

**Forum of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland**  
**Saturday, November 26, 2016**  
**9:00 – 16:30 h, Kursaal Bern**

The first Forum of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland was held as part of the initiative "i-platform – Diaspora for the Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina". The forum was organised by the association i-diaspora and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The event was attended not only by official representatives of Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also by experts in the field of economy, science, education, culture and numerous interested individuals. The forum gathered more than hundred participants.

**Forum programme and goals**

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The forum was opened by Ivica Petrušić, chairman of the association i-diaspora, Andrea Rauber Saxer, the Swiss Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kemo Sarač, chairman of the working group "Policy Making in Cooperation with the Diaspora" of the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In addition to the presentation of the establishment of i-platform, its goals and active operations since September 2015, the 2017-2019 Strategy was also presented. During a subsequent panel discussion, participants discussed the potentials and hurdles regarding the cooperation between the diaspora and Bosnia and Herzegovina based on selected "success stories". Successful entrepreneurs, official representatives of institutions at the state and local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina and education experts participated in the discussion. In addition to an exchange of ideas, experiences and contacts, the forum also provided a possibility for getting acquainted with ten projects in the field of economy, science, education, culture and society.

**Initiation of the i-platform and the 2017-2019 Strategy**

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The i-platform was established in cooperation with the association i-diaspora and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) following the study "Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Switzerland" published in 2014. This study recognised the necessity of a politically, ethnically and religiously independent platform for the purpose of promoting cooperation between the diaspora and Bosnia and Herzegovina. More than thirty consultations and information events with diaspora associations, representatives of government authorities, NGOs and interested individuals were held in Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina since September 2015 for the purpose of gathering relevant information in the initial phase and promoting open dialogue. Numerous discussions showed that the key reasons for a lack of cooperation between the diaspora and its country of origin lie in the lack

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of networking, lack of trust and insufficient information about already existing instruments. There is a particularly strong interest for potential engagement in the field of economy, which constitutes the common denominator of the three ethnically segregated BiH diasporas.

The 2017-2019 Strategy of the i-platform is based on these findings. The purpose is to position the i-platform as a match-making platform with a view to promote cooperation between the diaspora and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the primary focus is thus the expansion of the data base of contacts and systematic information gathering. In order for the diaspora to actively participate in the activities of the i-platform and initiate new projects, a group of experts for economic development will be established as the first step, and additional groups of experts may be established in the field of knowledge transfer, culture and social inclusion, as needed. Initiatives and projects prepared by groups of experts will be funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

### **Panel discussion: "Diaspora success stories: investments in economy and education in Bosnia and Herzegovina - what have we learned so far and what are the next steps?"**

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Moderators of the panel discussion were Steering Committee members, Jasmina Opardija-Šušnjar, the Head of the Regional Research Promotion Programme in the Western Balkans (RRPP) at the University of Fribourg, and Edin Dacić, the founder and CEO of the company Dacommet AG and IKEA-Partner in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Discussion participants were experts that have built bridges between Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina through their work:

- **Maida Bećirović**, Head of the Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Emilie Demaureux**, Research Assistant at the Centre for Development and Cooperation of the University of Applied Sciences of Bern and Programme Coordinator of a training programme entitled "Leadership and Skills Development Training" for the furniture and wood industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Tatomir Jovičić**, an entrepreneur from Lausanne and the owner of two companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a wood processing company "Tatko" and a cheese producing company "Zlatni sir" that produces and sells cheese in Bosnia and Herzegovina based on a Swiss recipe.
- **Dragan Kelečević**, Head of the Economic Development Department of Laktaši Municipality, who is, among other things, in charge of diaspora communication.
- **Esad Ljubijankić**, an entrepreneur from Aarau and the owner of the company "Vrganj" from Cazin that exports forest fruit and chestnuts to Switzerland.
- **Ivan Miličević**, Project Manager of the Development Department of Posušje Municipality.

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Based on their personal experiences, the participants discussed issues such as distrust, work ethics, lack of qualified managerial personnel, administrative barriers and the mistake to invest in Bosnia and Herzegovina exclusively based on emotional reasons. In spite of numerous obstacles, all participants were convinced of investment potentials of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Topics discussed include an enabling business environment, attractive investment possibilities in the wood, metal, food and tourism industry, the potential of a well-educated diaspora as the promoters of new values, work methods and experiences, but also a proactive approach of municipalities towards the diaspora.

Other participants from the audience reminded that sustainability and social issues such as environmental protection and health insurance for workers should not be disregarded. They referred to selected projects from different fields presented during the forum.

### **Projects and project ideas**

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Forum participants had the opportunity to become acquainted with various projects and project ideas in the field of economy, science, education, culture and society at ten information stalls and to exchange ideas, experiences and contacts.

- EUROmodul Schweiz AG: a producer of tailor-made room modules, urban furnishings, kiosks and advertising displays, Mr Teufik Delić (P1)
- Investment proposal of the entrepreneur Stojan Stevanović for the "production of charcoal and other products" in Lopare Municipality (P2)
- Information office for entrepreneurs entitled "Central Bosnia in the Swiss Market", Mr Muris Purić PhD (P3)
- Diaspora Office of Laktaši Municipality, Mr Dragan Kelečević (P4)
  - Environmental association "Kanarinac"; spa therapy and dental medicine tourism, organic vegetable farming
  - Women's Association Aleksandrovac, environmentally-friendly production of pillows
  - Digital Media Consulting GmbH Banja Luka
- The project "Innovation School Sprungbrett" of the University of Applied Sciences in Bern, Mr Kurt Wüthrich: an exchange of know-how in the field of international forestry and wood industry (P5)
- The Centre for Lifelong Learning, SCU Travnik, Mr Bernard Bilić: a private educational institution for languages, IT science and entrepreneurship (P6)
- Foundation "Bosanska bašta", Mr Edhem Kobilić PhD: a humanitarian organisation for health promotion and treatment (P7)
- Foundation "La Terra Nostra", Ms Alma Palo Aličehić: a humanitarian organisation for children, youth and families in need (P8)

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- Foundation "World without Mines", Mr Reto Nigg: more than ten years of operations in the framework of mine clearance projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina (P9)
- IKJF Intercultural Youth Support, Mr Christian Stoll and Ms Simone Meier: organisation of intercultural exchange projects (P10)

Bettina Etter, Programme Officer of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Anđelko Grahovac, Ambassador (des.) of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Switzerland, stressed during their closing speeches that numerous forum participants confirmed their interest in and the necessity of an independent platform with a view to promote the cooperation between the diaspora and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina welcome and support the initiative i-platform.

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