Strengthening Democracy in Bosnia & Herzegovina
Conservative Party
International Department
Introduction

The Western Balkans have been a priority of mine since I became the International Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Party. I vividly remember the conflict that unfolded in Bosnia & Herzegovina after the breakup of Yugoslavia, and ever since I have held an interest in maintaining stability in country and in the region. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country where ethnic divisions are an everyday reality, and the primary purpose of the International Department has been to strengthen democracy and encourage transparency, accountability, inclusion and plurality in politics.

Our work has been made possible by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which was founded in 1992 by Royal Prerogative for this very purpose: to support and encourage strong democracies worldwide. Of course, our work would have not been possible without cooperation with Centre-right sister parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina who sought our input and engagement. I am delighted to present a range of key achievements from our Bosnia & Herzegovina project in this booklet. It is my greatest wish that we continue our work in Bosnia & Herzegovina to ensure that the events of the 1990s are never repeated.

Alec Shelbrooke MP
Vice Chairman International
Article 4.19, Election Law of BiH (emphasis added)

Inclusion

Electoral Law in BiH requires the equal inclusion of the least represented gender, which in most cases can be understood as the inclusion of women. It states:

> Every candidates list shall include candidates of male and female gender, who are equally represented. The equal representation of the genders shall exist in case when one of the genders is represented with minimum of 40% of the total number of candidates on the list.

The minority gender candidates shall be distributed on the candidates list in the following manner: at least one minority gender candidate amongst the first two candidates, two minority gender candidates amongst the first five candidates, and three minority gender candidates amongst the first eight candidates, et seq."

All three parties who were trained by the Conservative Party complied with these legal requirements.

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Each party with Conservative Party support promoted the engagement of women in their campaigns:

1. **HDZ1990** were the only party in Bosnia & Herzegovina who endorsed a female candidate for State Presidency.

2. The **PDP** ensured that their female candidates were promoted in newspapers and television press. Each candidate was encouraged by the party to speak on behalf of the party on the areas that they were experts on, thus ensuring that the voices of women were heard in the run up to the elections:
   - Jelena Trivic provided expertise on matters of economy
   - Dijana Jesic advocated for social justice

3. **Nezavisni Blok** focused on holding capacity building trainings involving about 80 women from various walks of life aiming to “inspire, encourage and facilitate women to be socially and politically involved”.

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*Patria - Bosnia and Herzegovina* is a conservative party in the country. **HDZ1990** is a party in Bosnia & Herzegovina that endorsed a female candidate for State Presidency. The **PDP** ensured that their female candidates were promoted in newspapers and television press. Each candidate was encouraged by the party to speak on behalf of the party on the areas that they were experts on, thus ensuring that the voices of women were heard in the run up to the elections:

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Transparency & Accountability

Election fraud is one of the main problems of election processes in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Thus, emphasis was placed on training sister parties on how to prevent such occurrences, through a careful assessment of previous experiences and cooperation with other parties.

Encouraged by the Conservative Party, HDZ1990 was able to detect and deflect voter fraud by cooperating with like-minded parties in the country. HDZ1990 also identified which polling stations were at the greatest risk of electoral fraud, then held trainings with Conservative support for activists and volunteers on voter theft prevention.

Another problem in the political scene of BiH is that of accountability. Parties tend to stand on election promises that are not kept. However, we were able to identify some steps that our sister party the Nezavisni Blok took in order to be more accountable to the electorate:

- Stood by their pre-election pledge to oppose actions that grant a preferential treatment to politicians and disfavour citizens. For example, NB suspended from its Presidency MPs who post-election vouched for the return of financial appanage for politicians.
- Stood by their pre-election pledge of not striking a coalition with governing parties whose ideology does not comply with that of the NB.
- Fulfilled their pre-election pledge committing elected MPs to donate 20% of their salaries to a Scholarship Solidarity Fund for students.

NB’s persistent pattern of displaying their accountability can be linked to a Conservative capacity building training on the importance of politicians’ sense of accountability. During the seminar, participants felt that party members should take responsibility by offering deliverable policies play a part in delivering the solutions to problems. One participant referred to “democracy in practice” and putting the public first before politicians to demonstrate that NB offers a new kind of politics.

According to the HDZ1990 International Secretary, over 1,000 cases of voter fraud were prevented.
Policy & Political Messaging

The Conservative Party conducted a workshop on political messaging to help participating sister parties to counteract the pre-election narrative in Bosnia and Herzegovina that usually becomes very negative and divisive. One of the key recommendations to the parties in our trainings was to steer clear of defining themselves on account of the opposition, and rather to adopt issue-based campaigning outlining how the party and its candidates intend to solve problems in each constituency.

The Conservative Party has worked with the PDP for several years and more so in the run up to the recent general elections, where we concentrated on improving the party’s voter communication practices. The messages and actions of the PDP were starkly different to those of their main opponent, the SNSD, who were fined for electoral fraud and hate speech. The parties opted not to use divisive rhetoric (which is especially dangerous and inflammatory in BiH) and instead they were able to convey a structured narrative by identifying problems and solutions, thus contributing to stronger democratic practices in Republika Srpska.

Thanks to our trainings that resulted in a change of their communication strategy, we can conclude that the PDP’s political reach is more extensive. The PDP was able to increase the number of parliamentary seats on all levels of government. The most distinguishing success was the PDP’s win of two seats in the State Parliament where it previously had no representatives, as well as the increase of two additional seats in the Republic of Srpska entity.

GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT

- Parties conducted questionnaires & focus groups to better understand how people from various regions reacted to their policies
- Focus groups were used in different cities with a rural/urban, male/female structure
- Questionnaires & focus groups were pivotal in shaping policy, campaign messaging and identifying the needs of citizens

Case Study: PDP

The PDP party resolved to lead a campaign that concentrated on issues that matter to people rather than excessively identifying themselves through their opponents. This shift in rhetoric allowed the party to communicate a structured narrative that offered solutions without attacking their political opponents.

Positive campaigning is key to maintaining stability in Bosnia & Herzegovina, a country that is still very much divided by ethnic lines.

Political Parties Improved Their Methods of Communicating Policy By:

- Distributing shorter manifestos
- Identifying issues that matter to the electorate and offering viable policy solutions
- Focusing campaign narrative on how to tackle policy that is important to the people, as opposed to using divisive political rhetoric
- Using simpler language, catchy phrases, short descriptions, and infographics to convey policies
- Using social media platforms to share policies
HDZ1990 addressed issue-based campaigning mostly on cantonal levels and the issues addressed varied in each area. The Party compiled a 10 Point Policy Campaign codenamed 'SURVIVAL' (Croatian: OPSTANAK) tackling various issues and providing practical solutions. The focal point of the campaign was the issue of Brain Drain as many young, educated people are leaving the country.

As a new political party, Nezavisni Blok has engaged people who are new in politics and the training provided by the Conservatives have been fundamental in covering basic ground. We have found that our workshops and trainings were instrumental in shaping the NB’s discourse and personal branding. The NB has emerged as an inclusive party and delivered an election campaign that was not confined within the ambit of ethnic lines.
Election Methods

The Conservative Party encouraged our sister parties to campaign in a free and transparent way, by connecting with the hearts and minds of the voters rather than relying on bribery or threats.

For Nezavisni Blok, the Conservative Party training particularly enhanced the party’s in-house capacities in terms of leaflet and material compilation whose content, according to MP Amer Obradovic, was directly inspired by those of the Conservatives. This enhanced the party’s visibility and NB managed to win seats at all levels of governance (State, Federation, and Cantonal).

Overall, NB’s strategy consisted of conducting campaigns on the ground since the party lacked financial resources for big campaigns. The main campaign strategy was to introduce candidates and platforms through:

- Organised meetings with people in local communities, halls, and streets;
- Established networks through familiar people and extension of said networks on ‘friends of friends’;
- Social media.

Emphasis was placed by parties on policy and what the party can do for the country, rather than concentrating on divisive rhetoric.

Used knowledge passed on by the UK Conservatives to create captivating promotional material.

Engaged with citizens via materials being distributed personally by candidates.

“The content of our leaflets and materials is inspired specifically by those of the UK Conservatives” noted Amer Obradovic, International Secretary of Nezavisni Blok.

“Conservative Party encouraged our sister parties to campaign in a free and transparent way, by connecting with the hearts and minds of the voters rather than relying on bribery or threats.”

— Anja Petrovic, International Secretary of the PDP
PDP conducted a pre-campaign half a year before the election. This was mainly done through the following activities:

- Formal events carried out by the Chairman with the aim of discussing policies and expanding the party’s voter base where activists were encouraged to bring a person from their family/friendship circles.
- Informal events such as throwing barbecues as well as organising football tournaments carried out by the party.
- Utilisation of the Political Training Academy as a safe space to engage with potential activists/volunteers.

PDP voter communication improved thanks to elements that they took from our trainings, namely the creation of an incumbency calendar that highlighted important dates. For example, they identified that religious holidays are important to the electorate and that the party’s involvement or presence on those dates would be an avenue to engage with grassroots voters.
Encouraged by Conservative Party trainings, all three parties opted to utilise social media during their campaigns to bridge the gap between politicians and the electorate.

HDZ1990 used a personalised social media team to run their online campaign, which was an improvement on the 2014 elections according to International Secretary, Ante Jankovic. Anja Petrovic, PDP’s International Secretary, stated that because of the trainings held with the Conservative Party, the PDP began to use social media as a key tool in portraying the Chairman, Bratislav Borenovic, in a more informal and humanised way by avoiding imagery of him in formal clothing and large crowds. In accordance with recommendations from Conservative Party training, the PDP increased their confidence on social media by:
- Sharing more informal stories;
- Posting action photos;
- Using infographics and pictograms to impart their story more widely and succinctly;
- Put together a press team with the sole purpose of responding to social media bullying;
- Shaming imagery to stress jobs/investment economic growth, and
- Promotional videos of candidates speaking up for the policy.

Nezavisni Blok candidates each created their own Facebook profile to relate the message of the candidate and party to the electorate. Newly elected MP, Amer Obradovic, assumed the role of ‘watchdog’ of NB’s social media accounts and oversaw the party response to negative comments. He stated that the unanimous approach towards hostile communication was to not indulge, not fight back, nor delete negative comments. Blocking was used only in cases of trolls.
Conclusion

Better results for some parties: NB as a new party was able to attain mandates and PDP displayed the best results in the last 10 years

Train the youth and encourage them to engage through volunteering

A different way of displaying policy and political messaging which focused on how the parties plan to improve the needs of the society, rather than defining themselves through the opposition

The Conservative Party WFD programme achieved the following in BiH

New informal avenues of campaigning providing an organic bond with the electorate

Increased visibility through leaflets and infographics based on the Conservatives’ model

Strengthen the focus on the campaign of women candidates as well as their participation in politics

Encouraged accountability and transparency in pre-election pledges and post-election promises