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LINK 4 COOPERATION

The first project Forum for the exchange of good practice and cooperation of CSOs and local authorities

Zavidovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina

March 17, 2022

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The forum had two important objectives:

1. Assess the situation regarding the cooperation of local authorities and civil society in 12 local self-governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and
2. inauguration of the ELoGE program in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the first part of the Forum program, participants were addressed by speakers, representatives of the project consortium, the host Mayor, the Council of Europe, and the European Union, who emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation between government and civil society, **the importance of openness and readiness of all participants to engage in this process as well as the importance of using tools and methods of citizen participation in decision-making, the deliberative process of creating modern and prosperous communities.**

- Gianluca Vannini, Head of the Section for Operations for Social Development, Civil Society and Cross-Border Cooperation at the Delegation of the European Union to BiH, stressed the importance and specificity of the process of cooperation between civil society organizations and local authorities, emphasizing that: *“The path leading to efficient local government requires a long-term vision, focused on honestly respecting the needs of citizens and the business sector. Building trust must be a priority. Strengthening participatory processes and a strategic approach are two prerequisites for successful reform.”*
- Bearing in mind the importance of starting the ELoGE process in BiH, Bojana Urumova, Head of the Council of Europe Office in BiH, addressed the audience, saying: *“In the year when Bosnia and Herzegovina celebrated 20 years of Council of Europe membership, local democracies Mostar can work to improve the quality of local democracy. In cooperation with the Center for Expertise in Good Governance of the Council of Europe, I am convinced that the twelve local communities participating in this program will improve governance processes at the local level. The Council of Europe will, through a new Action Plan for the period*



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2022-2025. continue to support the development of democracy, transparency in work, and the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes.”

- Niall Sheerin, Program Manager of the Expert Center for Good Governance, Directorate-General for Democracy of the Council of Europe, emphasized: *"The Council of Europe exists to protect and promote European standards in human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The "Link 4 Cooperation" project offers a vector to promote the twelve principles of good democratic governance of the Council of Europe through the ELoGE program. By committing to the ELoGE Standards, cities and municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina agree to measure their performance against each of the twelve principles, raising awareness and challenging their democratic governance practices."*
- Having in mind the recent experience of ALDA in launching the ELoGE program in Croatia and Northern Macedonia and the importance of establishing such a process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Antonella Valmorbidia, Secretary-General of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), addressed the Forum participants: *"European Label of Excellence in Governance or ELoGE, the program is designed to support communities in their quest to improve their local self-government, making it more accountable to the needs of citizens and further enabling civic participation. ELoGE uses the twelve principles of good democratic governance as a benchmark to achieve this goal, assisting interested local governments in implementation and evaluation."*
- Commenting on the importance of participatory processes as a key factor in the development and stability of local democracy, Dzenana Dedić, Director of the Mostar Local Democracy Agency, said: *"Creating a new positive environment based on common interest local community, creates an environment of positive trends and progress. Local authorities that use resources and opportunities to adopt new tools and mechanisms of good local government, which will have citizens as partners, will create prosperous local communities."*
- Hasim Mujanovic, Mayor of Zavidovici and one of the hosts of the Forum, stressed the importance of commitment to continuous improvement of public services and achieving more efficient and responsible governance: *"Zavidovici Municipality is always ready to participate in projects aimed at promoting good governance. Together with civil society organizations, we are ready to strengthen the capacity of local authorities, solve problems together, and we want to further strengthen the connection with citizens by being involved in the public policy process. Applying the principles of the ELoGE methodology for good governance, we are convinced that our local government unit will have the opportunity to offer better public services and solutions that will meet the needs of all our citizens."*





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The inauguration of the ELoGE program in Bosnia and Herzegovina was especially significant. Twelve local self-government participants in this project showed a prominent level of responsibility and willingness to review the quality of their work, the quality of services they provide to their citizens, and their willingness to work to improve their capacities and competencies.

The second part of the Forum was dedicated to assessing the level and quality of cooperation between local authorities and civil society in twelve cities/municipalities participating in the project. About fifty participants worked in three working groups, each representing both sectors of local communities, different in size (area and population) from both Entities, and answered two questionnaires, one for local authorities and the other for citizens/civil society organizations. Through online questionnaires, government officials and citizens answered thirty-eight questions. The questionnaire was constructed in three parts:

1. a formal framework for cooperation
2. budget and financing
3. communication and participation

The answers were immediately summarized via the Google application and the analysis was presented in the concluding part of the Forum program. The working groups were led by moderators/panelists, who in addition to Google analysis also gave their expert review and recommendations from each of the 4 local communities that participated in the work of one working group. This innovative digital approach to the efficient collection of a large amount of relevant information was very well received by the participants and proved to be a good practice that we will use in the future.

The analysis as well as the moderator's recommendations showed that:

1. There is a formal framework for cooperation such as Statute, Rules of Procedure of the Council/Assembly, services and/or officials for cooperation with CSOs (80%-100%), and to a lesser extent: strategic documents that ensure the involvement of civil society organizations, communication strategy/plan, the cooperation agreement with CSOs (30%-60%);
2. There are budget items intended for financing associations and foundations, as well as funds for projects of interest to the local community (70% -100%), but there are no clear and transparent procedures and criteria for allocating these funds (35%- 40%);
3. There is a basis for communication and involvement of citizens in decision-making processes: Websites and Facebook pages, specified dates for receiving citizens, online communication, participation in budgeting, reports from Council/Assembly sessions (60%-100%), although there is a need for





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informing citizens and CSOs in general about the work of local self-governments, about the services they provide to citizens, about the possibilities and ways of communication with local authorities as well as about methods and tools of involving citizens in planning and decision-making processes. There is also a great need for digitalization and in general modernization of communication mechanisms and citizen participation in these processes.



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