

Launching of Campaign to Change NGO Legislation

- On 8 June, a working version of a new draft Law on Associations and Foundations will be widely distributed for public discussion. This first distribution is primarily aimed at domestic NGOs in Bosnia and Hercegovina, the aim being to solicit their views on legislation that will crucially affect them. Domestic NGOs and other interested commentators are actively encouraged to comment and provide input on the law by 8 July.
- June 8 also marks a day of action by domestic NGOs intended to raise awareness of the role of NGOs and the Third Sector. Public discussions, radio shows, round tables and street activities will take place in Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, Bijelina, Zenica, Tuzla and Bihac.

This initiative marks a crucial stage in the LEA/LINK project, which is supported by a host of domestic NGOs, legal experts and international organisations including the OHR. Established in 1997, this aims to improve the environment in which non-governmental organisations function in BiH. It combines Law, Education, Advocacy and Networking to develop a legal structure for NGOs which allows them to operate effectively: a legal team including lawyers from around the country has focused on drafting the law; in the meantime, seven regional NGOs are responsible for running regional educational campaigns to raise the general understanding of the role of NGOs, and how they contribute to society. Now they will work together to distribute the law and elicit comments on it. Fundamental to the consultation process is that it gives NGOs and other interested parties the opportunity to read, discuss, and comment on the planned law. This process will run until 8 July, when the legal experts associated with LEA/Link will incorporate comments and suggestions as appropriate. They will then produce a final text Law on Associations and Foundations. This will be officially submitted, with public approval, to the relevant authorities of both Entities, the Ministries of Justice of the Federation and Republika Srpska.

The Office of the High Representative, acknowledging the need for sound and consistent NGO legislation in both Entities, fully supports this process. The development of a strong and independent civic sector which contributes directly to a sustainable peace and democratic society is an important aspect of the implementation of the Dayton Accords.

A full report will also be distributed by the OHR/HRCC and will be available on the OHR website: (<https://www.ohr.int/hr-report/sr980608.htm>).