

ON THE PATHWAY FROM PROJECTS TO SYSTEMATIC CHANGE

BiH state and non-governmental sectors in the process of reforming social welfare

Abstract. *The article discusses the transition of the welfare system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author begins by focusing on the main faces of the transition and pinpoints unique features of the Bosnian experience. It continues with a brief elaboration of the role of non-governmental organisations in providing social welfare during the socialist regime, war period and in the process of transition. Special attention is given to the new legislation enacted by the end of 1990, which provided the possibility to develop a plural model of welfare. The author presents the biggest achievements and challenges faced on the path to a more participative and empowering welfare system. The paper provides examples in order to support the claim that the NGO sector has played a crucial role in bringing about substantive changes in the way the welfare system is moving away from the classical welfarism of the pre-war period towards empowerment and participation during the transition.*

Key words: *social welfare, social welfare reform, public/state sector, NGO sector, transition*

Introduction: Social welfare during socialism and the role of NGOs

By virtue of having shared common values and practices with other socialist countries of the region, Bosnia and Herzegovina ('BiH') faced the fall of socialism and subsequent war with a state-based social policy. The main features of the socialist welfare system were state-provided services of unequal quality but which were available to all: free education and health care, assistance with social apartments, assistance with many other services (transportation, food, clothes etc). The state pursued a policy of full employment while state-owned companies acted as social policy agents, at least in

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the fields of employment and housing policy. The system of social welfare was based and built upon the existence of centres for social work ('CSW'), institutions providing institutional care (such as institutions for children without parental care, the elderly, children and adults with development disorders etc) and other institutions for social protection (shelters, shelter stations, clubs).

Although it became popular to talk about civil society organisation during and in the aftermath of conflict(s) (1992-1995), in BiH's recent history there are examples of very vibrant civil society activities whose origins stretch back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Most civil initiatives during the times of the Hapsburg Monarchy (1878-1918) and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) (1918-1941) took the shape of an ethnically-coloured, community-based charity. Indeed, such organisations represented a genuine voluntary contribution of BiH citizens to the development of modern civil society. Yet, due to the very nature of their ideology, the communists distrusted any sort of non-governmental activity. Immediately after assuming power in post-World War II Yugoslavia, they banned virtually every civil association in existence, even charities. Social scientists have not reached a consensus over the question of whether the existence of officially sanctioned NGOs during socialism can be regarded as proof that civil society organisations actually survived throughout the communist rule. With respect to this, it must be stated that these 'official' NGOs represented little more than quasi-government structures ranging from anti-fascist women's associations to different foundations dealing with children and reforestation activities. None of these organisations really engaged in free discourse and activities not approved by local committees of the ruling party. As a result, the war in BiH occurred in a country with very few civil sector activities aside from national (ethnic) charity organisations, which were the first organisations to be re-established following the fall of the socialist regime in 1991.¹

Surprisingly, the end of socialism and consequent emergence of parties with parties aligned to a rightist ideology throughout the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ('SFRJ') disrupted the democratisation process that had started in the early 1990s and ended in war(s) with disastrous consequences for BiH: it is estimated that 258,000 BiH inhabitants were killed or are missing, i.e. 5.9 % of the pre-war population was eliminat-

¹ Charitable organisations within four major ethnic groups were established already during the time of Austro-Hungarian rule in BiH (1878-1918). The first charity with the name *La Benevolencija* grew out of the Jewish community of Sarajevo already in 1892 and was followed by *Merhamet*, *Caritas* and *Dobrotvor*. These organisations ended their social activities in the aftermath of World War II. As the process of democratisation started after the fall of socialism in 1989, the charities were the first third sector organisations to renew their activities.

ed (International Forum of Bosnia, 1999); there were 1.2 million refugees from BiH at the end of the war (UNHCR: 1998); the economic impact is estimated at USD 50–60 billion, of which USD 20 billion represents production capacity (UNDP: 1997). The war produced also consequences that are not directly measurable such as destruction of the governance system², the interruption of economic development, education, and a 'brain-drain'. However, the most enduring effects of the war are reflected in the destruction of the social body: the destruction of society, social ties, tolerance and co-existence, the breakdown of families and small communities and the general collapse of social values and normal life.

The social welfare regime during and after the war and the role of NGOs

The war in BiH and humanitarian crises it triggered attracted many international NGOs which have worked on various programmes and projects. International stakeholders have not engaged directly in the running of projects but have acted through international NGOs serving as implementing agencies, such as CARE, CRS, IRC and many others³.

By the end of the war in 1995, more than 200 international NGOs were registered in BiH. In his detailed study of the social welfare regime of BiH during the war and in its aftermath, Stubbs (2001:262) identified some common characteristics of their functioning: they implemented projects and programmes designed outside BiH and financed by the international community; they employed humanitarian workers experienced in crisis intervention in developing countries and foreigners with certain voluntary experience in the region; employees with a local background had no impact on project design or project implementation; largely these were not social work professionals but younger people fluent in English and able to adapt to the changing circumstances. It should be noted that they were technically and materially well-equipped and funded via extensive budget resources and took over many tasks initially performed by the country's centres of social work.

At the same time, their counterparts in the public sector shared the experience of a serious level of destruction in many senses: their material

² During the war there was, for instance, no legal system in any part of the BiH territory. Warlords had complete power over smaller or bigger territories under their control.

³ By the term international stakeholder we mean a wide range of agencies which were or still are active in BiH: supranational agencies which act at the global level, including agencies of the United Nations (UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF), the World Bank and International Monetary Fund; regional agencies such as the Council of Europe and European Union; bilateral agencies such as USAID, SIDA, DFID, GtZ etc; international foundations (Open Society Fund, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Heinrich Boell Foundation); larger international NGOs such as CARE International, Oxfam, International Rescue Committee and, finally, more or less solidier international organisations such as Quaker Peace and Service.

resources were mostly destroyed, they were under-staffed because many former employees had left their working positions or been attracted by the high wages offered by international NGOs. Indeed, just when the needs of the population had grown enormously, their resources ceased.⁴

In the first post-war years, the relationship between international/national NGOs and the CSW was characterised by the former completely ignoring the latter; there was neither an attempt to incorporate the CSW into project implementation nor to assist their work through their technical equipment or other resource-building. Stubbs (2001: 263) referred to this tendency when concluding that 'international NGOs (...) tended to wrongly understand, interpret and marginalise centres for social work, which were left without material and human resources and, as such, became a means of social exclusion and discrimination while, on the other hand, they might have become reintegration forces and even the key peace factor had international NGOs conducted detailed analyses and put in greater efforts'.⁵ By doing so, the foundations were laid down for the establishment of a completely independent system of social protection/welfare, even parallel to the state structures.

The Dayton Peace Agreement ('DPA') of 14 December 1995 formally ended the war in BiH. Although the DPA is primarily a peace treaty, it also created the framework for BiH as a state. It stipulated that BiH is a state consisting of two ethnically-based entities: Republika Srpska in the north and east with a Serb majority, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the southern and central parts of the country shared between Croats and Bosniaks. The entities divide the country almost in half: 49 % and 51 % of the territory, respectively. The DPA comprises a total of 11 annexes and mandated various international agencies to become key actors in certain aspects of the agreement.⁶ The responsibilities of state-level institutions were firmly limited to the following matters: foreign policy, foreign trade policy, customs policy, monetary policy, finances of the institutions and for the international obligations of BiH, immigration, refugee and asylum policy and regulation, international and inter-entity criminal law enforcement, establishment and

⁴ The following observations by M. Poturkovic, Director of the Cantonal Centre for Social Work Sarajevo, might illustrate these processes: 'In January 1992 there were 126 employees in the Centre for Social Work. In June 1992 only 42 employees are still active in the Centre' (JU Kantonalni centar za socijalni rad, 2008:17). Similarly, she pointed that 'In the period 1992-1995 our employees worked under absolutely inadequate conditions-without paper, PCs, chair and tables, simply without everything' (ibid:20).

⁵ The author's own translations from the Bosnian language.

⁶ The DPA contains the following annexes: 1-A) Military Aspects; 1-B) Regional Stabilisation; 2) Inter-Entity Boundary; 3) Elections; 4) Constitution; 5) Arbitration; 6) Human Rights; 7) Refugees and Displaced Persons; 8) Commission to Preserve National Monuments; 9) BiH Public Corporations; 10) Civilian Implementation; and 11) International Police Task Force.

operation of common international communications facilities, regulation of inter-entity transportation and air traffic control (Article 1 of Annex 4 of the DPA). Article 3 of the DPA foresees that ‘all governmental functions and powers not expressly assigned in this Constitution to the Institution of BiH shall be those of the Entities’. Although in the last few years in line with EU integration processes some modifications have been made and additional state-level ministries have been established, it is evident that state authority as established by the DPA is very restricted.

According to the provisions of the DPA, the state of BiH has no competencies in the area of social policy. The absence of any regulation at the state level has led to the enactment of two divergent systems of social welfare in the two entities. As such, the social welfare systems mirror the Dayton structure of two asymmetrically positioned entities: the Federation of BiH (‘FBiH’) where political power is divided between 10 cantons and the Federation; and Republika Srpska (‘RS’) with its strongly centralised organisation. Similarities between the two systems can be found in the level of rights and beneficiaries, while the main differences lie in the fact that the social welfare system in FBiH is decentralised (authority is shared between the entity and canton), while in RS a centralised social welfare regime is functioning⁷. A direct consequence of this solution is structural inequality in the level of social welfare offered by the cantons/municipalities.

In a climate where social welfare has been a low priority on the political agenda of both domestic forces and the international community, it is not surprising that there has been no coherent, systematic approach to social protection/welfare reform. As far as the international community’s involvement is concerned, following the war the emphasis has shifted away from humanitarian assistance towards development, which has encompassed civil society’s development, post-war reconstruction and capacity-building.⁸

⁷ It should be noted that the decentralised system of social protection is fully in line with contemporary international standards. However, given the unequal financial capacities of BiH municipalities it is apparent that municipalities are not in a state to provide for the ever growing social needs of their citizens.

⁸ What constitutes a civil society might be interpreted widely or narrowly and may include diverse groups and organisations such as advocacy/interest groups, social movements, political parties, charitable organisations, voluntary community organisations and religious organisations.

In various contexts organisations under the umbrella of civil society are named differently: non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations, and third sector organisations. The ascribed term implicitly emphasises only one, dominating element of the definition. In the BiH context civil society organisations are falsely equated with NGOs and we refer to the space they occupy as the non-governmental sector. This term became widely accepted for referring to legally constituted organisations established by natural or legal persons with no participation or representation of government. *Per definitionem*, the crucial element is their supposed independence of the public/government sector. In this paper we will use this terminology and speak of NGOs and the non-governmental sector in BiH, although following Anheimer & Seibel (1990) it would be more precise to use the terms third sector and third sector organisations which are more adequate as they refers to the sphere of social activity undertaken by various organi-

The area of social welfare was not recognised as a direct priority of post-war reconstruction, although it should have been keeping in mind the disastrous war results on one hand, and the unfolding transition process and its serious consequences, which further aggravated difficulties in the system causing poverty, marginalisation, social exclusion etc on the other. By not being regulated on the state level, many areas of social welfare in the aftermath of the conflict were left to varying influences of international and, gradually, local NGOs and their policies, programmes and projects. This led to the establishment of a parallel regime of social welfare headed by the NGO sector that was without functional relationships to the public sector. Its main feature in terms of the social services provided was its project-orientation with an emphasis on certain user groups such as children without parental care, persons with disabilities, the elderly or women victims of violence. The main characteristic of this period was their donor-centred approaches and donor-dependence. As donor interest changed from year to year (from disability to abuse, for example), NGOs changed the focus of their work according to actual donor interest. For many of those NGOs the donor market was as harsh as the private market. Many of them proved they could not sustain themselves and had to abandon their work.

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These developments led many authors to start speaking of 'projectomania' (Sejfija, 2006) to denote the uncritical attitude of NGOs whose entire programme of activities revolved around founding projects and whose priority was to develop projects that focus on compliance with donors' criteria, often without considering their practical relevance and viability. This led to a situation in which local NGOs lost contact with society, developing their agendas according to donor's expectations instead of responding to social needs. Some authors (Sekulic, 2002, Stubbs, 2003) went even further in their criticisms, claiming that part of civil society in BiH has been 'colonised' by international actors. This view is endorsed by Bosnian and foreign social sciences alike. Stubbs defines 'colonisation' as 'an asymmetry based on an unequal distribution of symbolic and financial power between two categories of actors' within the civil sector in BiH (Stubbs, in Papic et al., 1998:36; Stubbs, in Papic et al., 2003: 61-62). According to him, this asymmetry 'leads to outcomes which reinforce the dominance of international actors, their frameworks, assumptions, meanings and practices. As such, these outcomes may be inappropriate to the specific socio-political and socio-cultural context of particular society, and implicitly or explicitly, patronizing, demeaning and even insulting the local actors' (ibid).

sations that occupy the space between the state and market. This term includes organisations which do not fit in with the public/private sector dichotomy, not profit-driven and are not governmental organisations. Organisations of the third sector produce public good and services (Anheimer & Seibel, 1990).

The BiH social welfare system in transition

From the end of war until today BiH has undergone a difficult process of transformation, usually referred to as a transition or transitional process. The transition in BiH was threefold: at the political level, the transition from war to peace; at the economic level, the transition from a command to a market economy; and at the societal level, the transition from a state of urgent humanitarian assistance to a state of sustainable development (Papic et al., 2001:20). This transition process has been accompanied by numerous and painful reforms in political, economic and social fields. With respect to the social welfare system the key reforms have included, for example, introduction of assistance for the unemployed, the restriction of much of the assistance stemming from the socialist heritage, the privatisation of some services (education and health care), and the emergence of the third sector in the domain of social service providers, along with the abandonment of institutional care and its replacement by alternative care models.

The transition process in the social welfare area was launched by the introduction of a new legislative framework in both entities⁹. In September 1999 'The law on the basics of social protection, protection of civil war victims and protection of families with children' was passed in FBiH and was amended in 2005. The provisions of the law regulate the cycle of beneficiaries and their rights, while foreseeing the duty of respective cantonal institutions to enact cantonal law on social protection to define in detail the procedure, criteria, level of monetary payments, financing etc. The Law on Social Protection in RS was already passed in 1993 and amended in 1996 and 1999. It foresees that the entity and the municipalities are the carriers of social protection in its territory. The entity is in charge of defining rights and beneficiaries, while the municipalities are obliged to apply the social protection programmes based on analyses of the citizens' social status and needs.

It must be noted that the changes introduced did not affected beneficiaries and their rights, but were mostly designed to displace institutional and introduce alternative care, as well as the combined system of welfare which implies that, beside state institutions involved in the provision of social welfare, third sector organisations and organisations from the private sector appear as partners. Although the clear intention of the legislator was to create a legal basis for the promotion and enactment of partnership between the public/governmental and non-governmental sectors in the area of social

⁹ The reform process in the area of social protection started with the active engagement of international organisations and was framed by two quite opposite, even contradictory conceptions of social protection. Both mentioned institutions favoured the neo-liberal model, whereas in the country the social-democratic model still prevailed, based on the socialist heritage and artificially developed high expectations of its citizens.

welfare/protection (and, by doing so, legalising sanctions and recognising changes that had happened in practice), it has not created mechanisms that enable both sectors to develop their co-operation and work in the direction of partnership.¹⁰

The new legislative frameworks at the entity level were subsequently accompanied by other strategic documents. The Poverty Reduction Strategy of 2002 is the first such document to contain a section on social welfare reform, along with a range of concrete policy recommendations. However, the document has been assessed as being more of a list of hopeful wishes than a policy to be realised. Two other policy papers, the Mid-Term Development Strategy for BiH 2004–2007 and the Action Plan for the Integration of BiH into the EU were endorsed by the Council of Ministers in 2006. The Council of Ministers made a second decision regarding these documents as concerns European partnership priorities. Regrettably, this decision failed to pinpoint the priorities related to the social, education and health sectors in particular, as well as overall poverty reduction issues, which illustrates the inconsistency of the authorities towards reforms in these sectors (UNDP, 2007).

Gradually, big shifts in the NGO sector occurred due to the continuing availability of funds and programmes sponsored by foreign donors with links to governments which still play an important role in the reconstruction process. Many of the myriad local NGOs failed to recognise the need to shift their strategies from emergency humanitarian aid to more development-oriented activities. As the overall situation in BiH stabilised funds for emergency humanitarian assistance dried up, leading to the disappearance of those NGOs that were ill-equipped to deal with sophisticated development programmes.¹¹ On the other side, some local NGOs managed to timely adopt new, more professional working practices and attract developmental projects mainly directly funded by foreign governments and large international organisations. These projects differed radically from the emergency humanitarian interventions that BiH had experienced in the aftermath of the conflict. They were mostly sector-adjustment projects where donors sought to implement certain strategic goals of transforming aspects of the

¹⁰ While many areas of social policy such as health care, education and housing have been covered and discovered by the private sector which recognised the opportunity for profit gains, social welfare and unemployment are two areas that were not considered attractive by private enterprises. There are probably many reasons for this, but the most compelling seems to be the fact that social welfare, for example, has to deal with people in need of social assistance and it is assumed that those people cannot afford to pay for the services they need, and so no profit can be made. However, many NGOs entered the social protection field in order to bridge the gap between the lacking state initiatives and the growing social needs.

¹¹ Unfortunately, such a trend led to the disappearance of many grass roots organisations which lacked the capacity to prepare professional project proposals and develop expert monitoring tools which, in the course of time, became regular requirements of international donors.

inadequate social welfare system. This professionalisation of certain NGOs led to their gradual transformation into more consultancy-like firms due to their enormous expertise acquired in the course of implementing various sector-adjustment projects. In the area of social welfare, such a development is reflected in the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issue ('IBHI'), an organisation which gradually became the most respectful NGO in this area and which initiated the earliest programmes directed at the transformation of social welfare.¹² The IBHI was the first organisation to commence working on issues of transforming social welfare in an atmosphere in which neither governmental bodies on different levels nor the academic community had the necessary prerequisites available to undertake similar efforts. The first step to be undertaken was to conduct research into the social welfare system and policy in both entities, with a special focus on the perspectives of enacting a plural social welfare model, de-institutionalisation and the sustainability of the social welfare regime. In co-operation with different actors from the NGO sector, along with the CSW, relevant ministries, international organisations and local experts, the IBHI prepared a study entitled 'Social Protection in the FBiH: An Overview of the System and Policies'. Applying identical methodology, the same study was carried out in RS. Its findings are summarised in the document 'Transformation Strategy for the Social System in BiH' (Agic et al., 2002). The study recommends that the state/entity should assume responsibility for co-ordinating activities relating to social welfare, while local NGOs should provide support for the management of joint programmes.

Based upon the study's recommendations, the IBHI initiated a new project entitled 'Support to the social sector in BiH' in order to influence the relationship between the public and NGO sectors in the social welfare area. The project was financed by the government of Finland and the UK Department for International Development ('DFID') and implemented by the UNDP and IBHI. It was realised within two years in two BiH municipalities, one in the FBiH (Travnik) and one in RS (Prijeedor), with a budget of EUR 2 million. The projects' main goals involved the reform of social welfare on the local municipality level, establishment of new managerial structures for social protection at the municipality level, capacity-building, strengthening of physical and human resources as well as training and research (Stubbs, 2001:268). The primary achievements of the two projects may be summarised as follows: a new institutional framework for the co-ordination of social welfare has been established at the municipality level, which is more successful and appropriate; networking and co-ordination between

¹² As stated on its website, the IBHI-BiH works in four main sectors: poverty reduction, dynamic economic and social development, sustainable NGO sector and mainstreamed equality. For more information, see www.ibhibih.org

many actors in the social welfare field have been developed, most importantly between governmental and non-governmental organisations; the centres for social work have been equipped technically and their employees have been trained; an approach with a focus on the user of services has been initiated; and financial resources for social protection have been increased (Habul, 2008).

This project might also be understood as a pilot project for the enactment of the mixed model of social welfare, keeping in mind that for the first time, on an equal footing with institutional carriers of social welfare – the CSW – NGOs, citizens associations and private enterprises have been offered the chance of participating. As Habul (2008:37) rightly notes, this new approach has affirmed conceptual changes, changes in the way practice has been organised and a shift in the way of thinking and understanding the social protection system. The CSW have been forced to leave behind their long-term bureaucratic practice and adapt to the new market-like circumstances, whereas NGOs have had to improve their professional capacities. The initial concurrent position developed into a real partnership in practice, which might be seen in the fact that institutional bodies for co-ordination established during the project time have been inaugurated into a regular social protection commission. By the end of 2003, this strategy was already being implemented in 15 municipalities in both entities while a more extensive roll-out across the country was planned (*ibid*: 39–40).

However, as Stubbs (2001: 269) remarked, there was a problem of how to integrate these changes at the micro level with relatively weak changes at the mezzo level. To that end, a new project was initiated which anticipated an integrated approach to social welfare transformation and even more directly influenced the way social welfare is managed. This project¹³ was implemented from May 2001–2005 throughout BiH in the pilot municipalities of Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje and Zenica in the Federation of BiH and Banja Luka and Trebinje in Republika Srpska, with a budget of EUR 2 million¹⁴

The project's objective was to strengthen social policy regimes at all levels: the macro level pertains to entity regimes, the mezzo level to cantonal/municipality management and the micro level, the local community level involves a sense of partnership between municipalities (CSW) and NGOs and other civil sector organisations. The objective was to be achieved through the promotion of effective and efficient social policies which are

¹³ The project 'Reforming the Systems and Structures of Central and Local Social Policy Regimes in BiH', supported by the DFID (the UK government's Department for International Development).

¹⁴ The implementing organisations were Birks Sinclair Associated Ltd. and the IBHI, which applied an innovative bottom-up approach referred to as the 'new project model' (Papić et al., 2007:91) implying that the IBHI was not only the partner organisation which provided services during the implementation phase, but also had an equal influence on the implementation policy.

fiscally sustainable and innovative and contribute to the reduction of poverty, inequality and social exclusion.¹⁵ The programme aimed to achieve this objective by: improving social policy planning, social welfare management and administrative capacities of entity-level institutions (ministries), strengthening municipal (and cantonal) social policy management and social service delivery, and developing partnership and community action projects between civil society and municipalities in four pilot areas (Papic et al., 2007: 92).

Papic et al. (ibid:100) highlighted two important lessons of this project: first, the key lasting elements of the project are: knowledge, experience, networks, an ethos of partnership and awareness of the needs of marginalised people and, second, new a partnership model which involves a “synergy of foreign operational knowledge and local operational knowledge experiences which ‘opened the door’” to the development of partnership with all local stakeholders (ibid). They further suggest that ‘this approach could have broader regional significance and be applied in the Balkan and South-Eastern European countries as a better model of international support’ (ibid: 100–101). It is apparent that initial success has been achieved in the development of a partnership between the public sector and the civil sector in the field of social services. The involvement of local NGOs ensures that citizens’ needs are articulated and reflected in programme implementation.

In the course of running those two projects, the IBHI was profiled as a recognised agency in the social policy area. However, as Stubbs (2001:269) rightly warned, there remains a very complex question of whether it is based on clear responsibility lines and structures as it might also be interpreted as the transmission of ownership from the academic community and governments to private consultative and implementing agencies.

The current state of affairs

More than a decade later, BiH’s transitional experience seems to fully confirm the metaphor of ‘the transition from socialism to feudalism’ coined by Verdery (1996), by which she attempted to disrupt the dominant,

¹⁵ Different partnership mechanisms have been developed in order to meet the goals set, such as municipal project management boards with the task to support, advise and manage project activities and ensure the active involvement of all actors at the municipal level; project co-ordination groups, at the entity level, with the task to oversee project management issues, promote joint working, discuss recommendations from entity forums and exercise policy influence, plan the dissemination of the lessons learned, participate in project reviews and plan future developments following the termination of the project. Further, horizontal and vertical partnerships have been developed. A horizontal partnership was developed between various organisations active in social protection in the pilot municipalities, whereas a vertical partnership was accomplished through social policy advisory groups at the entity level, which served as consultative advisory groups.

Western-led conception of 'transition' as being evolutionary in the sense of leading to something better and more prosperous, towards liberal democracy and market capitalism. On the contrary, the transition in BiH has produced 'great uncertainty about where government and law actually resided' (Verdery, 1996:205). The transition has had the following effects:

- at the political level, the country is undergoing the most serious crisis since the end of the war, marked by renewed ethnic tensions and (ethnified) conflicting approaches to the most important political issues such as constitutional reform, accession to the EU, the role of the OHR etc;
- at the economic level, the situation is marked by the following: the number of unemployed is estimated at 530,000 (BiH Agency for Employment, 2008)¹⁶; data for 2007 from the BiH Agency for Statistics reveal that over 320,000 people are social welfare beneficiaries (financial and in-kind), which makes up 7 % of the estimated BiH population¹⁷; here we should also add the consequences of the failed privatisation process, the high level of public expenditure and the highest level of corruption in the region (SELDI, 2008).
- at the societal level, we should mention that, according to World Bank (WB) and UNDP data, the number of people in poverty in BiH' calculated by international standards is approaching 680,000, whereas the total population is estimated at 3.8 million¹⁸ and there are strong tendencies toward the exclusion of the elderly, children and youth, people with disabilities, women, and ethnic minorities.

What is happening with social welfare system? In order to examine current developments within BiH's social welfare system, it is instructive to take into consideration the thesis of plurality developed by Kolaric (2009)¹⁹. Namely, acknowledging the fact that the process of transition in post-socialist societies develops at different speeds and intensities, with different internal and external actors with their different interests and ideologies, Kolaric argues for the rejection of the convergence thesis which, as she says, has

¹⁶ The national statistical data indicate that the unemployment rate is close to 40 %, while international assessments are close to half that rate on the grounds that the official statistics are unable to calculate the extent of the underestimated gray economy. It is estimated that nearly 300,000 people earn their living through gray economy channels.

¹⁷ Although approximately 16 % of GDP is allocated to social transfers (including pensioners and war veterans), it is obvious that the available resources are insufficient to meet the needs of the population (UNDP, 2007).

¹⁸ The last census was conducted in 1991. Since the end of the war the question of the census has become a highly politicised and sensitive issue around which no political consensus can be reached.

¹⁹ We refer to the background paper delivered by Kolaric for the CINEFOGO conference on 'The Role of Third Sector Organisations in Changing Welfare Systems in Central and Eastern European Countries' which took place at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana on 5-6 February 2009.

since the fall of socialism dominated research into reforms in the sphere of social policy in former socialist countries. Rather than converge in some Western social policy regime, social welfare systems in those countries are witnessing a plurality of emerging welfare systems (ibid).

Although the distinct feature of the BiH transitional path is reflected in the overall situation of political, economic and social instability, fragile governance structures and incapacity to establish sustainability, it must be conceded that developments in the social welfare system seem to fully support the abovementioned thesis of the plurality of welfare systems emerging in former socialist countries.

Indeed, in light of the troubled climate in which many socio-political reforms have been prone to fail the challenging task of reforming social welfare was, to a certain degree, even successful if we observe it through the prism of NGOs, mostly in terms of their inclusion in service provision and policy drafting. We should also take into account the involvement of a greater number of international organisations which have fatefully influenced and even shaped current development of the social welfare regime in BiH.

Fifteen years after the first local NGO appeared in 1993²⁰, the total number of registered NGOs in BiH exceeds 9,000, although only half of them are really active, i.e. 4,629. The total estimated income of the NGO sector in BiH represents 4.5 % of GDP, whereas the NGO sector's consumption amounts to 2.4 % of GDP. The number of full-time and part-time employees in the NGO sector is 26,668, representing 2.3 % of the active force. If we add to this the number of fulltime volunteers (63,129), namely 5.36 % of active labour citizens, we arrive at the figure of 7.66 % of the active labour force working in the NGO sector (Ninkovic-Papic, 2007: 90).

It is interesting to more closely examine the distribution of activities among local NGOs in accordance with their NACE classifications.

²⁰ Accordingly to recent research, most international NGOs (43 %) were registered for the first time in the 1996-2000 period, while the biggest number of local NGOs was registered for the first time in the 2001-2004 period (40 %).

Table 1: The distribution of activities among local NGOs according to their NACE classifications

NACE CODE	NACE DESCRIPTION	FBIH	RS ²¹	BIH
85.3	Social Work Activities (with and without accommodation) not undertaken by government or private sector	961	93	1,054
91.11	Business and Employers' organisations	157	25	182
91.12	Professional organisations	220	179	399
91.20	Trade Unions	1,270	25	1,295
91.31	Religious organisations	138	10	148
91.32	Political organisations	722	39	761
91.33	Other membership organisations. These include: – Activities of organisations directly affiliated to a political party furthering a public cause or issue by means of public education, political influence, fundraising etc – Special interest groups such as touring clubs and automobile associations and consumer associations – Associations for the purpose of social acquaintanceship such as rotary clubs, lodges etc – Associations of youth, young persons associations, student associations, clubs and fraternities etc – Associations for the pursuit of a cultural or recreational activity or hobby (other than sports or games) – Associations for the protection of animals	2,039	1,381	3,420
92.62	Other sporting activities	1,151	685	1,836
TOTAL		6,658	2,437	9,095

It is important to note that, after trade unions, NGOs engaged in social work activities appear to be the largest. This might indicate some important developmental trends if we compare these data with the data obtained in a study by the Centre for Information and Support to the Non-governmental Sector in 1997. Its analysis showed that NGOs active in BiH grouped their activities around five major areas. The majority is concerned with human rights issues, including women, children and minority rights (40 %), then

²¹ This number includes 121 organisations registered in the Brcko District.

come organisations dealing with sport, culture and leisure time (38.5 %) and, third, organisations devoted to youth issues, student and children issues (33.5 %) and organisations concerned with social issues (33.5 %). The two last areas covered include reconstruction and repatriation, humanitarian relief and ecology.

Nonetheless, here we should also emphasise the apparent unequal distribution of these NGOs between the two entities: the FBiH has up to 10 times more NGOs active in the social work field than RS! However, as some authors have mentioned (D@dalos, 2003:7), the unequal distribution of NGOs on the entity level should not lead to the conclusion that RS has offered less fertile grounds for civil society actions. Indeed, this fact is certainly linked to the 'uneven intervention' by the international community both during and immediately after the war, which was not concentrated in the major cities but also gravitated towards FBiH and Western RS (ibid).

Bearing in mind that the NGOs established by international organisations tended to be settled in urban areas, such as Sarajevo, Tuzla and Banja Luka, surely the issue of unequal regional representation is involved stake. A direct consequence is that the services provided by NGOs are inaccessible by a large part of the population. The NGO sector at this time is described generally as being located in the main urban centres with a great number and concentration of organisations in FBiH resulting from the fact that Banja Luka, Bijeljina and Prijedor were the only sizeable towns in RS. A number of factors connected to the post-war environment militated against the emergence of significant NGOs in more rural regions of BiH: a lack of educated people, a smaller population density, a lack of access to information and donors due to geographical isolation, adverse political pressure and the suspicion of civil action among the general population (especially in Eastern RS) and in the concentration of donors and donor interventions in the larger towns. The above cited study conducted by the D@dalos Association for Peace Education Work in 2003 on a sample of 154 respondent organisations from 51 different locations across both entities of BiH seemed to confirm the widespread presumption that civic activity in more rural areas is lagging behind that in major cities (ibid).²²

Bearing in mind the abovementioned characteristics of the NGO sector, we should also consider its possible influences on the reform of BiH's welfare system. The question to be answered is what is the NGOs' position in the hierarchy of sectors that provide social services and/or what is the relationship between the public sector and NGO sector? Here it also seems helpful to consult the research model proposed by Kolaric (2009) which allows a

²² Regarding the structure of the NGOs interviewed, it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of NGOs addressed women's and youth issues (76 organisations), while only 12 NGOs were engaged in the delivery of health and social services (D@dalos, 2003:10).

differentiation of four distinct strategies in relation to the role played by third sector organisations in achieving sought after changes within social welfare systems. These strategies are: classical welfarism, with limited space for third sector organisations and its complementary role to the public sector; an empowerment and participation strategy in which third sector organisations play the primary role and represent an alternative to public and market service provision; a commercialisation and consumerism strategy, with broad space for third sector organisations and its substituting role relative to the public sector and a social investment strategy in which responsibility chiefly resides with public sector agencies, but also includes third sector organisations.

If we apply the proposed research model in order to find out what was and still is the NGO sector's role in influencing social welfare reform in BiH, the thesis of the plurality of strategies and their individual elements becomes even more obvious. Apparently, in different reform stages the BiH social welfare system has revealed characteristics of classical welfarism, a commercialisation and consumerism strategy as well as elements of an empowerment and participation strategy.

As shown in previous sections, upon the rebirth of NGOs during and after the war these organisations primarily filled in the gaps that had emerged in the structure of the welfare regime. However, we should also note that certain NGOs, as shown by the IBHI example, which have acquired more professional knowledge and are still attractive to the donor community, function in certain aspects as a substitution for the missing state initiatives and actions, as well as the missing scientific responses to transitional challenges in this field by the academic community. As repeatedly emphasised throughout this article, governmental institutions at all three levels (entity, cantonal and municipal) have lacked and are still lacking capacities to engage in the process of the transition of the social welfare system for many reasons. Two of them are most compelling: the first pertains to the constitutional structure of the state as devised in Dayton, which did not foresee any mode of state authority in the area of social welfare and, in so doing, prevented the success of any effort to harmonise policy in this sector²³;

²³ It became quite common to refer to post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina as a 'virtual state'. This term denotes the country as a non-functional state incapable of assuming full ownership of its political processes. Supporting such comments are the political tensions within the country which led to the extension of the mandate of the Office of the High Representative (OHR). (Ethno)political divisions in the country seem to be dangerously high, even 14 years after the end of the conflict and contribute to the persistence of a climate of institutional and political uncertainty. The political system devised in Dayton has proven to be cumbersome, inefficient, expensive and constrained by constitutional provisions designed to prevent common government at the state level rather than to enable it. In addition, politicians from both entities ignore and undermine the present state. While politicians from the FBiH tend to regard it as a temporary system, their counterparts in RS view it as a minor obstacle to their autonomist ambitions.

while the second reason has to do with the low priority given to social welfare by the ruling political elites on the wider socio-political agenda. Therefore, the space was created through which more powerful NGOs could not only become service providers but also take over the leading role in introducing and managing social welfare reforms.

If we attempt to examine the relationship between the public and NGO sectors, we should first recall that the modes of institutional co-operation between the two sectors under scrutiny might be analysed on different levels according to the post-war state structure: state, entity, cantonal and municipal. For the purposes of this article, we will briefly outline the key characteristics of this process on every level.

Regarding co-operation between the two sectors on the state level, it should be noted that pushing impulses from the civil society sector to institutionalise their co-operation finally resulted in the signing of an agreement of co-operation between the Council of Ministries BiH ('CoM') as the state government on one side and representatives of the BiH non-governmental sector on the other in May 2007. This agreement was seen as an initial step towards the establishment of an institutional and legal framework for dialogue and co-operation between governmental and non-governmental sectors in BiH. According to the agreement, both signatories were obliged to take the necessary steps to create an institutional mechanism²⁴ which would enable the process to develop.²⁵ The CoM envisioned two such bodies: a state bureau for co-operation with the NGO sector and a council for civil society. Unfortunately, the CoM did not take any measures to realise the accepted obligations even though the establishment of social dialogue is regarded as a key short-term priority of BiH in the process of EU accession (EC, 2008). While the state government is obviously lacking the political will to move forward in this process, the non-governmental sector faces problems of another kind. By the end of 2007, the Council of Civil Society had been established to act as a partner institution of the CoM. However, since its creation the Council has been challenged by the question of its mission and legitimacy.²⁶

²⁴ As indicated in the study conducted by Zeravčić (2008), the mission issue pertains to the question of whether the council might be established as an advocacy body keeping in mind the diversity of the sector itself, as well as issues of the passive and active legitimating of its representatives. With respect to this, members of the Council share the opinion that it should rather be constituted as a forum or think-tank of various NVO and individuals involved in the development of civil society (ibid).

²⁵ The text of this agreement is available at the CoM official website: www.vijeceministara.gov.ba

²⁶ Despite lacking mechanisms for co-operation, it is interesting to mention that the structure of NGOs' income sources in BiH has drastically changed. This is best illustrated by figures from 2007 for their income structure: 27 % from membership fees, 21 % from government donations, 21 % from international donations, 18 % from domestic donations, 9 % from contracted services, 2 % from municipal funds and 2 % from other sources (Grupa autora, 2007: 91). These figures are especially interesting in the sense they

Regarding co-operation on the entity level, a recent study by Zeravcic (2008) shows that neither FBiH nor RS has initiated any form of co-operative agreement with the NGO sector. Accordingly, there is no institutional mechanism that includes representatives of both sectors which would take on a co-ordinating role. Grants to NGOs in both entities are awarded either if they are declared as being organisations of 'special interests' or upon the submission of programme activities (ibid: 50). Something similar applies to co-operation between both sectors on the cantonal level in FBiH. Regrettably, there is no form of institutional co-operation between NGOs and cantonal governments, implying that no cantonal government (out of 10) has signed any agreement or established any mechanism for co-operation. The funds awarded to NGOs are largely limited to those NGOs registered in a single canton.

Yet the picture appears more optimistic when it comes to the question of mutual co-operation on the municipal level. In the study mentioned above, it is stated that out of 118 researched municipalities in BiH, 47.18 % (or 67 municipalities) have signed some kind of protocol for co-operation with NGOs active in their territory. However, only 31 municipalities subsequently established common bodies for co-ordination that comprise both sectors' representatives (ibid: 29). Some authors (Sejfija, 2006) argue that when it comes to the issue of the co-operation of both sectors at municipal and/or cantonal levels, the experience of public institutions and NGOs working in the social work (and therefore also social welfare) field might serve as a successful example given the level of not only co-operation but also partnership achieved in recent years.

Despite a environment which was more or less hostile to fruitful co-operation and partnership between the public and NGO sectors, as Basic (2008: 47) noted, there are prominent examples in the social work field which reveal a high level of mutual co-operation between two sectors on three different levels: level of policy design, the legislative level and the level of professional practice. As far as policy creation is concerned, it should be noted that some key documents regarding policies for social inclusion on the national and/or entity level have been formulated in the course of close co-operation between the public and non-governmental sectors and, can in this respect, be regarded as examples of 'good practice'. For the purposes of this paper, we will mention the following: 'BiH Strategy for Solving the Problems of Roma People' adopted in 2005, 'Action Plan for Gender Equality', adopted in 2006 and 'Policy in the Area of Disability in BiH', adopted in 2007 (ibid). Second, a similar process is also at stake when it comes to developing

might be interpreted as the growing support given to NGOs programmes by governments, even though NGOs often complain about the insufficient level of understanding given to them by public institutions.

normative standards regulating the social welfare field and, implicitly, the social work field. For example, the adoption of the Cantonal Law on Social Welfare for the Sarajevo Canton was preceded by intense and close co-operation with the Association of People with Disabilities, whose members were members of a working group created for that purpose but who also actively participated in public discussions on foreseen solutions and suggestions. Further, it should be noted that these organisations are also included in the process of amending the Federal Law on Social Welfare. Finally, it seems as if these developments are reflected in the way social work is practiced on a daily basis by social work organisations. The introduction of a plural model of welfare in the late 1990s has contributed not only to the de-bureaucracy of social work practice, but also to the development of a culture of co-operation between the formal social work setting and NGOs working in the area of social service delivery (ibid: 48).

Concluding remarks

Many countries have a long tradition of NGOs providing social welfare services, while some others mainly rely on the public sector to provide these services depending on the features of the wider socio-political contexts within which social welfare policy is devised. In favour of NGOs as service providers are claims that NGOs are more flexible, adjusted to solving individual problems, and that they better understand the problems certain groups face. Moreover, it is often claimed that the services provided by NGOs are much cheaper and more efficient and that public sector organisations are not oriented to the users of their services. However, some counter-arguments emerge when it comes to NGOs as service providers that mostly point at issues of the quality, efficiency and prices of services. Some analyses show that NGOs can achieve higher quality services, greater efficiency and lower prices when they implement narrowly defined projects in areas where they have significant experience and expertise. On the contrary, when they deal with widely defined development programmes and complex multi-sector programmes implemented by state institutions the NGO sector achieves poorer results (Clayton, 1996:7-11).

In BiH, as in other then socialist countries, a state-based social welfare system prevailed for almost five decades after the end of World War II. Its key characteristics were that services were provided by the state and available to all. The space for third sector organisations was very limited and they did not constitute a respective partner in the production or provision of services due to the ideological mistrust of the communist ruling elite. In applying Kolaric's research model, we could say that up until the war(s) in the 1990s BiH was a country in which elements of classical welfarism dominated.

The fall of socialism and subsequent war(s) in BiH in the early 1990s brought important changes to all aspects of social life and consequently in the way in which the social welfare system was organised. The system was subjected to dramatic and radical changes due to the collapse of the entire state system as a consequence of the war, which began in spring 1992. As state agencies ceased their activities and were incapable of providing citizens with basic goods and security, many international organisations occupied their space by providing direct humanitarian relief and assistance during the war and implementing various development projects after the war. Very soon these international NGOs started pursuing a policy of establishing local non-governmental organisations in accordance with the proclaimed policy of sustainability and ownership. The first local NGO was established in 1993 and they continually grew in number from year to year. In 2007 there were more than 9,000 NGOs in BiH. As mentioned, the estimated income of the NGO sector in BiH represents 4.5 % of GDP. The number of full-time and part-time employees as well as volunteers in the NGO sector in 2007 almost reached 90,000, making up 7.66 % of the active labour force. According to these figures, the NGO sector in BiH appears to be large. Having entered the social welfare arena, international and subsequently local NGOs thoroughly changed the nature and functioning of the social welfare system. From a very marginal position they became important, in some instances even crucial, social service providers which in some aspects play a complementary role to public service providers (filling in structural gaps created by the malfunctioning welfare system) and/or in some aspects act as a substitution for missing state initiatives and actions.

It is worth noting that the effects of these developments seem to confirm the thesis of the plurality of the welfare systems emerging in post-socialist BiH. Although the transitional phase is still continuing, in the current social welfare system in BiH we can identify elements of classical welfarism, an empowerment and participation strategy and a commercialisation and consumerism strategy.

The element of classical welfarism can be identified in the main aim the social welfare system is expected to fulfil, e.g. to reduce social inequalities by ensuring basic social security and social services to its citizens. Another equally important element relates to the fact that the main responsibility for providing social services resides with public sector organisations which are professionalised to a great extent. However, the new framework enacted in the post-war period legally regulated changes that occurred during the war in which the collapse of the former social structures left spaces open for NGOs to enter the social welfare system. Their most important functions related to filling in the gaps produced by public sector agencies. The changes in the system have also been reflected in the way social welfare and

social work language was/is constructed. Under the influence of the international NGOs, a new language has developed and been imported into both the BiH NGO sector and public discourse. For example, clients are no longer regarded as passive service recipients but have become active service users.

Another important feature of those organisations relates to their public recognition as an alternative to the services provided by the state (or the market). Being an important branch of civil society, these organisations are often labelled 'good' organisations in juxtaposition to their 'bad' counterparts in the public sector. In this context, we refer to the Marklund study (2002) on social policy and poverty in post-totalitarian Europe in which he speaks of two diverging views of civil society's role in the process of social welfare reform in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The first view of civil society in the process of reforming the social welfare regime assumes the positive role of different organisations within civil society in initiating social welfare reform within the existing state structures, but autonomously in relation to the state. Another, opposing, view of the role of civil society in the reform process highlights the mistrust of civil society in the state on the basis of the former experience of state control and oppression. Within this context, civil society is highly negative as regards both the state and the market (*ibid*: 2002:356). In the mentioned study, Marklund was very sceptical of the possibilities of civil society becoming a leading factor in the transition process on the premises that the dominant social forces are against any improvement of co-operation between state and civil movements.

Contrary to this quite pessimistic view of civil society's potential to actively engage in social welfare reforms, the BiH experience of the first transitional decade seems to speak in favour of civil society's potential to initiate change and address key issues even before they are included on the formal political agenda, despite the ethno-politically-oriented state structures and ensuing obstructions to multi-ethnic approaches to politics which act as deterrence factors in the establishment of positive, proactive relations between the state and the civil sector where NGOs are located. As elaborated in previous sections, initial success has been achieved in the development of a partnership between the state and the NGO sector in the field of social welfare which has enabled NGOs to not only exert an influence over the process of transforming social welfare, but also to evolve into the key actors in the changes undertaken, as shown by the IBHI example discussed above. Recognising the self-evident unwillingness of political elites to initiate structural reforms of the social welfare system as well as the silent ignorance of this important but unpleasant task by the academic community, the IBHI gradually initiated the transition of the social welfare system by antici-

pating not only a new co-operative mode of functioning between the governmental and non-governmental sectors at municipal/cantonal and entity levels, but also by incorporating these innovations into a wider framework of systematic change of the social welfare regime in general. However, it is questionable whether such a development could have been possible without the substantial financial and material help of major international developmental organisations which invested huge amounts of money in the projects developed by the IBHI, thereby contributing to it becoming the most influential policy-setting agency in the social welfare area in BiH today.

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