What is the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina?

As the primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is playing a major role in the creation of a stable, peaceful, and democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The mandate of the OSCE Mission to BiH — which was established on 18 December 1995 — includes promoting democratic values, monitoring and furthering the development of human rights, organizing and supervising elections, as well as implementing arms control and security-building measures.

The OSCE’s Dayton Mandate

The signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in December 1995 ended 43 months of war in BiH. Since then, BiH has faced the daunting task of re-constituting itself as a multi-ethnic, democratic society. While BiH has now addressed many of its immediate post-war humanitarian problems, it continues to face several long-term challenges, such as fostering respect for human rights and promoting inter-ethnic tolerance; creating democratic institutions; conducting elections; and developing an independent and pluralistic media.

How is the Mission Structured?

The OSCE Mission covers the entire territory of BiH, and includes a Sarajevo-based Head Office; regional centres in Banja Luka, Mostar, Sarajevo, and Tuzla; a centre in Brcko; and 27 field offices (see map). The Head Office is led by the Head of Mission and Senior Deputy Head of Mission, who have overall responsibility for Mission policy, planning and operations. The Mission’s Democratization, Elections, Human Rights, Media Affairs and Regional Stabilization departments — which are also headquartered in Sarajevo — work closely with the Head Office in the development and implementation of mission-wide policies and programmes.

Regional centres, along with the field offices, also work closely with the Head Office to ensure that the Mission’s policies and programmes are implemented throughout BiH. One of the Mission’s key assets is its strong field presence, and in several of BiH’s more politically sensitive areas — including Capljina, Trebinje, and Velika Kladusa — the OSCE is one of only a few international organizations with a permanent presence. Another key Mission asset is its staff, comprised of highly-qualified professionals from a wide variety of backgrounds, and including nationals from BiH itself and internationals from the OSCE’s participating States.
Much of the work of the OSCE Mission to BiH is carried out by the Mission’s functional departments. The Mission also works in close cooperation with other international organizations such as the NATO-led Stabilization Force (SFOR), the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Mission to BiH (UNMIBH).

**Democratization**

The Democratization Department aids the development of democratic structures and culture, from the grassroots to the state level, throughout BiH.

The Department’s Civil Society activities are aimed at promoting grassroots participation in politics and encouraging the political and advocacy role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Political Parties programme seeks to develop and assist viable multi-ethnic parties through training, networking, and by supporting voter contact events and media access. The programme also works to advance the role of women in politics. OSCE-supported Democracy Centres and Political Resource Centres across BiH help promote both these programmes.

The development of transparent, participatory and professional governance is the goal of the Department’s Governance programme. The main activity involves intensive training for municipal officials, including mayors, on financing and implementing sustainable municipal infrastructure projects. Through its Rule of Law programme, the Department has been involved in the formulation of a judicial reform strategy for BiH. The programme has also run a substantial legal aid project, and has contributed to judicial training, provision of materials to courts and the production of a commentary on BiH laws.

**Elections**

The OSCE Mission has had primary responsibility for the organization and supervision of BiH’s post-Dayton elections, including national elections in 1996 and 1998, municipal elections in 1997, and special elections in Republika Srpska in 1997. Through the National Election Results Implementation Committee, the Mission has also overseen the implementation of municipal election results, and continues to monitor the work of municipal assemblies throughout BiH.

As the Mission prepares for future elections, it is handing over greater responsibility to BiH citizens and institutions. Recent initiatives to advance this nationalization process include the recruitment of BiH citizens to key staff positions, and the participation of selected national staff in the Programme in Electoral Administration Process offered by the University of Essex.

The Mission also operates an Out-of-Country Voting (OCV) Office, which works to ensure that BiH citizens living abroad can exercise their democratic right to vote. In addition, the Mission works closely with Local Election Commissions across BiH, which provide a critical foundation for the nationalization of the country’s electoral infrastructure. Other key election-related bodies include the Provisional Election Commission, which is chaired by the OSCE Head of Mission and is responsible for regulating the electoral process in BiH, and the Election Appeals Sub-Commission, which is mandated with investigating and adjudicating violations of electoral rules and regulations.

**Human Rights**

The Human Rights Department works to advance civil, legal and economic rights for all citizens of BiH. It reports on and investigates allegations of human rights
violations and, when necessary, intervenes in individual cases. The Mission also works in close collaboration with national human rights institutions to ensure that the Department’s knowledge and expertise are passed on to national actors.

Much of the Mission’s current human rights work focuses on facilitating the return of refugees and displaced persons to their pre-war homes, and enabling returnees to re-claim their property. While property legislation is now in place in both entities of BiH, the Human Rights Department continues to work to ensure that fair decisions are made and that such decisions are fully implemented by local authorities.

The Mission is also helping to create an independent judiciary. In addition to contributing to the drafting of legislation to ensure an independent judicial appointment process, Human Rights Officers frequently meet with judges, lawyers and prosecutors on issues ranging from the unlawful removal of judges to the upholding of international fair-trial standards.

**Media Affairs**

The Mission’s Department of Media Affairs (DMA) seeks to strengthen media within BiH through a number of important strands of work. Foremost among these is the development of independent media, which DMA accomplishes through professional development, management training and assistance, and small grants to independent media outlets. DMA has been significantly involved in the expansion and evolution of the Free Exchange Radio Network (FERN), the only independent radio covering the whole of BiH, and in the creation of the new Independent Radio Network of BiH, a voluntary cooperative effort of BiH’s best independent radio stations.

Equally important is DMA’s promotion of inter-entity communication among media outlets — through journalists’ seminars, support for the development of journalists’ associations, assistance in the creation of a BiH Press Code and Press Council, and the development of inter-entity press distribution programmes. DMA also plays an active role in media monitoring in order to ensure sound media practices in keeping with the best Western standards of journalism.

Recently, DMA launched the Media Law Initiative, aimed at developing a body of law — and a corps of lawyers — able to promote and protect the rights of journalists, ensure freedom of expression, and permit the establishment and operation of transparent and independent media outlets.

**Regional Stabilization**

As part of its regional stabilization programme, the Mission monitors and implements military aspects of the Dayton Accords. Specifically, the Mission is mandated to undertake activities which promote transparency, co-operation and confidence-building among the armed forces of both entities of BiH, and also carries out activities aimed at limiting the equipment and manpower of the armies of BiH, Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Regional stabilization activities include the formation of consultative commissions to promote dialogue among military personnel from both entities of BiH. The Mission also aids visiting inspection teams by verifying information and providing expert assistance in arms reduction, and has achieved considerable success in helping all relevant parties achieve arms reduction targets.

In order to facilitate further progress towards military stability in BiH, the Mission sponsors seminars and workshops on confidence and security building issues. Key issues addressed by these seminars — and by the Department for Regional Stabilization more generally — include strengthening democratic control of the military, enhancing transparency in defence budgets and promoting military force reductions. The Mission also works to facilitate greater co-operation between the Entity Armed Forces within BiH.
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