

Platform of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland

17–21 November 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina

i-dijaspora

A Short Retrospective and Further Steps

Introduction

From 17–21 November 2015, the members of the “i-dijaspora” association and representatives of the Swiss Government and the Embassy of Switzerland in Bosnia and Herzegovina presented the Platform of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland in cities throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Two conferences were held in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, while bilateral meetings with representatives of state, entity and local institutions, as well as with NGOs, took place in Tuzla and Banja Luka.

The following report presents the most significant conclusions from these conferences and bilateral meetings in BiH. It also shows what the next steps should be in the creation and establishment of the Platform for the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland.

Platform of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland

Based on the results of the University of Neuchâtel (CH) study “The Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Switzerland”,¹ the Swiss Government recognised the potential of the BiH diaspora in Switzerland to contribute to the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Consequently, it decided to support the establishment of the Platform of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland, in cooperation with the i-dijaspora association.

The results of the aforementioned study and the first conference of the BiH diaspora in Switzerland—which took place on 13 December 2014 in Berne—proved that there is a need for a politically, religiously, and ethnically independent platform for the exchange of information, knowledge and experience. The aim of this platform is to give various associations and organisations from the BiH diaspora in Switzerland access to its database so that they can establish contact with other associations and institutions in Switzerland and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Platform of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland will provide its members with information about current activities of the diaspora in Switzerland and BiH, foster mutual cooperation, and help to establish contact between members. It will also support the realisation of joint projects in the domains of economy, culture, and science/education.

¹ “The Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Switzerland” study, October 2015.
<https://www.sem.admin.ch/dam/data/sem/publiservice/publikationen/diaspora/diasporastudie-bosnien-e.pdf>.

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Members of the platform will have the opportunity to attend thematic conferences and sessions on science, culture and economics. This will facilitate another of the platform's aims: the formation of expert groups in these domains, leading to an exchange of information, experience and knowledge.

Results and Conclusions of the Conferences and Bilateral Meetings

Participants at the conferences and bilateral meetings discussed the following questions—concerning the domains of economy, culture, and science/education—with the members of i-dijaspora:

- What expectations do actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina have of such a platform? Which possible sub-categories of these three domains (discussed in three separate workshops) are of interest to them?
- With which actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina could and should the platform collaborate? What are the potential benefits of this collaboration?
- What obstacles and problems (norms, laws, practices) could occur, and how should the platform deal with them?

Through many constructive and interesting discussions, the members of i-dijaspora collected plenty of important and useful information, ideas, and concrete suggestions. The i-dijaspora association thanks all participants for their effort and constructive work. Concerning the expectations of the Platform of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland from the perspective of actors in BiH, we present this selection of interesting suggestions:

- Economy:
Direct collaboration with governmental institutions; organisation of business forums; employment initiatives; one-stop-shops; business and investment consulting; investment funds; an academy for entrepreneurs; coaching/mentoring for start-ups; private partnerships; the sub-domains of tourism and medical/health tourism; and fostering organic food production.
- Culture:
Projects based on local identity (presentation of the BiH identity/culture in Europe); mutual cultural exchange; diaspora=market; student exchange; internships for

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students in Switzerland and BiH; support concerning complex and bureaucratic procedures (e.g. import/export of artworks); and programs for seniors.

▪ Science/Education:

Import of knowledge to BiH through mentoring; mutual communication and cooperation; student/professor exchange; internships in Switzerland and BiH; summer schools; partnerships between Swiss and BiH universities; knowledge exchange (in the areas of agriculture, IT, the timber and mining industries, tourism); embedding of BiH universities into EU funds (support from the diaspora to complete complex application procedures); inter-ethnic/religious exchange/communication; and intersectional cooperation between science/education and economy.

Ideas about which actors in BiH could be potential partners of the platform were diverse in all workshops. Participants proposed: governmental institutions; ministries; direct cooperation with local communities and municipalities; NGOs; universities; and industries.

Participants mentioned distrust and incomplete information as possible obstacles to cooperation between the platform and actors in BiH. The general need for a platform to exchange information, knowledge and experience was confirmed by all participants, as was the necessity for the diaspora to place its trust in the government and individuals.

Further steps

Positive feedback from participants of the Sarajevo and Banja Luka conferences and successful bilateral meetings with institutions on various levels strengthens the i-dijaspora association in its aim to establish the Platform of the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland.

The main goal of i-dijaspora is to establish a platform that would foster cooperation both within the BiH diaspora in Switzerland and with institutions in BiH. In collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), i-dijaspora aims to integrate the diaspora into the development process of BiH, and to strengthen cooperation between Switzerland and BiH by the end of 2016.

The platform's website will be accessible by the beginning of 2016, and will contain information about associations of the BiH diaspora in Switzerland, institutions and possible partners in BiH, and news of the platform's current activities.

Consultations in the form of information events with associations and interested individuals from the BiH diaspora will take place in all regions of Switzerland from February to March 2016. The aim of these public events is to present the ideas, tasks and services provided by the platform to its potential members and partners.

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During this process, the formation of expert groups in the domains of economy, culture and science/education will begin. The meetings organised by the platform will provide experts with an opportunity to exchange information, knowledge and experience, and to talk about concrete projects which could be realised in 2016.

The i-dijaspora association and the Embassy of Switzerland in BiH again thank all participants for their participation and effort. The value and success of the future Platform for the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland and its key partners in BiH depend on the active collaboration of all stakeholders, and the vast amount of useful information collected during the conferences and bilateral meetings will be of great use to the creation and realisation of the platform.

We will continue to inform you about the platform's activities, and welcome your continued active contribution to the development of the Platform for the BiH Diaspora in Switzerland.

For further information or enquiries, please contact our administrative office at: desk@idijaspora.ch.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely,



Ivica Petrušić, President of i-dijaspora



Bettina Etter, Representative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

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