil border monitoring at the tri-border between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia
- Waste water purification plant
- Transport network
- Exchange of tourist visits.

At this meeting, the participants agreed to complete all verified projects until December, when the last meeting would be held in the period of Montenegro's chairing of the commission. At this meeting, final versions of projects would be adopted. Presentation of projects to donors would be organized at a donors' conference, envisaged to take place as part of the meeting of the three foreign affairs ministers, in the second half of January 2009.

Therefore, after seven years of persistent attempts, the full support of local and central authorities to cooperate in the South Adriatic area was finally achieved. In addition, the institutional mechanism was established for preparation of joint projects and their implementation, which provides, for the first time, a sufficient basis to expect the cooperation in this turbulent region to start developing in full swing.

## SUMMARY

In reality, there are many problems of joint interest in the South Adriatic triangle that could be resolved efficiently by joint efforts, as they are of cross-border character. The greatest impediments were psychological and political barriers to cooperation, i.e., the consequences of the recent war, evident in a lack of trust, a reserved attitude to contacts, and especially to cooperation, with recent enemies.

The progress in developing the cooperation will depend, first of all, on political will, as it lies in the hands of politicians, who were the main obstacle to finding a common language for quite a long time. Non-governmental organizations and representatives of business sector were willing and ready to cooperate, but civil society remained powerless to achieve any considerable cooperation on their own, without support and faced with obstructive local authorities and cautious central governments.

The media failed to support a number of initiatives launched by non-governmental organizations, particularly by youth organizations, to discover the complete truth about the past and thus overcome its burdens and step into the future. Religious communities hesitated for a long time to give their assent to forgiveness and reconciliation, but, in the end, they played a positive role in creating the conditions needed for establishment of mutual contacts and cooperation.

A valuable contribution to the development of cross-border cooperation has been provided by the EastWest Institute, as has organized and financed a great number of meetings and events. International organizations were willing, whenever needed, to provide their support. However, they could only support cooperation when the main actors, primarily local authorities, were ready to cooperate. The OSCE provided experts who conducted the objective analysis of the issue of water supply in Herceg Novi, and subsequently made very concrete recommendations for resolving this issue. This organization also played a very constructive role in lobbying with central authorities, particularly in Croatia. Changes of the international programs' strategies also helped to launch the new wave of cooperation.

Changing the strategy of the Igman Initiative from the primary impulse of cooperation among non-governmental organizations to a direct involvement of national governments, that would encourage the local authorities, has proved to be the only efficient solution in such specific circumstances surrounding this deeply-scarred area. In order for this support not to remain only verbal, a well-developed mechanism of cooperation of local communities was established, including monitoring, provision of incentives, and the direct assistance of central authorities.

Goals and fields of cooperation must be concrete in order to work and have been precisely formulated in order to avoid misunderstanding about the goals of this initiative to bring together the tri-border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro. They are exclusively focused on identification of problems that are of joint interest, preparation of projects that would be the same for all or for some local communities, and lobbying with international institutions for financial support.

The Igman Initiative has been, at all times, actively involved in the mechanism of cooperation, willing to help in preserving the created momentum and issue a public warning should any delays or misunderstandings occur. The Igman Initiative is also aware of a problem that is very specific for Bosnia and Herzegovina—there are two government entities and weak central authorities, whose impact on local authorities is insufficient. For this reason, this organization will continue its lobbying activities with the authorities of these two entities, even more so because the municipalities in the triangle belong to both entities;

The Igman Initiative will make use of the positive fact that presidents of states take active part in this organization's sessions, and will, in this respect, make efforts to ensure the necessary political support to the project of cooperation in the South Adriatic tri-border area. The pattern the Igman Initiative has successfully applied in other triangles of cooperation, based on the civil sector initiative that is later accepted by local and other authorities, could not be efficiently applied in this area.

## ANNEX

Figure A1.

“Closer Cooperation of Multiethnic Cities,” Herceg Novi, Montenegro



In November 2006, officials in the multiethnic city of Herceg Novi discuss their experiences in cross-border cooperation with colleagues from Kyrgyzstan. The visit was presented in local and national media.



# Local Policies in Multiethnic Community Management



# Activities of the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia and the Center for Regionalism

*Tomislav Žigmanov*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final section provides an overview of a three-year-long project of the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia to develop and reach a morally sustainable and ethno-culturally sensitive model of governance in multiethnic local communities in Serbia. It was implemented by three different local self-governments (Senta, Sombor, and Zrenjanin) in Vojvodina, in cooperation with the Center for Regionalism from Novi Sad and a group of experts engaged to assist with the project.

The project began with an in-depth analysis of the existing status of local minority policies. The results were later the subjects of public discussions held in each local community. This was followed by a number of activities aimed at developing the capacities of local authorities and minority institutions and organizations for the creation and implementation of minority policies at the local level by means education (round tables, consultations, organized trainings, and study tours).

The target groups of these activities were the elected and appointed representatives of local, regional, and central administrative authorities, representatives of local minority institutions and NGOs, cultural and educational institutions, the media, etc. At the same time, various activities were undertaken in order to establish good models for minority policies in local communities. In this respect, the concrete problems and existing needs in given local communities first were defined, followed by the planned creation of the most adequate and optimal solutions, which had to observe the legal framework, interests, and needs of each particular minority community, as well as realistic possibilities for the local community concerned. Finally, the initiatives were defined, along with the manners of their articulation (models, procedures, system, etc.), which was followed by the implementation of the initiatives as one of the ways of resolving the problems.

*“National minority protection is of crucial importance for stability, democratic security and peace on the European continent.”*

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A relatively large number of persons belonging to national minorities live in Serbia. According to the last census (2002), a population of 7,498,001, excluding Kosovo, lives in Serbia. Serbs, as the most numerous national community, account for 82.86 percent. Persons belonging to national minorities account for 14.38 percent, whereas the others, undeclared and undecided, account for 2.67 percent. According to these census figures, the largest minority in Serbia are Hungarians, who are the sole group making up more than 3 percent of the population (3.91 percent or 293,299), followed by Bosniaks (1.82 percent or 136,087), Roma (1.44 percent or 108,193), Yugoslavs (1.08 percent or 80,721), Croats (0.94 percent or 70,602), Albanians (0.82 percent or 61,647), Slovaks (0.79 percent or 59,021), Vlachs (0.53 percent or 40,054), Romanians (0.46 percent or 34,576), and others. Hungarians, along with Bosniaks and Romas, make up almost one half of the minority population in the Republic of Serbia—7.17 percent.

National minorities in Serbia live dispersed over the whole territory. Minority groups are concentrated in the regions of Vojvodina (Hungarians, Croats, Slovaks, Romanians), Sandžak (Bosniaks), and in the south of Serbia (Albanians). In some areas, ethnic Serbs are a minority in those municipalities inhabited by a majority of Bosniaks, Hungarians, or Albanians. There are significant differences among these groups, such as in terms of health indicators, educational attainment, professional qualifications and position on the labor market, political mobilization, and so on.<sup>1</sup> These characteristics of minority communities significantly affect how they can exercise their rights as well as the character and intensity of articulation of their interests. Similar to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Roma minority has the greatest number of unfavorable social indicators. All these variables were taken into consideration in the course of implementing the planned project activities.

If pluralist democratic societies are to fulfill their potential, then they should guarantee the conditions that ensure that persons belonging to national minorities, like the majority, may freely enjoy both universal civil rights as well as special minority rights, thus achieving their full integration into society. Broadly put, socially inclusive policies necessitate a number of specific benefits for members of minority groups. The manner in which minority rights are regulated and implemented in practice and how persons belonging to national minorities are integrated into society significantly influence

the quality of interethnic relations, the degree of the civil cohesion of the society, human security, stabilization of the democratization process, and ultimately, economic prosperity.

All these aspects were considered in the development of projects on managing multiethnic communities by the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia. Specifically, the overall position of minorities, and the quality and scope of exercising minority rights in a given local community, are not effected only by the formal legal and institutional framework, but also by specific local minority policies. This proved to be a rule also in this case, that is, without local minority policies—particularly in the transition countries—there are great obstacles to exercise minority rights and to integrate minorities into society, and as a result, their absence negatively effects the quality and stability of interethnic relations.

In this project on local minority policies, the following activities were implied, including a set of specific programs, institutional mechanisms, and concrete actions of public authorities, political actors and civil organizations aimed at: (i) the establishment and development of systematic guarantees as well as all other (ii) social prerequisites for protection of cultural identities and promotion of effective participation of minorities in public decision-making processes. The existence of such policies in local multiethnic communities crucially contributes to the promotion of interethnic tolerance, the harmonization of differences, the implementation of legal guarantees, and the development of comprehensive practices for exercising legitimate interests and needs of persons belonging to minority communities. They all are aimed at democratic development of local communities and at improving the quality of citizens' life.

To this end, such policies uphold, promote, and exercise the principles of multiculturalism in local communities, and their implementation proves intercultural competence of public authorities at the local level. Considering that they were significantly lacking in Serbia, the basis for different and numerous activities launched within this project was centered around two objectives: (i) building and developing of local minority policies; (ii) reinforcing and defining the prerequisites of their existence (e.g., the improvement of the legal framework and supporting institutional solutions, which existed at the level of central authorities).

Accordingly, it seems relevant to point to two more significant deficits that existed in the sphere of multiethnic communities' management in Serbia. Firstly, similar to other transition countries in the region, the capacities of local governments in Serbia were underdeveloped for an adequate and quality response to the challenges of (democratically) managing multiethnic communities. Secondly, the entire complex of minority issues in Serbia was going through a transition, both in the formal and legal sphere and in institutional, structural segments.

They had various deficits of objective nature, which were mainly reliant on central authorities, such as: (i) the unresolved issue of political representation of minorities

at all government levels; (ii) the ambiguous manner of participation in the decision-making processes, particularly the role of National Minority Councils as bodies of minority self-government; (iii) the incompleteness of new institutional arrangements (e.g., the relationship between National Minority Councils and Interethnic Relations Councils within local assemblies); (iv) problems in exercising human and minority rights; and the (v) issues of protection at local level, particularly the issues of information, education, culture, and official language use.

One should also bear in mind that throughout the three-year period of the project duration (2005–2007) the country was distinguished by additional characteristics. Comparing Serbia to other countries in Central and South Eastern Europe, this is a country experiencing a late transition, which started following the demise of the regime of Slobodan Milošević in the autumn of 2000, over a decade since many of Serbia's neighbors began to refashion their economies and societies. Until then, the democratization of Serbian society was only on the surface, hiding the regime of Slobodan Milošević characterized by powerful sultan-like attributes. Among other things, this resulted in Serbia's poorly developed democratic potentials and underdeveloped rule of law. After almost three years of accelerated transition (2000–2003), democratization came to a standstill following the assassination of the Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić (March 2003).

Wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and finally in Kosovo resulted in economic devastation, a nearly-total impoverishment of the general population, and a redefined geopolitical position for Serbia. Additionally, the frustrations due to such a series of defeats were powerful and resulted in persons belonging to particular minority communities (mainly Croats, Bosniaks, and Albanians) distrusting public institutions. The absence of more comprehensive approach to come to grips with the past in Serbia, after 2000, aggravated the democratic recovery of the country.

Finally, interethnic relations were in upheaval throughout the 1990s: severe ethnic turbulence among the communities led to much mistrust among particular national communities. For example, policies were very often "ethnicized" and segregation was strong among particular minority communities, especially among the Roma. The nearly decade-long absence of any integration policy for persons belonging to national minority communities in Serbian society further complicated the process of stabilization of interethnic tensions.

Concerning the formal and legal framework on minority issues—similar to other countries at the beginning of the transition in the 1990s—there was *legal chaos*. In particular, at that time Serbia still did not have a constitutive element meeting contemporary legal standards. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, adopted as late as 1990, was inadequate in a large part of its provisions. Another significant feature of its unharmonized legal framework was that rights under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe (which Serbia

signed) was not properly regulated by the law. The absence of the rule of law gave rise to impunity: it was not uncommon thing for public and elected officials to disregard regulations. Finally, persons belonging to minorities were not even informed or aware of their right to exercise their rights.

Another major characteristic has been Serbia's largely unregulated institutions, partly explained by Serbia's late and slow transformation from an authoritarian to a democratic country. Therefore, a large number of unregulated and incomplete legal rules and institutional solutions, made room for improvisations and *ad hoc* approaches to solving problems.

Here, the institutional role previously held by the monopolist Communist Party was not replaced by an emerging democratic political system but by a totalitarian one. Furthermore, resources existing within civil society and non-governmental organizations in local communities were not always utilized in an adequate manner. Representatives of local communities were more inclined to "rule" rather than "manage" communities. At the same time, one should also bear in mind that Serbia was highly centralized state and that local self-governments had relatively limited competences. In the process of exercising human and minority rights at the local level, a further aggravating circumstance was the overlapping tiers of government (central, regional, and local).

## Cooperation Goals

On the basis of such initial facts and assumptions, as well as characteristics of Serbian society relevant to the management of multiethnic communities, project activities were planned either with the main purpose to eliminate the existing, detected deficits or to alleviate their negative impacts. This required that all actors involved in that complex process become empowered by different means to create and implement such local policies that are essentially ethnically-sensitive. From the very beginning of this preliminary project the Serbian Fund for an Open Society was aware of the restricted character of the initiatives coming from the civil society towards the authorities.

The main project goals were defined, as follows:

- establishment and development of new policies in local communities, to improve management in multiethnic local communities in Serbia and thereby contributing to increased social cohesion at the local level;
- enhancement of intercultural capacities of public authorities, particularly with regard to promotion of the principle of multiculturalism in multiethnic local communities;
- articulation of interests and exercising the needs of all citizens in the local community through the local administrative authorities and in an institutionalized

manner, with a special focus on interests and needs of minority communities at the local level;

- development of systematic solutions for problems relevant to the life of minority communities, particularly in the field of participation in decision-making at the local level, as well as in exercising individual rights to education, information, fostering of one's own culture, official use of languages and alphabets in a local community;
- contribution to the development of sustainable and equitable model of managing multiethnic local communities in a transition country.

The project represents a classic form of partner cooperation among civil society organizations with the state and public administration bodies. Naturally, this partnership required autonomy, independence, and equality of each institution and organization that was involved. They all gathered around the same endeavors and project goals, and the project implementation presumed interactive relations between the specified actors.

Civil organizations, think tanks, and individual experts were the driving force of this initiative, for beyond sharing experiences in the sphere of local minority policies, the representatives of local authorities and minority self-governments were most often participants in the various round tables, seminars, and trainings. They also implemented local policies. Furthermore, they were used as powerful resources for promotion and exchange of achieved results (e.g., policy on Roma integration into local communities), as well as for particular lobbying and advocacy activities, elaborated within the project (e.g., amendments of particular legislative solutions).

## Synergy of Numerous Participants

As far as the issues of project organization and management are concerned, the leading holder of all activities was the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia (FOSS),<sup>2</sup> which at the same time was the major donor. Activities of direct implementation were entrusted to the executive director the Center for Regionalism<sup>3</sup> from Novi Sad. It was selected as a main partner in the implementation since it previously had an extensive experience of work in this field (e.g., nearly a decade of successful implementation of the project “Agreement on Multiethnic Tolerance,” which now has expanded regionally to include more western Balkan countries). What is more, the Center for Regionalism had credibility in local communities, as well as well-developed human resources. All specified characteristics were necessarily required for the organization that was engaged in direct implementation of this kind of activity. The Open Society Fund signed the special Cooperation Agreement with implementing parties, which more specifically defined mutual rights and responsibilities.

Apart from implementing parties some form of cooperation was also established with other *civil society organizations* that also have similar resources and orientation: the Belgrade Open School, the PALGO Center, the Center for Civil Society Development, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, local NGOs, minority organizations present in the local communities, local media, etc. Similarly, particular emphasis was placed on the involvement of established *experts* in the fields of minority rights, public administration, local communities' management, etc., in implementation of specific project tasks. Furthermore, a significant contribution from *minority representatives* was counted on, like the members of National Minority Councils and representatives of other minority institutions and organizations.

Particular attention was given to establishment of links with other *similar projects* that were underway at that time in Serbia. Synergy of all activities aimed at promoting the position of minorities and improved exercising of human and minority rights was made possible. For instance, one such project implemented by the NGO Civil Initiatives was "Minority Rights in Practice in South Eastern Europe 2004–2006,"<sup>4</sup> supported by the King Baudouin Foundation in partnership with the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Soros Foundations in South Eastern Europe. The project was aimed at promoting the position of minority communities and improving the full exercise of human and minority rights at the local level through building capacities of minority institutions and local self-governments.

## Project Locations: Diversity as a Selection Criterion

The project itself was implemented across three municipalities of different size in Vojvodina, the northern, autonomous region of Serbia with an ethnically mixed population. Throughout the selection process of municipalities, it was taken into account that one of them has a low population and that its ethnic majority at the general state level represents a quantitative minority within the territory of the municipality. Accordingly, the municipality of *Senta* was selected, that is, a municipality with a population of a little more than 25,000, in which Hungarians are the majority and Serbs are the minority population, along with a smaller number of Roma. The second municipality was supposed to be a cross-border municipality of medium size, in which the majority population is Serbian and in which a significant number of citizens from several minority communities lives. As a result, the municipality of *Sombor* was selected, which is the municipality with the population of more than 90,000 where the Serbs make up the majority (a little more than 50 percent), but there is a significant percentage of Hungarians and Croats, whereas the Roma population accounts for a lower percentage. Finally, the selection criteria for the third municipality envisaged a big municipality with a dominant number of citizens belonging to the national majority at the state level and a smaller number of citizens

belonging to ethnic minorities. Thus, the municipality of *Zrenjanin* was selected, that is, a municipality with a population of over 130,000, whereas the minority population is much lower (up to 20 percent), including: Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, and Roma. The justification for this selection was the assumption that particular solutions in managing multiethnic local communities may not be identical, keeping in mind the differences among local communities.

The whole project was managed by a *project council*—the highest managing authority comprised of nine members. It was chosen upon a proposal put forward by the donor and implementing party and according to the agreement of all actors involved in the project. In terms of staff, it was comprised of the donor and implementing organization (three members), an independent expert responsible for minority issues (one person), one representative of each local self-government in which the project was implemented (three members in total), one representative of executive branch of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, as well as one representative of the National Minority Councils from the participating local self-governments. The council meetings were at least five times a year and it also worked on continuous definition of the project activities. The council was headed by its *president* who chaired the sessions, which were prepared and organized by the employees of the implementing organization.

## MAIN ACTIVITIES

Considering that the project goals were extremely demanding, the varied and complex activities were implemented over three years. Therefore, it was not possible to envisage all the activities during the planning stage. It was deliberately planned that a number of activities would be defined by the project council in the course of the project implementation. Accordingly, this project had the attribute of structural openness.

### Preparations: Institutionalization and Introduction of All Stakeholders

Before the commencement of the project implementation, all necessary preliminary actions had been taken. For instance, the project's structure was developed to deal with the organization and communication between the project holder (FOSS), the project implementing party (Center for Regionalism), and all stakeholders (local self-governments, minority institutions and organizations, NGOs). In addition, each participating institution and organization appointed a person to be responsible for the project implementation. Such management structure was viewed as being crucial to the project implementation process.

In parallel, the relevant project stakeholders (provincial authorities, representatives of the three municipalities, representatives of National Minority Councils, NGOs, experts) were introduced to the initiative and they were informed about their expected contribution. Finally, the consent for their participation in the project implementation was also requested. This was carried out by the representatives of the project holder (the donor). In addition, the representatives of the relevant international institutions and organizations in Serbia (e.g., the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the Council of Europe, the European Agency for Reconstruction and Development) were also informed about the project. Upon completion of the preparatory activities, the project council was constituted, the president was appointed, and the role of the council was defined.

## Understanding the Current Situation in the Field

The first major project activity was research-based. Specifically, it was necessary to investigate the situation in the field of managing multiethnic communities and gain a clear insight into the characteristics of the local minority policies in the three municipalities in Vojvodina. In other words, interdisciplinary research aimed to obtain a snapshot of the legal and institutional frameworks, development plans and local self-governments' capacities in the field of managing multiethnic communities. The research questions focused on staff capacities, kinds and characteristics of the pursued policies, how the rights of the persons belonging to minorities are exercised, what are the employment policies, what is the relationships between central and local authorities, were there any problems and of what kind, and what are the methods of possible solution to interethnic relations.

To accomplish this job, a think tank, the Center for Civil Society Development, was engaged from Zrenjanin. It conducted a *survey* that covered the following issues:

- the normative and legal aspects and institutional arrangements that regulate the issues relevant to exercising minority rights at the local level;
- the possible legal and functional gaps between public administration and self-government bodies, that is, between different management levels;
- the division of competences and management methods in the resolution of regular and extraordinary issues in multiethnic communities;
- the actual and desired management policies;
- the ethno-cultural aspects of policies in these municipalities;
- the means of funding the activities relevant to the development of ethno-cultural identity;
- the policies for multiethnic funding, particularly with regard to the funding policy for minority communities and organizations;

- possible differential treatment of particular national communities in this respect and funding or lack of funding for persons belonging to national communities and their needs;
- development of multiethnic policies in the selected communities;
- presence of the minority issue on the public agenda.

Survey results were published in four separate monographs, with a volume of 150 pages for each municipality, whereas the fourth volume synthesized and compared the obtained results in all three municipalities.

Organization of four *round tables* followed, when the survey results were presented and discussed (Zrenjanin, Sombor, Senta, and Novi Sad). All round tables were attended by the highest representatives of local self-governments, officials from administration both at central and local level, representatives of councilors' groups, institutions in the field of culture, information, and education, people from institutions dealing with minority issues, political parties, representatives from the non-governmental sector, as well as distinguished individuals from the public life of each specific local community. Each participant of the round table received the publication with the survey results seven days in advance, so that the discussions were of an excellent quality, and in terms of the content, they were governed by the problems of respective local communities.

These discussions, also evaluated by two independent experts, were very important for the future of this project, since, not only the survey results were reviewed, but they also served the purpose of defining the further steps with respect to the content of this project. In addition to significantly contributing to more reasonable insights into the situation and problems in the field of multiethnic local community management, the survey results were useful in amending the policies in specific segments (e.g., the municipal administration in Sombor allocated twice as many funds in its 2006 budget intended for the organizations dealing with minority culture based on the insight and the comparison with the methods that were employed by the municipality of Zrenjanin).

## Capacity Building Activities

The start of the project was based on the assumption that the capacities for the creation and implementation of minority policies at the local level were insufficiently developed. This assumption was confirmed by the survey. With the view to eliminate established deficiencies, different education programs were organized and were intended for various target groups such as local political officials, employees in public administration, educational institutions, news agencies, political parties' activists, political youth, civic organizations (NGOs), minority political and cultural organizations, and similar ac-

tors. The knowledge and skills, necessary for establishment and implementation of the minority policies at local level, were transferred by means of round tables, symposiums, conferences, education through trainings and seminars, as well as through study tours and exchanges of best practices. As they were—to a certain extent—skilled people who had their point of views on these issues, the program tried to develop each educational concept in an interactive manner.

First the three-day *seminar* on “Writing Effective Policy Papers” was held (developed by LGI’s expert team). The guidebook under the same name was translated into Serbian, so each participant could receive a copy. The Belgrade Open School issued training certificates. Both of these actions guaranteed the successful outcome of the seminar. The seminar participants, 40 of them in total, were appointed and elected representatives of the local authorities from all three municipalities in which project had been implemented as well as representatives of the provincial administration. The reason for this theme having been chosen for the training were the deficiencies detected among the representatives of local authorities in the course of conducted survey, particularly a lack of skills in defining actual proposals for resolution of specific problems in the process of local communities’ management.

A second three-day *training* addressed the topic of “Managing Differences.” The training involved the project council members, the representatives of the municipal administrations of Zrenjanin, Senta, and Sombor, NGO representatives from the three municipalities, and the provincial administration—the Secretariat for Administration, Regulations, and National Minorities and the Office of the Provincial Ombudsman. This training was aimed at raising awareness, understanding, and knowledge about identity, differences, and interethnic relations, thus improving the capacities of municipal and provincial administration to work and increase their sensitivity to the issues concerning persons belonging to minority groups and interethnic relations.

Additionally, two *symposiums* were held, which were focused on the difficulties of two new institutions—the Ombudspersons in local communities and the Interethnic Relations Councils at municipal assemblies. Immediate actors (i.e., Ombudspersons, members of Interethnic Relations Councils), as well as representatives of administration, experts, and others directly involved in the project implementation participated in the activities of these symposiums. Debates were aimed at gaining a comprehensive insight into the place, role, function, and significance of those new institutions, both in the process of local communities’ management and in exercising minority rights.

In addition to pointing to theoretical and formal and legal aspects, special emphasis was placed upon the elaboration of previous experiences. The most important segments were documented by independent evaluators. This material was later used by a focus group to draft the two policy documents: “Recommendations for Building the Institution and Work of the Ombudspersons (Citizens’ Defender) in Multiethnic Local Communities” and “Recommendations for Establishment and Work of Interethnic Relations

Councils.”<sup>5</sup> [These documents were offered later to all multiethnic local communities through the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities. At the same time, the Ombudspersons used these recommendations for launching the activities aimed at the establishment of these institutions in six municipalities in the Serbian part of Sandžak, which ensured dissemination of good practice developed in Vojvodina, whereas recommendations on the Interethnic Relations Councils were used in trainings of councils’ members in a number of municipalities in Sandžak and Vojvodina.

At one point, it occurred to the project council members that the texts of two recommendations may be used as a basis for potentially better, more precise wording of those articles in the law that refers to municipal interethnic relations councils and local ombudsperson institutions. This was quite necessary because the new Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which was adopted in the meantime, also included more specific regulations on minority rights. Accordingly, a *working group* was established, which, after a number of meetings, drafted new articles to the Law on Local Self-Government. These proposals were concerned with defining the competences of local self-governments when it comes to exercising rights of the persons belonging to national minorities, as well as institutions of local ombudsman and municipal interethnic relations councils, also providing detailed exposition of the initiative.

## Models of Minority Policies in Local Communities

Activities also were aimed at improving how citizens can demand to exercise the right to information in one’s own mother tongue at the local level. Here, activities were focused on a more consistent application of the existing laws, and furthermore on defining and supporting documents upon the adoption of new laws in 2003 and 2004. This initiative was developed in three steps and its implementation took over two years. The first step involved empirical research on how and within what scope this right is exercised. The second step included launching of public debate on the existing situation and the opportunities for and sustainability of new solutions. The third step envisaged different activities aimed at building an optimal and sustainable model of supporting the use of minority languages in the public sphere (recommendations targeting legislative authorities, funding policies for the media).

The program also worked to develop local policies for Roma integration. The situation of the Roma community in Senta was the least favorable, in the sense that there are no inclusive local policies targeted at the Roma population. In cooperation with the Roma Educational Center from Subotica, an initiative was launched to empower the local Roma community and to improve their position and how they can independently articulate their interests. Responding to the specific position and needs of the Roma community, further work has been planned on the development of the relevant policies.

The practices transferred to Senta from Subotica were successful, and the first Roma non-governmental organization was established in the municipality of Senta. It drew up and implemented its first project, and a whole set of measures for more effective local Roma integration was developed (in the field of healthcare, preschool and primary education, social assistance, and housing conditions). The final round table agreed to establish permanent communication between the representatives of Roma community and aforementioned institutions.

## Public Advocacy

Media coverage has played an important role in the activities that were implemented so far. However, this coverage was deemed insufficient since the attainment of specific, more demanding goals also required typical lobbying activities. The steps in lobbying and public advocacy of this legislative initiative were agreed and targeted at the widest circle of relevant domestic institutions, as well as at international institutions concerned with the issues of human and minority rights.

To this end, a Proposal for the Amendment of the Law on Self-government was submitted to a wide segment of government institutions at the central and provincial level: assembly bodies and deputies' groups in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and the Assembly of Vojvodina; the competent Ministry for Public Administration and Local Self-government, the offices of the Prime Minister and President; to the Office of Citizens' Protection; to at the national provincial Ombudspersons; National Minority Councils; and the wide circle of domestic and international, governmental and non-governmental organizations. Intensive consultation, monitoring, promotion, and lobbying activities followed, mainly aimed at ensuring that these proposals are submitted for consideration by the Assembly and finally introduced into the new Law on Self-government.

By the beginning of December 2007, this proposal of legislative solutions<sup>6</sup> was supported by a number of international institutions, first of all by OSCE Mission in Belgrade and the Council of Europe. It was also supported by the Assembly Committee on Interethnic Relations, more specifically, the proposal received a positive judgment and was accepted by all the committee members and passed for further Assembly consideration. Some of the proposed articles were introduced into the new Law on Local Self-Government.

## SUMMARY AND RESULTS

Alongside the Center for Regionalism, the Fund for an Open Society has conceived, initiated, and implemented the three-year project “Minority Policies in Local Communities—Situations and Perspectives of Managing Multiethnic Communities,” the main goal of which was to assist the multiethnic local communities in transition countries in the process of building and developing a good management model.

The goal was attained through implementation of numerous activities like capacity building for local self-governments, building and development of new institutions, upgrading the legal framework, and development of ethnically sensitive public policies at the local level. Particularly effective was the creation of a policy proposal aimed at establishing and operating the Ombudsperson in multiethnic local communities, the Interethnic Relations Councils, and the right to use minority languages at the local level.

The results achieved throughout the project implementation were disseminated not only around other parts of Serbia with multiethnic populations (first of all the area of Sandžak and in the south of Serbia), but also to Montenegro. Furthermore, a number of countries from Central Asia also expressed their interest in the methodology and the content of activities (for instance, LGI supported sharing these experiences with local government officials in Kyrgyzstan).

At the final phase, the proposal for new articles to the Law on Local Self-government was drawn up, which refer to the competences of local self-governments with respect to the issues of exercising the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and establishing local ombudspersons and municipal Interethnic Relations Councils. Following several months of lobbying and advocacy activities, a number of articles from this draft were introduced into the new Law on Local Self-Government in Serbia.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Unquestionably, these minority groups are neither closed categories, nor homogenous. Rather, they are internally heterogeneous.
- <sup>2</sup> Visit the Fund for an Open Society-Serbia online, at <http://www.fosserbia.org>.
- <sup>3</sup> See the Center for Regionalism homepage, at <http://www.centarzaregionalizam.org.rs>.
- <sup>4</sup> For more on this initiative, visit: <http://www.kbs-frb.be/call.aspx?id=209762&LangType=1033>.
- <sup>5</sup> Institution of Ombudsperson is not obligatory in the Law on Local-Self Government, but it can be founded on a local level. The State has established a central level Ombudsperson, and Province level as well. Central level Ombudsperson has the right to establish its local offices in municipalities where needed.
- <sup>6</sup> The Center for Regionalism has proposed legal provisions and amendments to Law on Local Self-Government regarding the role of Interethnic Relations Councils and local Ombudspersons, models of selection of their members, competences and functioning in general.

# Annexes



## ANNEX 1



### TRILATERAL POSITION TOWARDS THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

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*JOINT STATEMENT MADE BY THE PRESIDENT OF SERBIA AND  
MONTENEGRO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA AND  
PRESIDENT OF THE PRESIDENCY OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA*

**CONTINUING** on the practice established through the participation of the President of the Republic of Croatia and the President of the Presidency of BiH in the 9th session of the Igman Initiative, which took place in Zagreb in September 2004, we – the Presidents of Serbia and Montenegro, Republic of Croatia and the Presidency of BiH - participated in the 10th meeting of Igman Initiative, held in Belgrade on 27 June 2005.

**WELCOMING** the role and engagement of non-governmental organisations in initiatives, such as the Igman Initiative, in fostering and motivating the organs and institutions of the three states in the continuation of the policy of normalisation of relations among the states of the so-called Dayton triangle, with the aim of making restored confidences and mutual understanding a basis for building peace, stability and security in this key segment of southeastern Europe,

**CONFIRMING** their determination to contribute, through their personal engagement, to the creation of confidence and "good neighbors" climate, and thus help the overall stabilisation of circumstances on the territory of former Yugoslavia,

**EXPRESSING ASSURANCES** that there is no alternative to the complete renewal of good neighborly relations, regional cooperation based on full equality and the principle of fulfilling mutual interests and joining the EU, as the ultimate goal that all three states are striving for,

**AFTER HAVING REVIEWED** the current situation referring to the interstate relations in an atmosphere of openness, and after having given a positive assessment of the Igman Initiative efforts in contributing to the expansion of the bilateral agreement network among the states, We, the President of Serbia and Montenegro, the President of the Republic of Croatia and the President of the Presidency of BiH, agree on the following:

- 1) There has been significant progress in the relations between the Republic of Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as between Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina since the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia ended, so the normalisation within the so called Dayton triangle currently encompasses virtually all spheres of life;
- 2) As all three countries have an identical long-term goal, namely inclusion in the European Union, it is required that the remaining residues of the wars, in which the former Yugoslavia broke apart, be removed in order to further improve the normalisation of relations, this being one of the key preconditions for joining the EU;
- 3) Impartial attitude towards the past, both recent and the one dating from the period of World War II and passing the truth about the past events on to the young generations, are some of the key preconditions for our countries to cease to be the hostages of the past and turn to future, unburdened with historic myths and aspirations of the history revisionists;
- 4) Cooperation between the state, state institutions and the non-governmental sector should be continued, in particular in the area of establishment and strengthening of the rule of law, reform of judiciary, modernisation of public administration, whereas it is necessary to pay special tribute to the non-governmental organisations, which, on numerous occasions, proved to be valuable leaders, in particular in the policy of peace and stability and dealing with the past with the aim of opening the doors of future;

- 5) Process of the return of all refugees and exiles who wish to return should be accelerated, equally supported and assisted by all three states at all levels, with the creation of conditions not only for the return, but also for their remaining, which implies economy revival and the development of the regions where the exiles would return, with the valuable, both past and future, assistance from the international community ;
- 6) Efficient affirmation of the idea that national minorities and communities are an integral part of the society and state in which they reside, that they enrich both the material and intellectual culture of the state, epitomize bridges of joint communication and furthering of friendship and cooperation among citizens and states of the so called Dayton triangle, and a consistent implementation of inter-state agreements on the protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities in accordance with the best practices and international agreements, will contribute to political and social stability of each state and consolidate the European perspectives of the entire region;
- 7) Full and unconditional cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, not just in cases of voluntary surrenders of the indicted, but also in cases of indicted, who seek their rescue from justice in hiding, is an inevitable step towards the complete elimination of the "collective guilt and responsibility" theory, and also a precondition for the individualisation of guilt and responsibility for crimes committed during the recent wars on all three sides; it is of utmost importance to ensure all preconditions for fair and just proceedings in both cases processed before domestic courts and those which will be transferred from the Hague, including the statements of witnesses as well as their protection;
- 8) A regime of visa-free border crossings of should be permanently institutionalised, as this would also help that the renewal of relations does not apply to representatives of state and business subjects only, but that it should grow into one of the key components in the renewed network of links and contacts in the relations among the three states;
- 9) Traffic relations among the Republic of Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina should be restored and built, which will, needless to say, contribute to an improved movement of people and goods, not just among the three states, but also between the three countries and Europe, ie. the world;
- 10) All disputable issues should be resolved by means of conversation and negotiations, even through temporary solutions as a step towards the permanent ones, with the aim of making lives of those living in border areas easier - ensuring that the interests of each state's environment and citizens be preserved, but also starting from common interests in the framework of both bilateral and regional policies, taking into account the fact that successful cooperation of the three states is a pattern of the relations in the EU in which the three states wish to integrate and that Europe needs to be built in the region if we wish to turn the region into a part of the united Europe;
- 11) Mental, culture, historic, economic and all other barriers that could hamper the successful normalisation within the so called Dayton triangle, should be removed through patient work, with presence of good will of all three parties, in cooperation and with assistance from the international community, whenever such assistance is available and required;
- 12) All three parties are accountable for undertaking necessary steps and measures with the aim of gradual overcoming and elimination of hatred and mistrust, roused by recent wars, in order to facilitate all processes of individual and group contacts establishment among the citizens of the three states.

Presidents of Serbia and Montenegro, Republic of Croatia and the Presidency of BiH intend to continue with the practice of occasional participation in the meetings of Igman Initiative and therefore appeal to Igman Initiative to continue with its activities aimed at creating conditions and circumstances in which our region will definitely break away from the past and its legacy, and also, through accepting the European standards, intend to create conditions for the accession of the three states to the EU, in accordance with their individual achievements and results.

President of SaM

President of Croatia

President of the Presidency of BiH

Belgrade, 27 June 2005

This statement has been made in three originals in Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian languages, each version having the validity of an original.

## ANNEX 2

## AGREEMENT ON INTERETHNIC TOLERANCE

*Aware* of the fact that post-socialist transition of the economic and political system, state of law and stabilization of democracy are essentially dependent on the culture of peace, tolerance, trust and stable interethnic relations,

*Committed* to the European system of civic values, to the realization of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and integration in the EU institutions, and to the policy of respect, neighborly relations and cooperation between the states to the benefit of their citizens, regions and local self-governments,

*Adherent* to the philosophy and legacy of civilization of inalienable human rights and freedoms, including the idea that the extent of democracy in modern political orders is measured by the majority's relation to the minorities,

*In accordance* with the standards of the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe, in relation to the protection of rights and freedoms of national and ethnic minorities,

*Being of opinion* that borders between the neighboring states and regions safeguard the preservation of self-distinctiveness, but deeming that those borders are not there to disregard the likeness and the need for inter-communication and free exchange of commodities, people and ideas,

*Hoping* that minorities will no longer be used as an "apple of discord" between nations and states,

*Confident* that the time is coming when the old and new national minorities, with guaranteed rights and freedoms to cherish and develop their cultural identity, will become the important lever in the overall cooperation,

*Intending* to preserve the multicultural wealth of their environment, to develop the direct and most efficient participation of citizens of all nationalities in the decision-making process related with issues of any interest to their communities, as well as to contribute to the stabilization of the region, communication and cooperation among citizens and institutions of neighboring countries, regions and local self-governments,

*Pursuant* to the European Charter on Local Self-government, and in the spirit of the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter on Regional and Minorities' Languages,

*Realizing* the importance of the process of regional cooperation initiated in the triangle Novi Sad–Osijek–Tuzla,

Citizens, non-governmental organizations and political representatives of the local self-governments (municipal and city) of multicultural cities in South Eastern Europe (West Balkans) hereby accede to the

## AGREEMENT ON INTERETHNIC TOLERANCE

### Article 1

Signatories of the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance (hereinafter: the Agreement) hereby declare their adherence to the following objectives, principles and action programs:

### I. OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE AGREEMENT

#### Article 2

Agreement objectives and principles are as follows:

1. To establish the social framework for the activities of local self-government bodies, local public institutions, non-governmental organizations and citizens of multicultural cities of South Eastern Europe, in all social, cultural and educational fields, committed to the development of liberal democracy, ethnic and religious tolerance and to the protection of human rights, in accordance with the authentic citizens' needs and with the European system of social values;
2. To preserve cultural diversity, to protect the rights and freedoms of national and ethnic minorities, to cherish the civic virtues and the good tradition of coexistence;
3. To promote the European principles and experiences in the field of human rights, freedom, multiculturalism and interculturalism, as essential pre-conditions of democracy;
4. To oppose to the language of hatred, xenophobia, prejudices, inflexibility and all forms of ethnic and religious intolerance;
5. To develop the civil society, democratic public, social criticism and atmosphere where reason, creativity, competence and responsibility become the main attributes of public debates, political initiatives and decision-making process related with issues of local and regional importance;
6. To create the conditions that facilitate and encourage the use of regional and minority languages, both orally and in writing, in public and in private life;
7. To encourage the mass media to re-affirm the tradition, culture and languages of national and ethnic minorities on the local territory;

8. To develop the communication and cooperation between the citizens, non-governmental organizations and bodies of local and regional self-governments of all countries of South Eastern Europe in accordance with the ratified international treaties and multilateral and bilateral (inter-state) political agreements as well;
9. To improve the culture of law, including the respect for the state, constitutional and legal norms, general deed and local regulations, on the part of members of national and ethnic minority, as well as the respect for the rights of other national minorities and members of the majority who are a minority in certain parts of the state's territory;
10. To affirm the European tradition of open cities and to expand the freedom of market communication, cooperation between the public and private sector for the purpose of prosperous economy, healthy society and sustainable ecological development;
11. To join the processes of euroregional cooperation, those being the important factor of the overall development of Europe as a sustainable union of democratic countries and nations, all ethno-national minorities and old and new regions as well;
12. To strive to make borders against the political violence, organized crime and terrorism the only borders in this "Europe without borders" ("Europe of Nations," "Europe of Citizens," "Europe of Regions," "Europe of Minorities");
13. To solve the problems of communication between the citizens of neighboring countries and members of national communities in the Region of South Eastern Europe which will be created through the potential earlier accession of other countries to the European Union and the so-called Schengen visa regime;
14. To develop the "triangles" of cooperation into concentric "circles" of cooperation, while respecting the given state of affairs or specific traits of each environment, with a desire to find an area of joint activities, likely and realistically acceptable for each local and regional community.

## II. PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

### Article 3

In the field of education, according to their own abilities, rights and competencies, the signatories of the Agreement will:

- Monitor the realization of state education programs dealing with issues of cultural identity in preparatory schools, elementary and secondary schools and universities;

- Pay special attention to the contents of following subjects: language and literature, history, arts, music and other subjects that are related with vital issues of rights of national minorities to the preservation and development of their own tradition and cultural identity
- Initiate or support activities aimed at training teachers and their assistants and associates in institutions of education, to develop the culture of peace, tolerance and multiculturalism;
- Support the existing programs, or initiate activities in cooperation with the educational authorities and other institutions of alternative education to provide learning of local community languages and introduction of culture of other nationalities and ethnic minorities to the children and adults who are interested in it,
- Take steps to strengthen the trust and prevent the behavior that threatens to spoil the atmosphere of interethnic tolerance and the right to be different within the institutions of education;
- Organize meetings of students and teachers to help them to get to know each other better, to develop creativity, competition and education for tolerance and interculturality.

#### Article 4

In the field of culture, according to their abilities, rights and competencies, the signatories of the Agreement will:

- Take steps to enable wide-ranging cultural development for the members of all national communities, including the improvement of conditions for freedom of expression and development of tradition and culture of national minorities and ethnic communities;
- Periodically organize meetings and manifestations (art, music, film, television and video, eco-cultural manifestations, sports etc.) to promote, particularly among the young, advantages of multiculturalism and interethnic tolerance;
- Organize and support all activities aimed at protection of cultural goods and prevent activities that are detrimental to cultural goods of nationalities, national minorities and ethnic communities;
- Cooperate with all cultural institutions, organizations and associations in the so called civic sector, committed to tolerance and development of multiculturalism and particularly with organizations and cultural associations of national and ethnic minorities.

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## Article 5

In the field of social organizing, signatories to the Agreement will:

- Incite and develop social organization and coordination of activities of non-governmental (non-profit and profit) organizations that promote multiculturalism and interethnic tolerance and protection of minority rights and cherish tradition and development of the culture of each nationality individually and all together;
- On the basis of public calls for proposals and quality of offered programs, provide financial support to multicultural projects and permanent activities of non-governmental organizations and cultural and educational associations of all national and ethnic communities;
- Help non-governmental organizations to obtain offices and fulfill other working conditions, according to their aptitude and results they achieved.

## Article 6

In the field of implementation of administrative power and organization of public city services, the signatories to the Agreement will:

- In accordance with state, constitutional and legal regulations, ratified European conventions, as well as in accordance with local regulations, improve conditions for realization of national minorities' rights to the free use of their language in private and public (official) communication, orally and in writing, including the right to use family names and names in the language of the respective minority;
- In accordance with current conditions and to the reasonable extent, provide and encourage the use of officially recognized minority languages and writing systems when it comes to contacts between the citizens and the authorities of the local community and regional authorities, and in printing official documents in corresponding minority languages and so on;
- Respect historical multicultural heritage and requirements of the social environment when it comes to putting up and giving names to the cities and settlements.

## Article 7

In the field of public communication and program policy of the media which serve as a public service, the signatories to the Agreement will:

- Exert influence on local media to inform their citizens in corresponding minority languages as well;
- Encourage or facilitate founding newspapers, radio stations and TV channels in minority languages;
- Encourage promotion of multicultural values, interethnic tolerance and rights of minorities and particularly promote individual achievements, prominent authors and proven human rights activists;
- Oppose to all forms of discrimination, to the language of hatred and to all manifestations of inter-national and religious intolerance.

#### Article 8

1. In keeping with the Article 16 of the European Convention on Protection of National Minorities, Signatories to the Agreement will refrain from measures that change the ethnic structure of the population in areas populated by national minorities and which lead to constriction of rights and freedoms implied by this Convention;
2. In accordance with norms of state of law and demands of justice, they will make efforts to help the citizens who had left their homes during the past wars in former SFR Yugoslavia and who are not in violation of law, to fulfill their civil and proprietary rights, including freedom to choose their own place of residence.

#### Article 9

In accordance with European standards, signatories to the Agreement will make efforts to utilize the opportunities provided by the current bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation in the field of economy and social life, as well as to initiate drafting and realization of new agreements with the purpose of improvement of cross-border communication and cooperation between countries, regions and cities, i.e. economical, political and civil subjects in the Region.

#### Article 10

1. In keeping with the liberal principle of free private enterprising, as well as with experiences of cooperation between the private and public sector in local communities of the countries with stable market democracy, signatories to the Agreement will encourage all activities that strengthen the small and middle scale business;
2. Signatories to the Agreement will pay special attention to the establishment of wide-ranging communications between the subjects in economy, including the

periodical meetings and fairs, being aware that in doing so they improve the material preconditions of local democracy: production, flow of goods and capital, local border traffic, understanding between people and nationalities, as well as chances for the return of young experts and entrepreneurs from abroad.

#### Article 11

Through their public actions on the local, regional and national level, non-governmental organizations which are signatories to the Agreement will promote and develop the spirit of multiculturalism, especially in the field of:

- Stabilization of preconditions for peace and security in the Region of South Eastern Europe;
- protection of individual and collective rights and freedoms, especially for the members of national minorities and ethnic communities;
- Providing information and education to the citizens aimed at encouraging their active participation in the process of post-socialist democratic transition;
- Education of citizens, both young and adult, about European standards, principles and experiences of multiculturalism;
- Cooperation with local government bodies on specific projects, as well as the necessary control and social criticism in the process of decision-making and implementation of public decisions;
- Cooperation and coordination of activities of citizens' associations on projects of public, cultural and political importance;
- Civil dialog between the citizens, NGOs, expert and professional associations in the cities and regions of countries of South Eastern Europe.

#### Article 12

In order to improve interethnic tolerance and realization of rights and freedoms of national minorities, and in keeping with European standards and recommendations of the High Commissioner for National Minorities at OSCE and respective expert groups, city authorities will make efforts to set up advisory bodies comprised of representatives of local authorities, national communities and non-governmental organizations, to permanently monitor the state of international relations and advise respective institutions of the administration system of public affairs.

## Article 13

Municipal Councils and City Halls or Municipal and City Assemblies will look into problems and conditions of the improvement of international relations in accordance with their working programs and current situation. In doing so, they will make an effort to put these issues once a year in the agenda of the bodies of local authority.

## Article 14

In all fields and forms of mutual cooperation, signatories to the Agreement will express their adherence to the principles and solutions of the European Charter on Local Self-government, continuously exchange experiences and promote positive examples of decentralization of power and prepare the local administration to serve as a public service for citizens' interests.

## Article 15

1. In accordance with their role and influence, institutions of autonomous government and representatives of citizens' interests in country's capitals, as well as in large urban environments, political, cultural and university centers of regions in South Eastern Europe, are especially important for realization of ethno-cultural justice and development of multiculturalism.
2. For the above mentioned reasons, we will regard the accession of the government and civil sector of capitals of countries and regions to the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance as an important encouragement to the overall process of cooperation initiated by this Agreement, as well as to the stabilization of conditions in the Region of South Eastern Europe (West Balkans).

## Article 16

1. Through their representatives, all participants, signatories to the Agreement, will once a year review the realization of the Agreement and issue a draft plan of future joint activities.
2. As a constituent part of cultural manifestations and actions in "triangles", i.e. "circles" of cooperation, these working-consultative meetings will be held each year in a different city, and periodically, there will be meetings of all cities signatories to the Agreement.

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Article 17

Signatories to the Agreement agree to the idea to launch an initiative to form a Joint Award Committee to reward the contribution of individuals and organizations to the improvement of relations between nationalities and cooperation between people, towns, regions and countries. The Award will be called: "Charter of Interethnic Tolerance".

### III. ACCESSION OF OTHER SOCIAL SUBJECTS TO THE AGREEMENT

Article 18

1. Agreement signatories wish to reaffirm and expand the cooperation initiated in the Novi Sad-Osijek-Tuzla triangle, through the inclusion of new social protagonists.
2. Apart from the Administrative bodies of multicultural cities, countries' capitals and regional (entity, canton, zupan, province) centers, and neighboring cities of cross-border regions as well, new subjects and equal participants in the process of cooperation initiated by this Agreement may include NGOs, cultural and professional associations, media and other social institutions and organizations which promote human rights, interethnic tolerance and interculturality.

Article 19

Stepping out of the process of cooperation defined by the Agreement on Interethnic Tolerance may occur:

- a) In case of public acting against the standards of UN, OSCE and Council of Europe
- b) In case of continuous absence from every activity related with realization of the Agreement
- c) In case of the official request for stepping out.

Article 20

1. For the purpose of coordination of activities, signatories to the Agreement will form permanent and temporary coordination bodies.

2. Forms of organization, tasks, competencies and operations of coordination bodies will be regulated by special acts adopted by representatives of all Agreement signatories.

#### IV. AGREEMENT SIGNATORIES

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In \_\_\_\_\_

## ANNEX 3

Table 1.

## Members of the Association of Multiethnic Cities of South Eastern Europe

No.	Local Authorities	NGO's
1.	Alexandria (RO) [in association process]	
2.	Arad (RO) [in association process]	Millennium [in association process]
3.	Bač (SRB) ΔΔ	Center for Local Democracy ΔΔ
4.	Bačka Palanka (SRB) ΔΔ	Society for Tolerance ΔΔ
5.	Baja (HU) ΔΔ	
6.	Bajina Bašta (SRB) ΔΔ	Agora ΔΔ
7.	Banja Luka (BH) ΔΔ	Helsinki Citizens Parliament ΔΔ
8.	Bar (MNE) ΔΔ	Center for Local Community Development ΔΔ
9.	Belgrade (SRB) Δ Δ	European Movement in Serbia ΔΔ
10.	Bihać (BH) ΔΔ	Women from Una ΔΔ
11.	Bijelo Polje (MNE) Δ	
12.	Bijeljina (BiH) ΔΔ	Helsinki Board for Human Rights Δ
13.	Bitola (MK) Δ	Biosphere, IMOR Δ
14.	Bor (SRB) Δ	Multiethnic center for Development of Danube 21 Δ
15.	Brčko (BH) Δ	Organization for Return Δ
16.	Budva (MNE) [in association process]	Festa Djuna [in association process]
17.	Calafat (RO) ΔΔ	
18.	Cluj (RO) Δ	
19.	Craiova (RO) [in association process]	
20.	Csongrad (HU) ΔΔ	
21.	Delčevo (MK) Δ	Humanitarian Charity Society of Roma Δ
22.	Djirrokaster (AL) [in association process]	
23.	Dubrovnik (CRO) ΔΔ	
24.	Elbasan (AL) [in association process]	

No.	Local Authorities		NGO's	
25.	Florina (GR)	[in association process]		
26.	Gostivar (MK)	Δ		
27.	Gyula (HU)	Δ		
28.	Herceg Novi (MNE)	ΔΔ	Media center of youth, Civil informational Educational Center	ΔΔ
29.	Indija (SRB)	ΔΔ	Women Initiative Indjija	ΔΔ
30.	Jimbolia (RO)	ΔΔ	Banat Ripensis	ΔΔ
31.	Karlovac (CRO)	Δ	Step	Δ
32.	Kecskemet (HU)	Δ	Future of Europe Association	Δ
33.	Kikinda (SRB)	ΔΔ	District 0230	ΔΔ
34.	Koprivnica (CRO)	Δ		
35.	Kotor (MNG)	ΔΔ	Anima	ΔΔ
36.	Kladovo (SRB)	Δ		
37.	Kula (SRB)	ΔΔ		
38.	Kumanovo (MK)	ΔΔ	Kolo Srpskih Sestara	ΔΔ
39.	Mako (HU)	Δ	Roma Association Mako	Δ
40.	Mostar (BH)	ΔΔ	Cupido	ΔΔ
41.	Novi Bečej (SRB)	ΔΔ	PAAD	ΔΔ
42.	Novi Pazar (SRB)	Δ		
43.	Novi Sad (SRB)	ΔΔ	Center for Regionalism	ΔΔ
44.	Novi Vinodolski (CRO)	Δ		
45.	Niš (SRB)	ΔΔ	Trag	ΔΔ
46.	Osijek (CRO)	ΔΔ	Center for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights	ΔΔ
47.	Pančevo (SRB)	Δ	Center for Interethnic Tolerance	Δ
48.	Pecs (HU)	[in association process]		
49.	Pljevlja (MNE)	Δ	Bonum	Δ
50.	Plovdiv (BG)	Δ		
51.	Podgorica (MNE)	Δ	ASK, ELSA	ΔΔ
52.	Preševo (SRB)	ΔΔ	Center for Multicultural Education	ΔΔ

No.	Local Authorities	NGO's
53.	Prespa (MK) Δ	
54.	Prijedor (BH) ΔΔ	Don ΔΔ
55.	Prijepolje (SRB) Δ	Center for Politics Research Argument Δ
56.	Priština [in association process]	Mother Teresa, Pristina Δ
57.	Pula (CRO) ΔΔ	HOMO ΔΔ
58.	Resen (MK) Δ	
59.	Sarajevo (BH) ΔΔ	Helsinki Board for Human Rights ΔΔ
60.	Senta (SRB) ΔΔ	
61.	Sjenica (SRB) ΔΔ	Flores Δ
62.	Shkoder (AL) Δ	Malteser Δ
63.	Skopje (MK) ΔΔ	Center for Interethnic Tolerance and Refugees ΔΔ
64.	Sofia (BG) ΔΔ	Balkan Political Club ΔΔ
65.	Sombor (SRB) ΔΔ	Open Lycee ΔΔ
66.	Split (CRO) Δ	Split Group ToD ΔΔ
67.	Srebrenica (BH) ΔΔ	Citizens Forum Srebrenica ΔΔ
68.	Sremska Mitrovica (SRB) ΔΔ	Center for Regional Development of Srem ΔΔ
69.	Strumica (MK) Δ	
70.	Subotica (SRB) ΔΔ	Open University ΔΔ
71.	Szeged (HU) Δ	Istvan Bibo Foundation Szeged ΔΔ
72.	Szentes (HU) ΔΔ	Local Association of the Hungarian Red Cross ΔΔ
73.	Thesaloniki (GR) [in association process]	Karamanlis Institute [in association process]
74.	Timisoara (RO) ΔΔ	Euroregional Center for Democracy ΔΔ
75.	Tirana (AL) [in association process]	Mjaft [in association process]
76.	Trebinje (BH) ΔΔ	League for Protection of Private Ownership and Human Rights ΔΔ
77.	Turnu Severin (RO) [in association process]	
78.	Tuzla (BH) ΔΔ	Citizens Forum Tuzla ΔΔ



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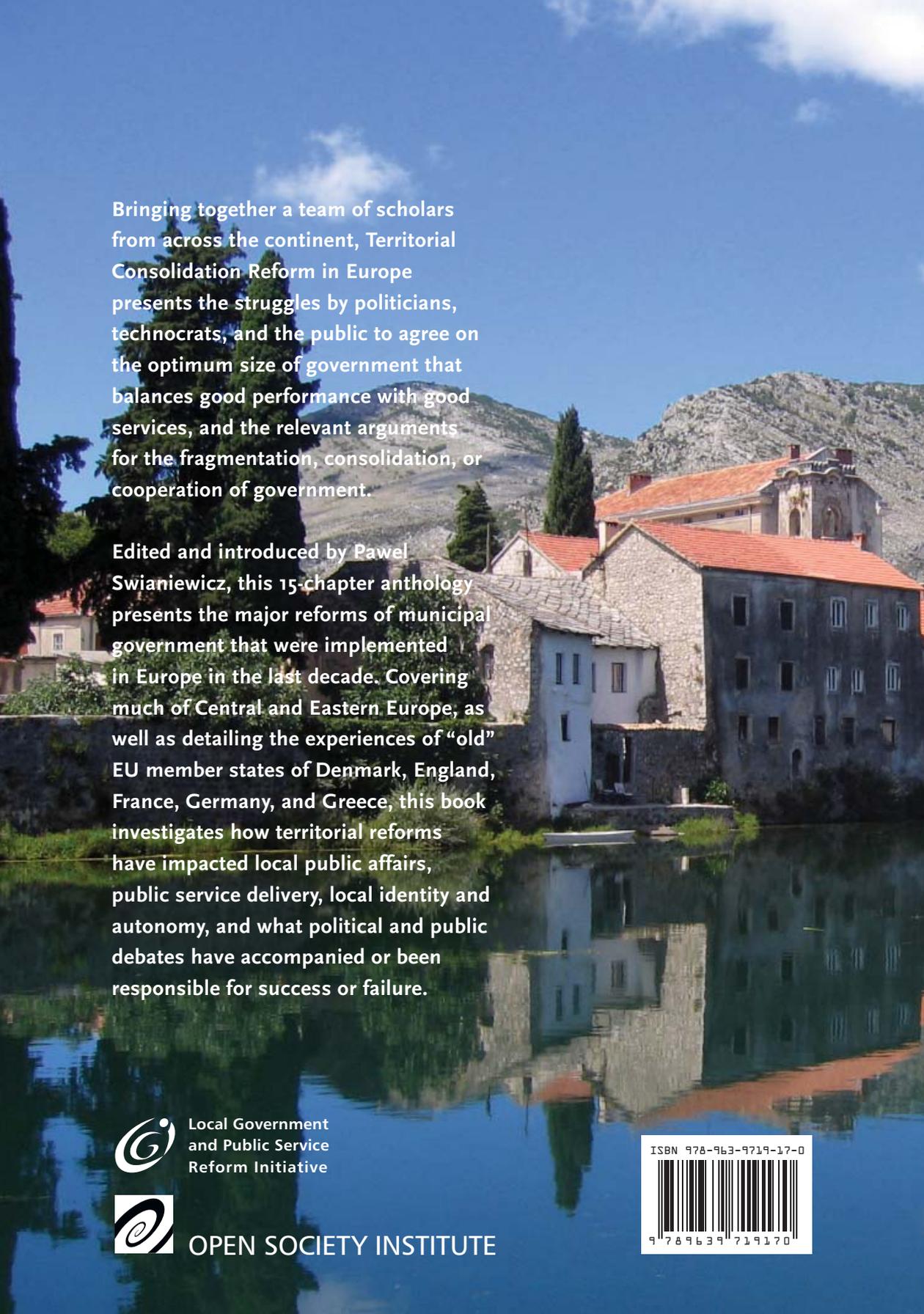












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