

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe****Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina**

ENGLISH only

**Deputy Head of Mission****15<sup>TH</sup> OSCE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM****BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND THE ENVIRONMENT:  
CURRENT SITUATION, OBSTACLES, AND THE WAY FORWARD****INTRODUCTION:**

Like other countries in the OSCE region, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has its fair share of problems with its management of the environment. Within the context of the former-Yugoslavia, BiH was one of the centres of heavy industry and sources of raw materials and energy. As such, basic natural resources, such as, soil, water and air, were all exposed to serious levels of pollution for a period of over forty years. During the recent war, the situation continued to deteriorate with the collapse of government and infrastructure (electricity, water, sewage, waste processing, etc.) and a complete lack of regulation and maintenance of natural resources. As a result, the quality of the environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina was severely compromised during this period. In the three years of the conflict, thousands of tonnes of waste were left unprocessed, thousands of hectares of forests were either clear cut or destroyed, and large areas of formerly fertile agricultural lands were destroyed or contaminated. Moreover, the forced migration of populations within the country during the war, primarily from rural to urban, left many areas unpopulated and ripe for the unchecked expansion of housing and industrial facilities, which has, in many cases, diminished the quality of surrounding agricultural areas.

While the end of the war halted most of the more egregious attacks against the environment, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be faced with legacy of the pre-war and wartime period. In addition, the complex governmental system established as a result of the peace agreement has inhibited the development and implementation of a state-wide environmental policy to deal with these issues and to prevent new ones from occurring. The current constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not place the responsibility for environmental at the state level. Rather, this is carried out by the sub-state entities – the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, lower level environmental management is delegated to the cantonal ministries in the Federation and municipalities in the Republika Srpska. As both entities and cantons may adopt legislation, existing environmental legislation often differs widely from one administrative district to the next, complicating co-operation and co-ordination on issues that cross administrative boundaries. Moreover, monitoring and inspection mechanisms remain weak and the enforcement of existing legislation continues to be inconsistent. Finally, citizen awareness about and participation in environmental issues is weak due to a lack of sufficient information and education.

Amongst the various environmental areas of concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina, three areas are continue to be particularly hard hit by the absence of a unified approach to the environment – land degradation, soil contamination, and water management.

**LAND DEGRADATION:**

The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina occupies a total area of 5,112,879 hectares. Just over 52% of this area has been identified as being suitable for agriculture, with the other half designated as forest lands. Prior to the war, the agricultural sector was one of the most important in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributing up to 9.2% to the total Gross Domestic Product. However, much of the useable agricultural land in the country has been lost during the wartime and post-war period to widespread unplanned and unregulated building of residential and industrial constructions. Other major sources of land degradation come from mining, landfills, and the presence of land mines and detonated military ordnances. It is estimated that 6,000 hectares of land were directly destroyed by war related actions and 15,000-20,000 minefields were created throughout the country by using over 1 million mines. These mines were spread over a total area equalling 420,000 hectares or 8% of the total land area. According to some unofficial estimates at least 50% of available agricultural land is currently underused or unmanaged, much of it due to the presence of landmines. As a result, the contribution of agriculture has significantly decreased in recent times (in the year 2000 the percentage dropped to 7.2%) and the use of land has continued to deteriorate with time. It is estimated that the Federation of BiH (FBiH) loses more than 3,000 hectares of land per year, and the Republika Srpska (RS) loses 2,000 hectares per year.

In addition to the deterioration of agricultural lands, forests in BiH continue to be plagued by a series of problems. In relation to its size, Bosnia and Herzegovina is amongst one of the richest when it comes to forest-based resources. Taking into account that approximately 50% of the country's land consists of forests, this sector is of importance to Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic wellbeing. As in the case of agricultural lands, the recent war and unregulated development has resulted in damage in several areas. Perhaps one of the most detrimental problems is illegal logging, which often comes in the form of clear-cutting and without a plan for reforestation activities. In the long-term, this practice will eliminate this renewable resource and an important source of income for the country. Taking into account that over 80% of land in Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of land slopes, the unplanned removal of timber and consequent increase in water-induced erosion will also have an increasingly detrimental effect on the overall quality of land throughout the country, thus impacting on another sector of the environment.

**WATER MANAGEMENT AND SOIL CONTAMINATION:**

Bosnia and Herzegovina has abundant water resources which could play a large role in further economic development in the country. Unfortunately, as with other sectors, insufficient attention has been given to this important resource and it has not been protected from misuse. Currently, water sources are threatened from organic pollution resulting from insufficient wastewater treatment plants, inadequate maintenance of sewage systems, exploitation of forests, and uncontrolled use of pesticides. To illustrate the situation regarding wastewater (mis)management in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is reported that almost 90% of wastewater is released directly into rivers, streams and underground channels. Prior to the war, the pollution load was recorded at 9.5 million people, while the population was at 4.5 million. This was the consequence of mainly industrial waste water. Despite the fact that pollution levels have dropped following the war due to the closure of many major industries such as steel production, this legacy continues to plague many of the rivers and natural lakes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This in turn affects the quality of soil in the immediate area of water sources as well as soil that is irrigated with such water. Further, the overall maintenance of water systems is deemed as inadequate and there are presently no regulations or laws for this to take place. To date, there still remain large sections of the water system that require replacement and it is estimated that approximately 850 km of pipeline requires

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extensive cleaning. At the same time, prices for water remain low and insufficient to generate adequate revenue for the maintenance and further development of the system.

### **THE WAY FORWARD:**

As seen above, there remain many problems regarding the environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, there are some positive developments as well, as government progressively begins to take these issues more seriously. One of the most notable developments in the post-war period on environmental issues has been the development of the BiH National Environment Action Plan. In July 2000, the Governments of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska received an International Development Fund (IDF) grant from the World Bank for environmental capacity building. With the assistance of this grant, the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) for Bosnia and Herzegovina was completed in early 2003. The goal of the NEAP is identification of short and long-term priority actions and measures providing the basis for preparation of a long-term environmental protection strategy in accordance with the economic, social and political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The intention of the NEAP is to facilitate the preparation of a unified environmental protection policy in the context of macroeconomic reforms, poverty reduction strategy and the transition process. Eight priority areas of NEAP were established through a joint multidisciplinary approach (Water resources/wastewater, Sustainable development of rural areas, Environmental management, Protection of biodiversity and landscape diversity, Waste/waste management, Economy, Public health and De-mining). Following this process, the participants and experts defined the priority measures and activities, which are a necessary precondition for undertaking actions in each of the above areas. While progress has been made in a number of areas, implementation of its findings remains modest.

### **CONCLUSION:**

It is clear that if Bosnia and Herzegovina is going to be a stable and prosperous country it must deal with its past and current environmental problems and take steps to prevent new ones from developing. In order to do this it must take environmental issues seriously and dedicate the necessary resources to address them. This entails adopting and implementing sound governance practices which is based on a participatory approach that includes citizens and which focuses on the enforcement of policies and law. It also means developing a strategic approach to addressing environmental issues internally as well as within the region. Slowly, government has come to acknowledge the importance of the environment and to take action, as the development of the NEAP attests to. However, for the plan to make a difference it requires sufficient political will to implement it.

In October 2006, BiH elected new representatives at the state, entity, and canton levels. On 11 January, in his first speech to the BiH Parliamentary Assembly as the Chairperson of the BiH Council of Ministers, Nikola Spiric, highlighted the environment as one of the top priorities for Bosnia and Herzegovina over the next four years. In particular, Mr. Spiric emphasised the connection between the responsible management of the environment and the development of agriculture and tourism. In particular, he noted that the Council of Ministers would take concrete steps to improve the current situation by drafting a state-level Law on Environment of Bosnia and Herzegovina and establishing the Environment Agency. Whether this first political commitment by the leadership of BiH is translated into concrete action on environmental issues remains to be seen. However, even this small gesture is to be appreciated. After all, every long voyage begins with a first step.