

Memorandum

To: Moises Venancio, Resident Representative a.i., United Nations Development Programme, Bosnia and Herzegovina
From: T K Vogel
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State-building and the challenges of ownership in BiH

- [1] This note outlines options for UNDP to provide analytical and operational leadership during the transformation of the international community's presence in BiH. This transformation is occurring in two modes, sometimes intertwined: as a phase-out of particular bodies or projects, and as a shift of continuing programs towards local ownership. An example of the first is the exit of RRTF, planned for the end of 2003; an example of the second is the hand-over of some of its functions to the competent local bodies. The two modes – phase-out and transfer to local ownership – together constitute “responsible disengagement” of the international community (IC).
- [2] While the recent and projected decline in financial resources has rendered the current level and nature of international support to BiH unsustainable, there is no consensus among the IC on either the need to re-focus current approaches or on the modalities of such a re-focusing. It is therefore necessary to move beyond mere analysis and on a solid analytical basis systematically advocate with the IC for the need to re-focus support policies. This will include some form of inter-agency coordination to ensure that disengagement strategies do not work at cross-purpose (e.g., by sending mixed signals to one and the same local body). The IC must resist organizational imperatives to stay or to leave, and instead focus on objective conditions on the ground in taking the decision whether, how, and when to disengage. In consequence, on-the-ground analytical capacities should be enhanced and criteria developed for the determination of “mission accomplished.” UNDP has a natural role to take in this process given its “Early Warning System” and similar initiatives in BiH.
- [3] The key question for any organization wishing to take intellectual leadership in the responsible disengagement of the international community from BiH will be how to effectively work with domestic bodies in focusing reform efforts on a strategy and vision of state-building that is sound, achievable, and sustainable. UNDP's standard approach of working with and through local structures – governments, civil society organizations, research institutes, etc. – seems well-suited for this challenge. However, there is a notable lack of consensus among the IC on what strategies to adopt, and continuing opportunistic use of such disagreement by local anti-reform constituencies. This is the dilemma of ownership, which needs to be further explored.
- [4] UNDP is by the nature of its mandate more exposed to the dilemmas of ownership than most members of the ad-hoc arrangement that is currently assisting, supervising, and governing BiH since it has long recognised institution-building as a core task.²

¹ This draft memo will eventually be submitted to UNDP-BiH and is not for attribution or quotation. Further versions of this working document will outline more concrete options for responsible disengagement.

² “The strengthening of local institutions is a traditional UNDP mandate that governments and donors alike view as the core element of the comparative advantage of UNDP.” UNDP Evaluation Office, “Sharing new ground in post-conflict situations: the role of UNDP in support of reintegration programmes,” January 2000.