



## Greenwood Paper

**Many hands make light work:  
Parliamentary oversight of the  
security sector in Bosnia and  
Herzegovina**



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# Many hands make light work: Parliamentary oversight of the security sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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## Part 1. Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has 14 parliaments with 638 elected representatives spread across 10 cantons, the Brčko District, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), the Republika Srpska (RS), and the state level of BiH. This is a considerable number for a country of just 3.4 million inhabitants. At the **state and entity levels** alone, there are 318 members of parliament (MPs), yet the legislature punches below its weight. Little legislation is adopted, oversight is weak at best, and citizens often feel unrepresented. MPs are regarded as either unwilling or incompetent. Finally, the system's complexity is compounded by ethnic divisions entrenched in the constitution through the three constituent peoples – Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. The complicated system and the lack of political will are two sides of the same coin.

Yet there is another side to the story – one of **parliamentary capacity and cooperation**. Parliaments operate through bureaucracies of mostly dedicated civil servants who keep the wheels of governance turning. They are backed by a legal framework of laws and procedures that, on average, meet European Union (EU) standards. Many elected representatives are also eager to engage and deliver. In fact, MPs have expressed interest in cooperating with their peers across the

### Key Points

- Bosnia and Herzegovina's security sector underwent reform two decades ago, but development has since stalled and earlier achievements are now at risk due to weak security sector governance.
- Parliamentary oversight of security in Bosnia and Herzegovina is hampered by a complicated governance system and a lack of political will, while citizens, civil society, and the European Union appear increasingly disengaged from the legislature.
- The legal framework for security sector oversight is solid; both state and entity parliaments employ dedicated staff, and elected representatives are inclined to cooperate – in sum, offering opportunities for positive change toward more active, responsible, and independent legislatures and security oversight.

country's parliaments, for instance between the FBiH and RS entity legislatures. There exists both institutional memory and untapped potential that could be mobilised if BiH and its international donors – particularly the EU, which is open to accession negotiations – put their minds and resources to it.

Democratic control of **the security sector** is of particular importance to Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the average citizen, security is not an abstract concept but a tangible part of daily life. Memories, losses, and grievances from the devastating war of the 1990s remain vivid. The process of security sector reform (SSR) was pursued vigorously by BiH and its international donors in the first half of the 2000s. Defence reform and the development of the Armed Forces proved successful, and an intelligence agency and investigative agencies were established. Police reform progressed more slowly and continued into the mid-2010s. Since then, however, reform has come to a standstill, as BiH's politics got stuck in status quo and international donors turned away. The country's Security Policy, published in 2006, has not been updated since.

The risk now is that the successful SSR of two decades ago is not only stalled but increasingly eroded by **poor governance** and weak oversight. More worryingly, the country continues to stumble from one provoked crisis to the next, as the Republika Srpska's leadership tests the state's

resilience to its limits. In this context, the threat of renewed conflict and instability remains real. Yet politicians across ethnic lines – Bosniak, Croat, and Serb – still cooperate on security matters. So far, the security sector has been relatively spared from ethnic strife, reflecting an informal understanding among the main ethnic leaders regarding the allocation of key security posts. However, such arrangements offer no guarantee of stability in the future.

**This study assesses parliamentary oversight of the security sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina at both the state and entity levels.** Its objective is to develop a set of recommendations that are realistic and tangible. While a comprehensive constitutional reform that simplifies BiH's governance structure is needed, such change remains unlikely in the absence of internal consensus or significant pressure from the EU or the United States (US). Accordingly, this study focuses on the art of the possible – identifying feasible reforms that can advance without being blocked and that attract sufficient political buy-in. It does not offer idealistic notions that might inspire action overnight, but rather practical steps that can gradually strengthen parliamentary capacity and cooperation. The hope is that this approach will contribute to a healthier parliamentary culture. The recommendations are aimed at BiH's state and entity level parliaments, though they also have implications for the country's executive structures.

#### Recommendations in brief

- The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina suffers from a perfunctory oversight culture that should be encouraged through concrete projects that push parliamentarians, staff, and committees out of their comfort zones.
- The culture of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is inconsequential and should be encouraged to assume greater responsibility by supporting legislators who are willing to exercise oversight.
- In the Republika Srpska, the National Assembly is docile to government direction. More exposure to peers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Europe could help foster greater independence in performing oversight functions.
- The European Union, its member states, and partners should devote increased attention to BiH's legislatures through targeted and conditional support programmes, recognising parliaments as a linchpin in future accession talks.
- In terms of cooperation: Establish a country-wide, civil society-managed network of elected representatives and parliamentary staff to cooperate, exchange experiences, and train together.
- In terms of capacity building: Introduce post-legislative scrutiny across all three legislatures; develop a habit of scheduling; modernise research capacity; and instruct MPs and staff on new security threats related to cyber and disinformation.

They further address the EU, with indirect relevance for the broader donor community.

The paper is **structured** in five parts. Following this introduction, Part II addresses governance and oversight from the 1995 Dayton Accords and subsequent constitution to BiH's current perspective on EU membership. Part III delves deeper into parliamentary oversight of the security sector, analysing the theory and structure of assemblies at both the state and entity levels. It explores which laws govern democratic control of defence and which parliamentary committees are tasked with security oversight. Part IV, the most extensive section, turns to the practice and performance of parliamentary oversight, assessing the challenges faced by elected representatives, parliamentary staff and the daily functioning of oversight committees. Part V presents a series of recommendations directed at BiH's three parliaments at the state and entity levels as well as at the EU and its member states.

The study is framed by three **provisos**. *First*, to maintain focus and manageability, it concentrates on the state and entity levels; legislative institutions at the canton level in FBiH and in the Brčko District are excluded from consideration. *Second*, it focuses on the parliaments' democratic oversight role, touching only briefly on their other core functions of representation and lawmaking. *Third*, the study prioritises institutions and people over detailed regulatory or event analysis, although the two intersect in discussions of oversight processes.

In terms of **terminology**, this study distinguishes between Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Security Sector Governance (SSG). SSR refers to the process involving all security actors and is aimed at creating effective and efficient defence, police, and intelligence structures. SSG specifically relates to the democratic management of these security actors. The study also employs several terms to discuss oversight as an essential part of good governance. It refers to democratic control in general; security sector oversight more specifically; oversight actors such as parliament, audit and ombudsperson institutions, and civil society. Throughout the text, the terms parliamentary oversight and parliamentary scrutiny are used most frequently.

With regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina's **parliamentary institutions**, the study refers to the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (PABiH) – comprising the House of Peoples and the House of Representatives – at the state level. At the entity level, it refers to the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (PFBiH) – which also has a House of Representatives and a House of Peoples – and the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska (NARS), which consists of a single chamber, while the separate Council of Peoples also holds legislative authority. Unless otherwise specified, references to 'the parliament' or 'the legislature' apply to all three institutions.

The research behind this study is extensive and forms part of the 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: Building Inclusive Oversight of Security (BIHOS) project. The study applies the CESS 'three C's' **methodology**, which examines how a parliament's *capacity* to hold the government to account on policy and spending, combined with its *cooperation* with other oversight actors – such as independent agencies, civil society, and the media – shapes a particular *culture* of democratic control and parliamentary oversight. This culture can range from healthy to weak or fall anywhere in between.

The study leans on extensive desk research and **four main sources of input**. *First*, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with Sarajevo-based international organisations, international foundations, and European embassies. *Second*, structured interviews (in local languages) were held with members of the three parliaments, eight in total. *Third*, six focus groups (also in local languages) were organised – two in Banja Luka and four in Sarajevo. Three of these focus groups involved parliamentary staff from the three parliaments, while the other three brought together civil society representatives, academics, and journalists who monitor developments in the state or entity parliaments. *Fourth*, a questionnaire was completed by eight individuals with direct experience in BiH's security sector oversight, drawn from both Banja Luka and Sarajevo. Although knowledge sources were not selected based on ethnicity, participants of Bosniak, Croat, and Serb backgrounds were all adequately represented.

## Part II. Security and oversight

### *Bosnia and Herzegovina's stabilocracy*

BiH's post-war development can broadly be divided into two periods.<sup>1</sup> The **first period** spans from 1995, when the war ended with the Dayton Peace Agreement, to April 2006, when a major constitutional reform effort narrowly failed in the Parliamentary Assembly. The aim of this reform package was to strengthen state level institutions at the expense of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and the entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS). While BiH spent the late 1990s recovering from the immediate consequences of the war, the early 2000s were marked by the institutionalisation of its governance structure and a proactive approach to democratic reform. At the same time, the EU, its member states, and the US rendered substantial regional and bilateral support to the Western Balkans.

The **second period**, from 2006 to the present, can be characterised as one of 'stabilocracy'<sup>2</sup> – a condition in which BiH's leaders are content with a status quo that delivers stability but little democratic progress or movement toward European integration. At the same time, the EU has largely tolerated this stagnation, also prioritising stability over democratic reform and effectively accepting the delay of BiH's accession prospects. Domestic politics have become deeply entrenched, as the leadership of the main ethnic-based parties – Bosniak, Croat, and Serb – focus on preserving their positions rather than advancing joint progress. Meanwhile, the EU has gradually shifted emphasis away from Bosnia and Herzegovina, disappointed by the lack of progress while seeking to develop new relations with neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe and North Africa. Meanwhile, people try to get by or choose to emigrate, while public engagement in politics and enthusiasm for EU membership continue to decline.

In recent years, Bosnia and Herzegovina's fragile **status quo** has been tested in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, the EU granted BiH candidate status in December 2022

Most of the findings and recommendations in this study are derived from the insights and views of interview and focus group participants, referred to throughout the text as '**observers**' and '**practitioners**'. These terms are used in references to protect anonymity, without disclosing names, positions, or institutional affiliations. For the same reason, all interview, focus group, and questionnaire references are cited uniformly as interview. Most focus groups and interviews were conducted in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, with a few talks taking place in Mostar.

In terms of **narration**, Part II (on security and oversight) and Part III (on the theory and structure of oversight) paraphrase material from interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires in order to maintain the flow of argument while integrating existing literature. In Part IV (on parliamentary practice and performance), the text includes more direct quotations to reflect the diversity of views on security sector oversight. Finally, in Part V (on recommendations), a return to paraphrasing ensures a clearer and more concise argument.

Last, but certainly not least, the author is thankful to all elected representatives, (international) civil servants, and (international) civil society representatives in Banja Luka and Sarajevo who generously shared their time and insights. At the **Centre for Security Studies** (CSS) in Sarajevo – led by Denis Hadžović – Benjamin Plevljak and Aida Krzalić organised and conducted structured interviews and focus groups, while also providing valuable advice throughout the research project. The extensive review by Benjamin Plevljak was of crucial importance to this study. Similarly, the **European Defendology Centre** in Banja Luka, headed by Professor Duško Vejnović, contributed input, offered guidance during the research, and reviewed a first draft. At the **Centre for European Security Studies** (CESS) in the Netherlands, Director Merijn Hartog reviewed the initial draft. Special thanks goes to three CESS interns. Wouter van der Horst and Rik Coopman, prepared a comprehensive background study on security and oversight-related legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as on the rules of procedure of its parliaments. CESS intern Luna Dupalo contributed through an extensive literature review.

and decided in March 2024 to open accession negotiations – a milestone that should have helped break the political deadlock and revive prospects for constitutional reform. However, Brussels' decision has so far neither translated into greater assistance for BiH nor prompted meaningful behavioural change among local politicians, beyond a short stench of upbeat initiatives that could not reverse the status quo.<sup>3</sup> On the negative side, the leader of the Republika Srpska has constantly sought to derail BiH's state level institutions while threatening secession. The most serious episode occurred in 2025, when the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina issued an arrest warrant for Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik on multiple charges, including establishing parallel state structures and threatening judicial officials. On 31 July, Dodik's conviction was confirmed: a one-year prison sentence – convertible to a fine of €18,660 – and a six-year ban on holding public office.<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing, Dodik has not stepped down but did indicate that he will not run in the 23 November elections in the RS. Throughout this episode, the authorities in both Sarajevo and Banja Luka appeared determined to avoid violence.

### *The security sector*

BiH's unity continues to be tested, as illustrated during the 'hot summer' of 2022<sup>5</sup> when High Representative Christian Schmidt intervened in the electoral process following a dispute between Bosniak and Croat politicians. Such episodes of tension affect society as a whole and **the security sector** in particular. In recent years, growing concern has emerged over the increasing militarisation of police forces within the entities, particularly in RS.<sup>6</sup> Plans announced in Banja Luka to establish a police reserve have, during the summer of 2025, intensified these concerns. At the same time, significant budgetary constraints continue to weigh on the security sector. In 2025, BiH's Border Police has struggled to maintain sufficient numbers of qualified officers due to limited training capacity.<sup>7</sup>

**Defence** reform in BiH is often regarded as a success story, with the establishment of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in 2004 and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH) in 2005 – merging the Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Army of the Republika

Srpska. A Security Policy was adopted in 2006 and a Defence Policy in 2008; however, neither document has been updated since.<sup>8</sup> This lack of policy development is a source of concern not only for BiH's civil society but also for the international community, which notes the absence of a proper defence review.<sup>9</sup> Although the MoD and AFBiH continue to function effectively, there are fears that renewed discussion of defence-related documents could politicise these institutions. Moreover, the likelihood of adopting new defence or security policies is low, as the Parliamentary Assembly continues to be paralysed on major policy and legislative initiatives.<sup>10</sup>

The **European Union Force (EUFOR)**, operating under the name *Operation Althea*, can be considered part of BiH's security sector, although it is neither managed nor overseen by domestic executive or parliamentary actors. The mission, comprising approximately 1,100 military personnel and civilian staff, operates under a United Nations (UN) mandate. It is politically linked to the EU Special Representative and the EU Ambassador to BiH, while military command falls under EU and NATO structures. One of EUFOR's core tasks is to support the AFBiH in its development. However, as secessionist tensions and the risk of outside interference have risen in recent years, EUFOR has modestly increased its troop presence.<sup>11</sup> Further reinforcements continue to be discussed within both European and BiH policy circles.

**Police** reform in BiH has been significantly more complex and problematic than defence reform. Beyond its complexity, the police's close connections to local political networks<sup>12</sup> have made it difficult to set up an effective and efficiently organised force under democratic control. In 2002, the Ministry of Security was formed to oversee a broad range of operationally independent agencies, including the Border Police, the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), and the Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In December 2024, the Minister of Security was arrested on graft charges, and six months later, the position remains vacant as the Council of Ministers – heavily influenced by party leaders – has failed to agree on a replacement. Meanwhile, the head of SIPA resigned to join the Republika Srpska Ministry of Interior, while his deputy, currently residing in Croatia, is evading arrest in BiH.<sup>13</sup> As one observer

noted, the current absence of political leadership may paradoxically have a positive side, as SIPA's operations have become somewhat less subject to political interference.<sup>14</sup>

With or without a minister of security, Bosnia and Herzegovina's sixteen police forces continue to operate within their respective **decentralised** jurisdictions – at the entity level in FBiH and the RS, across the ten cantons of FBiH, and within the Brčko District. Each jurisdiction has its own ministry of interior responsible for managing the police and its own parliament tasked with performing oversight duties. This decentralised structure also represents a potential strength: the lower the administrative level – state, entity, or canton – the greater the authority to design and implement practical security policies.<sup>15</sup> The main weakness, however, lies in the poor communication between levels of governance and security agencies, which could prove problematic in the event of a security crisis.<sup>16</sup>

BiH's **Intelligence** and Security Agency (OSA) was established in 2004 and operates under the authority of the President of the Council of Ministers. Over the last decade, the work of the OSA was regularly in the news; there were controversial attacks but also support for the agencies' leadership. A change of government and the dismissal of the director in 2023 – who was charged with abuse of office a year later – marked a turning point. Since then, the agency's new leadership has set clearer priorities and seems not politically involved.<sup>17</sup> At the state level, security institutions – most notably the AFBiH, the Border Police, SIPA, and OSA – remain operational and largely effective. However, they continue to face the persistent risks of political influence, resource limitations, and the inability to align their mandates with updated strategic frameworks.

### **Democratic control**

Perhaps the greatest threat to BiH's security sector is its poor governance, of which weak **democratic control** is a major component. This deficiency reinforces the status quo, impedes democratic development, and prevents adaptation to new circumstances and threats. In BiH, the parliament stands at the core of oversight of security and defence policy and spending. It is assisted in this

task by three groups of oversight watchdogs. *First*, independent institutions – most notably the Audit Office, the Ombudsperson, and various anti-corruption agencies – provide formal oversight. *Second*, civil society organisations and investigative journalists. *Third*, the international community, acting through the Office of the High Representative, retains the authority to intervene in BiH's governance.

The **OHR** is perhaps the least visible but most influential oversight actor in BiH. In its daily work, it primarily performs monitoring functions rather than direct oversight, although its findings can prompt interventions in governance by the High Representative. Such interventions are carried out under the so-called *Bonn Powers*, which were added to the OHR's mandate in 1997, two years after the Dayton Agreement. In recent years, relations between the OHR and the RS have been increasingly strained: the former issues warnings, while the latter dismisses its authority, creating a recurring crisis in security sector governance. Beyond monitoring, the OHR also provides advice to executive and legislative officials on legislative matters, though its engagement with the legislature remains limited.<sup>18</sup> Over time, the OHR has come to embody a kind of *catch-22*. On one hand, many advocate for a full transfer of sovereignty to BiH institutions, arguing that local ownership is essential for sustainable progress. On the other hand, often the same actors also believe that this sovereignty could lead to BiH falling apart.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has several functioning watchdog institutions. A key example is the network of **audit offices** at the state level and within the FBiH and RS. The Audit Office of the Institutions of BiH is well staffed and experienced, appointed by the Parliamentary Assembly, and operates according to international standards.<sup>19</sup> It reports regularly to parliament. All interlocutors who discussed auditing in BiH expressed positive views regarding the quality and professionalism of audit reporting. However, the extent to which parliament makes use of these reports (or fails to do so) is a different matter. BiH also has an Agency for the Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight against Corruption, established in 2009, which reports to a specific committee within the PABiH.

The **Human Rights Ombudsman Institution** handles complaints and investigates alleged human rights violations committed by public authorities at the state level, within the FBiH, the RS, and in the Brčko District. The institution is composed of three ombudspersons – one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Serb – and operates several offices across BiH.<sup>20</sup> Although the institution is generally well organised and adequately staffed, there are accusations of political influence, particularly regarding the appointment of ombudspersons, where political loyalty is often prioritised over professional merit.<sup>21</sup> In the RS, for example, the Ombudsperson was actively involved in the development of a ‘foreign agents’ law within the entity’s legislature.<sup>22</sup> As with audit reports, the legislature frequently ignores the findings issued by the ombuds institution, although many of its cases do attract media attention.

There are **media** outlets that occasionally engage in investigative journalism on security sector issues. In doing so, they help bring renewed attention to reports from audit and ombudsperson institutions that might otherwise be overlooked or routinely endorsed by the legislature. Media coverage can thus return these issues to the parliamentary agenda by generating public and political pressure. One notable example is the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), which operates across the Western Balkans and regularly reports on the security sector, particularly in relation to corruption, war crimes, and terrorism.<sup>23</sup> More broadly, there is ongoing interaction between journalists and civil society.

More than 25,000 associations and foundations are registered in BiH, although only a small number are **non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or think tanks** working on security matters.<sup>24</sup> In Sarajevo, the most prominent among them are the Centre for Security Studies (CSS), Atlantic Initiative, and the Strategic Analysis Initiative (SAI). In Banja Luka, key actors include the European Defendology Centre (EDC) and the Centre for International Relations (CIR). These and other organisations engage in security matters through policy advice, monitoring, and capacity building projects. On one hand, civil society organisations remain heavily dependent on EU and other donor funding, leaving limited space to develop independent initiatives or ideas. For example, few civil society actors have the capacity to regularly attend open sessions of the

PABiH Joint Committee on Defence and Security.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, NGOs – as well as journalists and academics – are increasingly targeted on social media for their monitoring activities or for exposing wrongdoing, often being accused of serving ethnic or foreign interests.<sup>26</sup>

### **External oversight support**

Security sector oversight in BiH is closely monitored and supported by the **European Union**. Despite Brussels’ decision to open accession negotiations, its assessment of BiH’s parliamentary oversight capacity remains critical: *‘Parliamentary oversight of the executive is weak, and there is no parliamentary monitoring of compliance with the recommendations of independent institutions. Parliamentary oversight of the executive remains weak also in entities and cantons’.*<sup>27</sup> The EU closely monitors the proceedings of parliaments at both the state and entity levels and can react to issues of concern, particularly to problematic draft legislation. Although the EU is by far the largest and most influential donor in the country, its direct support for strengthening parliamentary performance remains modest. Between 2019 and 2021, the EU implemented a Twinning project (delivered through the Austrian, Croatian, and Hungarian Parliaments) to prepare BiH’s parliaments at state, entity, and canton levels for harmonisation with EU legislation.<sup>28</sup> While the project provided valuable insights and background knowledge, its practical impact was limited due to the short timeframe and the wide scope of recipients. Although governance reform is a centrepiece of the EU accession process, defence and security are not part of the *acquis communautaire*. Nevertheless, these areas require sustained attention within BiH’s broader reform process.<sup>29</sup>

With the United States no longer active as a donor, the EU and its member states – along with Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom – now constitute the main donors of BiH’s democratic reforms, including **assistance for security sector oversight**. As discussed above, most donor support for democratic reform in BiH was delivered during the 2000s. Over the past fifteen years, outside support to BiH’s democracy agenda has dwindled. This is particularly evident in the limited support provided to BiH’s legislatures for overseeing defence and security policy. While the

EU tends to focus its efforts on the executive, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) missions in BiH continue to work with the legislature on various aspects of lawmaking and oversight.<sup>30</sup> In the early 2000s, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) played an instrumental role in supporting the state level parliament on legislation and oversight, while other organisations such as CESS implemented capacity building projects with both civil society and parliamentary actors. Today, the BIHOS project, implemented by CESS in partnership with local institutions, represents one of the few remaining initiatives aimed at strengthening staff capacity and spurring cooperation among the country's legislatures.

## Part III. Parliamentary oversight: theory and structure

### *Every positive feature has negative aspects*

Bosnia and Herzegovina's parliaments at the state and entity levels differ significantly in **structure and functioning**. The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (PABiH) comprises of two chambers but is relatively small, with 42 members in the House of Representatives and 15 in the House of Peoples. It benefits from good facilities and qualified professional staff. However, it struggles to pass legislation, as ethnically based political parties frequently block draft laws.<sup>31</sup> The Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (PFBiH) is considerably larger, with 80 seats in the House of Representatives and 98 in the House of Peoples. While it cannot match the PABiH's standards of professionalism, its rules of procedure are in place – though compliance is problematic. The PFBiH often proves ineffective and tends to rely on the individual initiative of a few proactive members when it does perform in lawmaking or oversight.<sup>32</sup> The National Assembly of the Republika Srpska (NARS), by contrast, has a single chamber with 83 seats and is structurally less complex than the PABiH or PFBiH. However, over the years it has lost much of its independence, increasingly serving as a tool of the executive rather than a counterweight

to it.<sup>33</sup> As in the PFBiH, an active committee chair – typically from the opposition – can occasionally stimulate a security committee to engage in representation or oversight work.<sup>34</sup>

A first **positive feature** of parliamentary oversight in BiH is its solid legal foundation. Both the state and entity levels – the FBiH and the RS – have their own constitutions. At the state level, oversight is regulated by the Law on Parliamentary Oversight, while the RS has adopted a Law on Parliamentary Oversight in the Field of Defence and Security – even though defence matters fall under state jurisdiction. All three parliaments have rules of procedure, with separate sets for each house in the PABiH and PFBiH. The OHR continues to monitor BiH's legislative framework closely, while the EU also tracks parliamentary developments. Meanwhile, the OSCE provides advice to the state and entity authorities on draft and adopted legislation in the areas of defence and security.

There are also **negative aspects** to this legal framework. Three are particularly noteworthy. *First*, at the constitutional level, BiH's legislation remains discriminatory, as it excludes individuals who are not Bosniak, Croat, or Serb from eligibility for the House of Peoples of the PABiH – a deficiency that is unlikely to be remedied in the near future.<sup>35</sup> *Second*, all three parliaments retain the ability to invoke a *vital national interest* – also referred to as an *ethnic veto* – whereby a small number, or even a single delegate, from one of the constituent peoples can block a decision. Although such vetoes are subsequently reviewed by the competent court, the political damage is often already done.<sup>36</sup> *Third*, although the legal basis for parliamentary scrutiny is formally in place, MPs and committees make only limited use of their oversight powers. Weak parliamentary oversight has prompted the judiciary to assume a more active role<sup>37</sup> as a counterbalance to the executive. At the same time, the continued presence of the OHR – with authority to intervene when necessary – further discourages parliamentarians from taking greater responsibility themselves.<sup>38</sup>

A second **positive feature** of the PABiH, the NARS, and, to a lesser extent, the PFBiH is the decent preconditions and circumstances of parliaments. All three parliaments provide elected representatives with staff support that ranges

from basic administrative assistance to political advice (further discussed in Part IV). The PABiH and the RS parliament enjoy relatively good facilities, including offices, meeting rooms, equipment, and restaurants. However, all three parliaments face shortages of modern technical equipment, and the PFBiH in particular requires renovated and expanded facilities. The salary for parliamentarians is generous. On average, state level MPs earn about €3,500 (gross) per month, FBiH MPs around €2,500, and members of the NARS approximately €1,500. For comparison, the average gross monthly income in BiH is about €750.<sup>39</sup>

These favourable conditions also come with some **negative aspects**. Many MPs – particularly in the entity parliaments – do not serve full time and are therefore often unaware of, or unable to make full use of, the facilities and resources available to them. Staff capacity, for instance in research or the organisation of field visits, is frequently underutilised, while informal gatherings in cafés are reportedly far more common than formal committee meetings.<sup>40</sup> In the PFBiH, there is widespread frustration over MPs' frequent absences from committee meetings and voting sessions, despite their generous salary.<sup>41</sup> Similar criticism is voiced at the state level, where attendance problems persist regardless of the high-level or the good salary.<sup>42</sup> In the RS, salaries are lower, but the irritation over cancelled committee meetings and absenteeism is no less pronounced.<sup>43</sup> Across all three legislatures, elected representatives are inactive, taking their orders from the heads of political parties and senior government officials.<sup>44</sup>

## *The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina*

**BiH's Constitution** grants the PABiH authority to hold the government to account on policy and spending (Section 4, Article IV) and defines the duties of the Council of Ministers to report to parliament. It also empowers the PABiH to dismiss the Council of Ministers through a vote of no confidence (Article V).<sup>46</sup> While the Constitution provides only a general framework – as is appropriate – the 2018 Law on Parliamentary Oversight specifies broad and detailed oversight powers for the PABiH. This law was developed with the assistance of the OSCE, which also reviewed earlier drafts and, for example, advocated for clearer provisions on legislators' access to confidential executive information.<sup>47</sup> Additional oversight provisions are contained in the Law on Defence, the Law on the Intelligence and Security Agency, and several laws governing policing, all of which provide a basis for parliamentary scrutiny.

The House of Representatives and the House of Peoples each have their own, yet largely similar, **Rules of Procedure (RoP)**. These are detailed but clearly structured, setting out every aspect of parliamentary work – from the establishment of committees to voting procedures.<sup>48</sup> However, the RoPs would benefit from review, either to simplify them or to distil a set of core rules that elected representatives can take to heart and be reminded of.<sup>49</sup> In practice, the RoPs are frequently disregarded, sometimes deliberately. For example, the outgoing majority in the PABiH has refused to hand over key positions to the new majority – an action that is in conflict with the RoP but has not been addressed.<sup>50</sup>

### **CASE CYBERSECURITY**

*'In 2022, BiH was the target of a major cyberattack. The Parliamentary Assembly was paralysed, and the confidentiality of sensitive information was compromised.'*<sup>45</sup> Although individual MPs have repeatedly urged the Ministry of Security to set-up a Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) – a standard mechanism in most countries – political deadlock has prevented agreement. The stalemate at the state level hinders the adoption of cybersecurity legislation, while it also remains unclear under which authority a national CERT should be placed. The lack of action lies mostly with the Council of Ministers, but the legislature has also proven unable to compel the government to take affirmative action. Meanwhile, the very institutions responsible for cybersecurity are themselves potential victims. The RS has developed some basic cybersecurity structures, and the FBiH is in the process of doing so at the entity level, yet all three parliaments remain vulnerable to attacks. In the absence of a national cybersecurity policy, parliaments must become more knowledgeable and vigilant regarding cyber threats. This issue has been partially addressed through awareness-raising and capacity building activities under the BIHOS project.

The **Joint Committee on Defence and Security (JCDS)**<sup>51</sup> is the primary parliamentary body responsible for overseeing BiH's security sector. Established in 2003, its members initially received regular training on parliamentary procedures and security issues. During the following decade, Committee members travelled regularly, especially exchanging experiences with colleagues in the Western Balkans. Over the past decade, however, JCDS activity has declined amid growing political blockades, resulting in fewer meetings and limited domestic or international visits.<sup>52</sup> Since 2024, the Committee has resumed a more consistent meeting schedule compared to other joint committees, holding five sessions in the first half of 2025 alone.<sup>53</sup> The current chair has increased the frequency of meetings and initiated working visits to security agencies and ministries,<sup>54</sup> while the previous chair, though less active in convening sessions, was more assertive in scrutinising the MoD through formal information requests.<sup>55</sup>

Oversight of the intelligence agency<sup>56</sup> is exercised at the state level through the **PABiH Joint Committee on Supervision of the Work of the Intelligence and Security Agency (JCSWISA)**, which met roughly five times per year between 2023 and 2025.<sup>57</sup> While the Committee is formally functioning, its effectiveness has been criticised. Meetings are infrequent, and MPs often lack the expertise to pose sufficiently probing questions, making it relatively easy for OSA to fulfil its reporting duties.<sup>58</sup> In some cases, MPs have even commented publicly on the Committee's proceedings – an act that may constitute a criminal offence.<sup>59</sup> On a more positive note, the proceedings of basic oversight are provided, as reports are delivered and questions answered by the executive. Since intelligence matters fall exclusively under state jurisdiction, oversight in this area is comparatively confined and straightforward relative to, for example, police policies.<sup>60</sup>

The PABiH has **three additional institutions** linked to its defence and security oversight tasks. *First*, the Parliamentary Military Commissioner (PMC) serves as a link between members of the AFB and parliament. The former and first Commissioner, Boško Šiljegović, who served two full terms following an initial three-year trial mandate (the law allows for only two terms),<sup>61</sup> was widely respected across party lines.<sup>62</sup> However, the PABiH

has since failed to agree on a successor, leaving the position vacant at the time of writing. *Second*, the Independent Board, which also operates at the entity and canton levels, plays a role in police oversight. While the state level Board is regarded as reasonably effective and relatively independent, its entity and canton level counterparts are seen as heavily politicised (see further below).<sup>63</sup> The appointment process for Board members (even at the state level) remains opaque, as does the procedure for selecting high-ranking police officials.<sup>64</sup> *Third*, the Citizens' Complaints Board on the Work of Police Officers in Police Bodies of BiH performs an ombuds-type function.

### **Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The **Constitution of the FBiH** outlines the oversight duties of its parliament, most notably in Article 21, which states: '*Either House may conduct investigations and, for this purpose, may compel the production of testimony and documents.*'<sup>66</sup> Further provisions assign the executive the duty to respond to parliamentary inquiries. While several security-related laws implicitly assume a parliamentary oversight role, the adoption of a dedicated and clearly formulated Law on Parliamentary Oversight would be a valuable addition. Such a law could help guide the Federation's 178 MPs toward a more active oversight role.<sup>67</sup>

The two chambers of the PFBiH each have their own **Rules of Procedure**, developed separately. The document for the House of Representatives is not available in English.<sup>68</sup> Both RoPs are extensive and define the work of their respective Security Committees in detail. A lack of understanding of the RoP poses a greater challenge in the PFBiH than in the smaller and more professional PABiH. The RoP stipulates that committee meetings should normally be held at least eight days before a plenary session. While this procedure is usually observed at the beginning of a legislative term, over time most committee meetings tend to be scheduled the day before the plenary – so that MPs do not have to travel to Sarajevo twice.<sup>69</sup> Such practices, which stretch the limits of what the RoP allows, ultimately undermine the quality of committee work.

Each chamber of the PFBiH has its own **Security**

**Committee.** Currently the committee in the House of Peoples is largely inactive, whereas its counterpart in the House of Representatives is exceptionally active. This raises the question of why a joint committee on security, similar to that at the state level,<sup>70</sup> has not been established – particularly since the RoP would allow for such an arrangement.<sup>71</sup> Several members of parliamentary staff and MPs serving on the Security Committee commend the proactive leadership of the chair and the active participation of its members, many of whom have a background in law enforcement or the judiciary. The committee’s expertise is also recognised by the executive, strengthening parliament’s capacity to contribute to the fight against corruption and organised crime – particularly following the establishment of the Special Department for the Suppression of Corruption, Organised Crime and Inter-Cantonal Crime at the Prosecutor’s Office of the BiH Federation (POSKOK) in 2025.<sup>72</sup>

The **Independent Board**, responsible for appointing and monitoring senior police officials, is widely viewed as problematic. What began as a good idea to introduce an additional layer of independent oversight has evolved into a system where board positions are distributed along political lines, rendering the body heavily politicised.<sup>73</sup> At the time of writing, the PFBiH has no functioning Independent Board, as the mandate of the previous board expired in 2022. Consequently, a new director of the Federal Police Administration also cannot be appointed. Both processes remain blocked due to ethnic power-sharing requirements and the inability of major political parties to reach agreement.<sup>74</sup>

### *The National Assembly of the Republika Srpska*

The **Constitution of the Republika Srpska** addresses parliamentary oversight in Article 70, stating that the ‘*National Assembly shall exert control over the work of the Government and other bodies responsible to it*’.<sup>76</sup> Several security-related laws in the RS also establish oversight duties for the executive, complemented by the Law on Parliamentary Oversight in the Field of Defence and Security (2005), which outlines the mechanisms of parliamentary supervision in detail.<sup>77</sup> While the judicial and legislative framework is largely up to standard in theory, compliance in practice remains weak. This is due to parliamentarians’ limited

use of their formal powers and to the executive’s tendency to disregard legislative provisions. At the same time, some voices within the National Assembly have called for updating certain laws – particularly the oversight law – to strengthen their relevance and application.<sup>78</sup>

The **Rules of Procedure** of the NARS are extensive (comparable to those of the PABiH and PFBiH) and include detailed provisions on the establishment and tasks of the Security Committee. Article 37 further stipulates that ‘*working bodies shall cooperate with each other on matters of harmonising the legal system of the Republika Srpska with the legal acquis of the European Union*’.<sup>79</sup> Most interviewees, whether members of or observers to the NARS, regard the RoP as a sound foundation for legislative and committee work, particularly in the area of security. As a result, there is considerable frustration when the RoPs are not respected, especially when meetings are cancelled due to the lack of a quorum.<sup>80</sup>

The **Security Committee of the NARS** meets irregularly and includes a mix of seasoned politicians and newer members, a few of whom have shown interest in enhancing their parliamentary skills. The Ministry of Internal Affairs submits an annual action plan and biannual reports to the Committee.<sup>81</sup> Although the Committee has the authority to initiate inquiries and hold hearings, it has not exercised these powers during its past two terms.<sup>82</sup> The Minister of Internal Affairs has been reluctant to appear before the Committee to explain or justify policy, and the Committee has not insisted on his appearance. The Council of Peoples, which functions separately from the NARS, does not hold specific security oversight tasks.

The NARS also appoints an **Independent Board**, as is the case at the state, FBiH, and canton levels. The Board comprises of two officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and five independent experts. It meets in the National Assembly building and function as a bridge between the executive and the legislature on police matters, while also performing ombuds-type functions by addressing citizen complaints.<sup>83</sup> However, as in the FBiH, the Board’s independence has been compromised by political interference in the appointment of its members.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a bicameral Parliamentary Assembly (PA). Each chamber is made up of the country's respective ethnicities (constituent peoples):



**HOUSE OF PEOPLES (HoP) – UPPER HOUSE**

- CONSISTS OF 5 BOSNIAKS, 5 CROATS, 5 SERBS
- DECISION MAKING BY MAJORITY – ONLY IF A MINIMUM OF 9 MEMBERS ARE PRESENT (3 PER ETHNICITY)
- 4-YEAR MANDATE



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES (HoR) – LOWER HOUSE**

- 42 MEMBERS, CONSISTING OF 28 REPRESENTATIVES ELECTED FROM THE FEDERATION AND 14 FROM REPUBLIKA SRPSKA
- DECISION MAKING BY MAJORITY (INCL. 1/3 OF EACH ENTITY)
- 4-YEAR MANDATE



**Joint Committee on Defence and Security (JCDS)**

- 12 members (elected by the PA: 6 HoP, 6 HoR and 2/3 FBiH, 1/3 RS)
- Met 3 times in 2022 and 6 times in 2023

**Is responsible for:**

- Monitoring BiH's security and defence policy
  - Budgetary oversight
- Preparing security sector legislation
- Overseeing the import and export of weapons



**Joint Committee on Supervision on the Work of Intelligence and Security Agency of BiH (JCSWISA)**

- 12 members (elected by the PA: 6 HoP, 6 HoR and 2/3 FBiH, 1/3 RS)
- Did not meet in 2022, but met 4 times in 2023

**Is responsible for:**

- Supervising the work of the Intelligence and Security Agency
  - Oversight on implementation of the Law on Protection of Classified Information
- Handling reports on the Intelligence and Security Agency
  - Budgetary oversight.

**Related to parliamentary oversight:**

**Parliamentary Military Commissioner (PMC)**

- JDCS proposes; plenary PA selects
- Is responsible for protecting human rights and freedoms of military personnel and for starting investigations as instructed by the PA and JCDS
- Cooperates with the Ministry of Defence, the General Inspectorate, the Armed Forces, and the Human Rights Ombudsman
- Attends sessions of the PA and JCDS.

**Independent Board**

- 9 members, elected from judiciary institutions, retired or senior civil servants, as well as legal experts
- Impartial and independent body of the Parliamentary Assembly relating to police force issues
- Is responsible for conducting candidate selection processes, proposing the removal of police officials and deputies in state-level police bodies, and handling complaints regarding officials and deputies.

**Citizens' Complaint Board on Work of the Police Officers in Police Bodies in BiH**

- 7 members
- All members are citizens not affiliated with the police
- Tasked with receiving, registering, assessing, and forwarding complaints relating to the conduct of BiH police officers.

<sup>65</sup> Taken from Jos Boonstra (ed.), 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: Democratic Oversight of Security', CESS Backgrounder, No. 4, March 2024.

Parliamentary oversight in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is conducted by the following institutions. The Federation has a bicameral assembly:



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
(LOWER HOUSE)**

- CONSISTS OF 98 SEATS
- 4-YEAR MANDATE
- MAY BE DISSOLVED BY THE PRESIDENT



**HOUSE OF PEOPLES  
(UPPER HOUSE)**

- CONSISTS OF 80 SEATS: 23 CROAT, 23 BOSNIAK, 23 SERB; 11 OTHER (MINORITIES)
- 4-YEAR MANDATE
- MAY BE DISSOLVED BY THE PRESIDENT



**Security Committee House of Representatives**

- 11 members
- Meets about 4 times a year

**Is tasked with:**

- Giving opinions and proposals to the House of Representatives
- Proposing measures for organising, managing, and developing the security of the Federation
- Considering issues of combating terrorism, inter-cantonal crime, illicit drug trade, and organised crime
- Considering questions about the acquisition, possession, and carrying of weapons
- Reviewing drafts and proposals of laws and other general acts regulating the security of the Federation and providing opinion and proposals to the House of Representatives



**Security Committee of the House of Peoples**

- 7 members
- Meets rarely, 1-2 times per mandate

**Is tasked with:**

- Proposing measures for the organisation, management, and development of security in the Federation
- Considering issues related to the suppression of terrorism, inter-cantonal crime, drug trafficking, and organised crime
- Considering issues related to the procurement, possession, and carrying of weapons
- Considering drafts and proposals for laws and other general acts regulating the area of security in the Federation and providing opinions and proposals to the House of Peoples
- Conducting preparatory work when the House of Peoples decides to conduct an investigation



**Independent Board**

- 7 members
- 4-year mandate

**Is tasked with:**

- Conducts the procedure for the appointment of the Director of the Federal Police Administration
- Monitoring the work of the police leadership

<sup>75</sup>. Taken from Jos Boonstra (ed.), 'Bosnia and Herzegovina – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Democratic Oversight of Security', CESS Backgrounder, No. 5, March 2024.

Parliamentary oversight in Republika Srpska is conducted by the following institutions. Republika Srpska has a unicameral assembly:



### NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

- CONSISTS OF 83 SEATS
- 4-YEAR MANDATE
- UNLIKE THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, THIS ASSEMBLY IS NOT CONSTITUTED ALONG ETHNIC LINES



### Security Committee

- Consists of 7 members
- Met 5 times in 2022 and 6 times in 2023
- Elected from among the MPs of the National Assembly

#### Is tasked with:

- Examining the current state of security
- Providing suggestions and opinions on security affairs
- Monitoring budget implementation
- Reporting to and informing the National Assembly regarding these matters



### COUNCIL OF PEOPLES

- CONSISTS OF 8 MEMBERS OF EACH ETHNICITY AND 4 'OTHERS', TOTALLING 28 MEMBERS
- NOT A CHAMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUT CAN VETO LAWS
- PROTECTS THE VITAL NATIONAL INTEREST OF THE CONSTITUENT PEOPLES IN THE RS REGARDING LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER GENERAL ACTS PASSED BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY



### INDEPENDENT BOARD

- Consists of 7 members: 2 from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and 5 representatives of the civil sector
- Appointed by the National Assembly

#### Is tasked with:

- Selecting the director of the police
- Investigating complaints by citizens
- Cooperating with the Ombudsmen
- Called to work ad hoc by the National Assembly

<sup>84</sup>. Taken from Jos Boonstra (ed.), 'Bosnia and Herzegovina – Republika Srpska: Democratic Oversight of Security', CESS Backgrounder, No. 6, March 2024.

# Part IV. Parliamentary oversight: practice and performance

## The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina

### *A perfunctory culture*

The parliamentary culture within the PABiH has become largely **perfunctory** due to persistent political blockades that make legislative work nearly impossible and render oversight even more difficult. As a result, the Assembly often goes through the motions of formality without delivering output. One observer argued that *'the story of the endangered people is constantly emphasised, highlighting the lack of political will to address key political issues in BiH'*.<sup>85</sup> This situation has led to *'permanent obstructions'* of parliamentary work, most visibly within the Joint Committee on Defence and Security (JCDS), which has been unable to consider new strategic documents such as the Strategy for Small Arms and Light Weapons Control or the Strategy for Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism. As one observer noted, *'In the last ten years, amendments and changes to the laws that were submitted to parliamentary procedure have not been adopted because representatives of the Republika Srpska interpreted every change in the law as a transfer of authority from the entity to the state level, which they do not agree with'*.<sup>86</sup> Most observers consulted for this study emphasised that the lack of political will weighs more heavily on parliamentary performance than the flaws or complexity of BiH's governance system. While the PABiH's JCDS was once an active body, it has been largely paralysed during the current and previous legislatures, as the political climate has grown increasingly hostile.

For this study, elected representatives were asked whether their parliaments place greater **emphasis** on representation, legislation, or oversight. State level MPs generally did not make a clear distinction, recognising that all three functions are important but acknowledging that little is achieved in practice. As one MP explained, *'We do not focus on issues that are in the interest of citizens, even though we aim to represent them'*, adding that BiH institutions are largely preoccupied with internal disputes driven

by political blockades.<sup>87</sup> An external observer argued that parliament's main focus is indeed on *representation* – but not of the broader electorate. Rather, most MPs represent the interests of their political parties, routinely consulting party leadership before taking any action.<sup>88</sup> Another observer commenting on oversight noted that *'some MPs don't know their powers. They simply have not learned what their job is or what tools they have at their disposal'*.<sup>89</sup>

When MPs and observers were asked which issues stand out most **negatively**, all pointed to the blockade of decision-making in Parliament. This ranges from the obstruction of opposition attempts to place items on the JCDS agenda to the continued failure to appoint a new PMC.<sup>90</sup> One elected representative noted that there has been a decline in both professional knowledge (for example, understanding a draft budget – see Box 7 below) and political understanding (such as recognising that the House of Representatives appoints ministers while both Houses jointly decide on dismissals): *'This lack of knowledge or political gamesmanship has resulted in political gridlock, with both Houses of the Parliamentary Assembly now dealing with irrelevant matters'*.<sup>91</sup>

On a more **positive** note, one MP observed that there had at least been a period of institution-building – from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s – that demonstrated the PABiH's capacity to perform its duties.<sup>92</sup> This legacy provides a basis that could be reactivated if political blockades were lifted. Most MPs and observers agree in their appreciation of parliamentary staff, who are widely regarded as professional and dedicated. In terms of output, one observer noted an increase in hearings driven by public and media pressure, *'mostly initiated by the opposition while the government cannot ignore these demands'*,<sup>93</sup> while another commended the efforts of the House of Representatives Anti-Corruption Committee for its attempts to uncover fraud.<sup>94</sup>

## CASE BUDGETARY OVERSIGHT

The power of the purse is normally the most powerful tool a parliament has at its disposal through its ability to adopt (or reject) budgets. This is not the case in BiH, where all three parliaments at the state and entity levels adopt budgets without a thorough debate. One observer noted that ‘MPs do not know what to ask regarding the defence budget’,<sup>95</sup> while another practitioner complained that knowledge gained through international training projects two decades ago has largely been lost among the current generation of MPs and parliamentary staff.<sup>96</sup> A combination of limited expertise and the tight timeframes within which governments present their budgets is also common at the entity level. As one representative explained, the PFBiH ‘usually passes the budget quickly, ad hoc. For Parliament to conduct thorough oversight of planning and spending, we would need more time. But the budget is often presented under urgent procedure, so committees do not even have time to act’.<sup>97</sup> In the NARS, too, there is little debate on the budget, with one observer arguing that the Assembly should have ‘more insight into the control of public spending’.<sup>98</sup>

## Capacity

In parliamentary **oversight**, the relationship between the legislature and the executive is crucial: MPs must demand transparency, and the executive must be accountable to parliament. According to one observer, ‘representatives of the executive branch behave responsibly towards members of parliament and respond to their requests. The pace of these discussions and the submission of reports beyond the obligatory ones depend on the chairperson and their approach to the work of the competent committees. In practice, it is not seen that the executive branch is overly accountable to parliament, especially because in most committees there are representatives of their political parties, so they probably do not consider themselves too burdened to present and explain their actions. This is a fundamental problem in BiH, because all of them, both in the executive and legislative branches, primarily show loyalty to the political party they belong to, to party interests, and to the party leader’.<sup>99</sup> As a result, committee meetings often become a mere formality. While the executive generally responds to invitations from the Joint Committee on Defence and Security and the Joint Committee

on Supervision of the Work of the Intelligence and Security Agency (JCSWISA), several observers noted that some government officials still fail to prioritise visits to parliament. One remarked on this contradiction: ‘But what is a paradox, is that people who sat for years in parliament and advocated for ministers to attend, once they become government officials, they no longer show up’.<sup>100</sup>

Most MPs and observers are positive about the support they receive from **parliamentary staff**: ‘The PABiH has highly competent internal support services — including the legislative and research sectors. These sectors are staffed by individuals who are exceptionally knowledgeable and helpful. I personally made frequent use of their services during my mandate, and their support significantly improved the quality of my parliamentary work. However, if one were to conduct research into how many MPs actually use these services, the numbers would be disappointing’.<sup>101</sup> There are, though, cases where staff support is either undervalued or overlooked. One MP remarked that ‘as far as support from the official staff of the PABiH goes, it practically does not exist. We manage however we can, obtaining information however we can’.<sup>102</sup> Some staff members have recounted being met with indifference from MPs, who occasionally ask, ‘who are you, what do you want?’, yet most feel generally recognised and appreciated. Still, staff often feel they serve two heads. As one explained, ‘we really have to divide this into two parts. One is the elected officials. Since I work with the committee, they truly value my work, everything I prepare for them. When it comes to the leadership of civil servants, I am not even sure they know what I do or what my job is’.<sup>103</sup>

Over the past year there have only been few training programmes that focus on **parliamentarians** and support services in the PABiH.<sup>104</sup> The perfunctory culture of parliamentary work at the state level made most donors decide that support was not worth the effort. While donors have overlooked the importance of training for support staff, the point does resonate concerning MPs. ‘It is not all about the system, the laws, or the Parliamentary Assembly’s system of decision-making. Every parliamentarian has the right to decide by their vote. That they choose not to, but by the vote of their president, is up to them, because they care not about the state and society, but about their own personal position in the party. That is a matter of personal integrity and the social habit

*that we have leaders, we must have Bakir Izetbegović as the leader of Bosniaks, Milorad Dodik as the leader of Serbs, and Dragan Čović as the leader of Croats’.*<sup>105</sup> At the same time, political leaders can come together because *‘political rivalry in Bosnia and Herzegovina has become largely performative. While during parliamentary sessions or televised debates, government and opposition members appear to be in open conflict, once the cameras are off, they often socialize together, revealing a mutual understanding that transcends ideological differences’.*<sup>106</sup>

Instead of training, a process of **awareness-raising** is warranted for MPs on how to make use of parliamentary staff. They should also be made aware that exercising oversight can bring them direct benefits: *‘MPs want to be re-elected. Now they do what they think is best to get votes again. It should somehow be made clear to them that parliamentary oversight work can very much help them secure votes again — but they do not realise it. They think that their “work in the field” is better in their base and that they should spend more time there with people, but I think oversight can also help a lot. For example, the Anti-Corruption Commission, if it continues this way, then, the chair and some members will gain popularity, be present in the public, media will be interested, interview them, seek them out’.*<sup>107</sup>

## Cooperation

**Parliamentary visits** to the AFB or police are important to oversight. But as one observer noted, *‘From 2004 to 2016, the Joint Committee visited one of the police agencies, units, and commands of the Armed Forces of BiH at least once a month. Detailed analyses of the situation in the defence and security sector were conducted, which were a topic of discussion in both houses of the Parliamentary assembly BiH following the analysis at the meeting of the Joint Committee. Unfortunately, after 2018, the Joint Committee has rarely visited subjects within the defence and security sector, and during 2024, they did not visit any institutions’.*<sup>108</sup> Fortunately, the 2025 JCDS workplan again foresees in several visits to security-related ministries and agencies.<sup>109</sup> Field visits stimulate oversight, as they inspire some MPs to ask the executive difficult questions and enables them to gain a better understanding of the reporting by other oversight agencies.

The JCDS also seemingly fails to actively use

reports by other **oversight institutions**, such as the Human Rights Ombudsman and the Audit Office. *‘One of the obligations of committees and MPs is to express opinions on the reports of other oversight bodies, but these reports are also used for political score-settling rather than for improving the oversight system. Reports of the Ombudsman do not receive much attention from politicians and MPs, while audit reports sometimes receive slightly more focus, but generally there are no results or benefits for citizens from such discussions. What is burdensome is that reports for all state institutions — 75 of them — are adopted in the same session, so objectively there is no room for quality discussion of these reports’.*<sup>110</sup> A few other observers noted that cooperation is very institutionalised – while audit and ombudsman reports are sent with regular intervals, the JCDS processes them without great consideration or debate, rendering the process rather perfunctory. As another observer noted: *‘I have never heard of any head of agency being replaced due to a negative audit report’.*<sup>111</sup>

The PABiH is also on the receiving end when cooperating with **civil society**: *‘In principle, parliaments cooperate with civil society. This cooperation is mostly initiated by civil society or international organizations based on projects involving members of MPs and staff, so they have access to research and training through conferences and seminars. In the past period, there have been very few initiatives – actually none at the state level – that were launched by parliament on jointly defining certain projects or events’.*<sup>112</sup> According to one observer, *‘Parliamentarians immediately ask what representatives of civil society are offering’.*<sup>113</sup> At the same time, another added that *‘They do if there’s something in it for them. Be it as small as a study trip abroad. Or a lunch on a mountain. They do not rely on NGOs for reports or insight’.* Last but not least, an observer argued that NGOs are also in it for funding and not always deliver worthwhile input.<sup>114</sup>

**International cooperation** has also been slacking in recent years. One MP said *‘that the Friendship Group of Parliamentarians for the Western Balkans (of which he is a member) is not active and in two years, we have not had a single meeting or encounter’.*<sup>115</sup> At the same time, *‘the Joint Committee for Defence and Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina no longer has visible cooperation with representatives of international organizations operating in BiH’.*

*This has always been a great opportunity for partnership cooperation and additional successful activities and projects'.<sup>116</sup> This observer went on to argue that civil servants from the PABiH received training and participated in projects run or funded by the EU, USAID, OSCE, UNDP or DCAF: 'After a long time, the Centre for European Security Studies contributes to the training of civil servants through the BIHOS programme, which is good'.<sup>117</sup>*

## The Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

### *An inconsequential culture*

Whereas the PABiH remains largely paralysed, the PFBiH is at least able to amend laws and carry out basic oversight functions. However, its overall output remains low, as most committees are dysfunctional and many elected representatives rarely attend sessions. The parliamentary culture within the PFBiH can be described as **inconsequential**, with many MPs believing that active participation makes little difference. As one representative put it, *'the work of MPs should be more regulated, and it is unacceptable that they have only the obligation to attend one session per month'.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, the PFBiH does provide opportunities for proactive MPs who are willing to engage. The current Security Committee in the House of Representatives is a case in point, demonstrating that meaningful oversight is possible when individual members take initiative.<sup>119</sup>*

When asked about their primary focus, MPs in the PFBiH tend to **emphasise** legislation, often at the expense of representation and oversight. As one elected representative acknowledged, *'I would love for us to focus more on solving citizens' problems. Right now, we are focused mostly on legislation'.<sup>120</sup> Oversight, by contrast, receives far less attention. Committee meetings are infrequent, and interaction with the executive is even rarer, leaving many MPs unfamiliar with their oversight roles and responsibilities.*

In **negative** terms, one observer noted that the Parliament is divided along two lines: between the ruling coalition and the opposition, and between Mostar (reflecting predominantly Croat perspectives) and Sarajevo (reflecting primarily Bosniak views). *The first is the classic division which*

*becomes evident during votes on the budget, laws and other acts proposed by the executive. The second division arises around long-term and politically sensitive issues such as amendments to the Election Law. In the latter case, polarization usually occurs between parties based in Sarajevo, which mainly advocate a civic model of representation, and parties based in Mostar, which support an ethnic model – according to which for example, two or three Cantons with a Croat majority could block decisions at the entity or state level'.<sup>121</sup> One practitioner noted the absence of a 'common denominator' in the FBiH's parliamentary work.<sup>122</sup> Because most MPs are not full-time legislators – and therefore lack experience and sustained engagement – the Parliament tends to be reactive rather than proactive. This is particularly problematic in the security sector, where the absence of continuous monitoring of the executive and the legal framework prevents timely adaptation when circumstances change.<sup>123</sup>*

When asked about **positive** aspects of parliamentary performance, one MP highlighted that during the April 2025 session of the PFBiH, all submitted laws were discussed and eventually adopted, even while working with a narrow majority.<sup>124</sup> Another positive feature mentioned by an observer is that *'the Security Committee of the Federation Parliament has formally requested the Federation Government to develop a Security Strategy for the Federation, which demonstrates a proactive approach to strategic planning. Thematic sessions were also held with the support of international organizations, such as the OSCE, which contributed to the quality of public discussions'.<sup>125</sup>*

### CASE POST-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY (PLS)

None of the three parliaments currently practise post-legislative scrutiny (PLS) — the process of evaluating the impact of laws after their adoption. As one observer explained, *‘normally outside media and public pressure forces parliament to revisit legislation; it is not by default’*.<sup>126</sup> In the PABiH, another observer recalled that about a decade ago, when the political climate was more favourable, committees occasionally debated laws that conflicted with each other. Outside expertise was sought, best practices from abroad were reviewed, and amendments were eventually introduced. Today, by contrast, most MPs and committees prefer *‘to go through the motions’* without attracting attention or controversy.<sup>127</sup> An observer from the PFBiH noted that the *‘Security Committee is formally mandated to monitor the implementation of laws’*, but *‘in practice, the Committee more often focuses on reviewing draft and proposed laws’*.<sup>128</sup> A similar pattern is evident in the RS, where one observer commented that *‘oversight should mean seeing what the law does in practice, and then changing it accordingly’*. In reality, however, attention remains focused primarily on procedural efficiency and legislative quantity rather than on the quality or impact of adopted laws.<sup>129</sup>

### Capacity

**Oversight** of police in the PFBiH pends on executive reporting as one parliamentarian explains: *‘Unfortunately, it has boiled down to reviewing reports on security status that we receive from the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Director of the Federal Police Administration. These reports are not real information on security status. They are reports on their work covering four areas determining security status: reported crimes, traffic violations and accidents, and attacks on authorized officers. This does not reflect security status’*.<sup>130</sup> As established earlier, the Security Committee of the House of People rarely meets while its counterpart in the House of Representatives convenes more regularly: *‘During this term, we requested three meetings with the Federal Ministry and the Police Administration. They responded quickly and provided the requested information’*.<sup>131</sup> Continuity is problematic though, as one observer explained: *‘When the Committee agrees on something, it fades away within months, and no one is held accountable for the decision. For*

*example: if there is agreement to have regular meetings with police commissioners, it starts and then there is often no follow-up’*.<sup>132</sup> And indeed *‘there is a need for proper planning of the work of parliaments in general and of the respective committees in particular’*.<sup>133</sup>

As at the state level, most MPs and observers in the PFBiH are positive about **staff support**, describing it as *‘dedicated and efficient’*, despite the challenging working conditions caused by limited office space and outdated equipment.<sup>134</sup> However, some MPs still refer to expert staff as a *‘technical service’* or regard them merely as *‘note-takers’*, failing to recognise the intellectual work involved in preparing briefings and organising meetings.<sup>135</sup> Civil service capacity in the PFBiH is more limited than in the PABiH, resulting in less structured working relationships. Some MPs make frequent use of staff assistance and expertise, while others largely ignore it – often because of irregular attendance. Since establishing a dedicated research department (see Box 9) would likely be too costly, alternative approaches could be explored. As one suggestion put forward, *‘the academic community could be involved. In the Security Committee there could be formal cooperation with university faculties of criminology and security studies’*.<sup>136</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the 178 **parliamentarians** across both chambers of the PFBiH are on average rarely present to attend committee meetings or to be available in parliament. One observer argued that parliamentarians are not responsive: *‘They are just not accessible to the public, though they should be. They don’t have basic communication skills’*.<sup>137</sup> Many MPs appear unfamiliar with the fundamentals of parliamentary work, despite receiving generous salaries. As another observer remarked, *‘there are exceptions – people who work hard and push forward – but they are lone wolves in that environment’*.<sup>138</sup> A former MP commented that *‘Security Committees have limited influence, and their conclusions can be ignored without consequences’*.<sup>139</sup> Some MPs are unaware of their duties, while others are frustrated by their lack of influence. In both cases, the outcome is the same: output is inconsequential to parliament, leaving governing authorities largely unchecked and citizens unrepresented.

### Cooperation

The PFBiH has an orderly working relationship

with other **oversight institutions**. One observer mentioned: *'The reports of the Audit Office and the Ombudsman are formally considered in the Parliament, but their use as a powerful tool for improving oversight and transparency is limited. Most of these reports remain at a formal level, without concrete recommendations or further actions. They are usually adopted or rejected without binding conclusions by the Parliament of the Federation of BiH which reduces their real impact'*.<sup>140</sup> In the case of auditing, both Houses have a joint Parliamentary Audit Committee, which makes sense, as the committees on security lack the expertise to evaluate technical audit reports. One observer argued that *'The joint audit committee we have is excellent – 14 members, mostly experts. They review all reports of audited institutions in the Federation. Clear recommendations exist. Often ministries do not just ignore them – they pile up even more violations. What bothers us is the lack of sanctions. There was an initiative to involve prosecutors in audits, because parliament has no prosecutorial authority. When this was the case, crucial documents simply disappeared'*.<sup>141</sup>

Views on cooperation with civil **society** are mixed. One former MP recalled that *'during my term, cooperation with civil society organisations was intensive and extremely valuable for the work of parliamentarians'*,<sup>142</sup> while others praised the practical advice received from NGOs on specific draft laws. However, observers also noted that cooperation between parliament and the academic or NGO communities remains limited. As one observer put it, *'I am not convinced that any federal MP sees the academic community as a key partner for solving problems. They usually think they know everything and do not need expert input. On the other hand, civil society organisations often criticise them for inaction and monitor their work – so even from that angle, there is no partnership'*.<sup>143</sup>

One positive development was the **initiative** of the House of Representatives Security Committee to hold joint meetings with the NARS in the RS and the PABiH at the state level. The first joint session took place in October 2023 at the PFBiH in Sarajevo, involving the Security Committees of both the PFBiH House of Representatives and the NARS. A second joint session followed in December that year in Banja Luka, supported by the UNDP. On that occasion, the PABiH also participated through

its Joint Committee on Defence and Security and Joint Committee on Supervision of the Work of the Intelligence and Security Agency. Unfortunately, a third session planned at the PABiH was postponed due to increased tensions between the RS and state level authorities. Nonetheless, one MP from the PFBiH recalled: *'It is very important that the working bodies of the entity parliaments exchange views. It is not necessary to make any special conclusions. It is good that within the entity parliaments it is known that we communicate, and also that the public is aware of this type of communication. The public reaction to this cooperation was very positive'*.<sup>144</sup>

## The National Assembly of the Republika Srpska

### A docile culture

The culture of the NARS can be considered **docile**, with the legislature largely following government legislative proposals rather than initiating or critically reviewing draft laws. For instance, the NARS swiftly adopted legislation banning state level judicial power and SIPA from operating in the RS – a move that poses challenges to BiH's overall stability and security. While some observers noted that the NARS *'is the most efficient national assembly in BiH'*,<sup>145</sup> others argued that the Assembly *'has become a tool in the hands of the rulers'*.<sup>146</sup> Most observers agreed, however, that the NARS generally lacks substantive debate in its proceedings.

When asked whether the NARS places greater **emphasis** on representation, legislation, or oversight, most elected representatives pointed to legislation. One MP explained that the emphasis *'is primarily the representation of the people and voters'* while *'legislation is something that, by definition, is our primary task'*.<sup>147</sup> Another representative added that *'our main task is to adopt quality laws'*, though it would be desirable for the NARS to have *'more insight into control of public spending'*.<sup>148</sup> As in the PABiH and the PFBiH, there is little emphasis on oversight, even though most MPs appear to understand its importance as a core parliamentary function.

The most serious **negative** aspect affecting the NARS, according to a non-BiH observer, is the presence of *'authoritarian tendencies, not allowing MPs to do their job properly – critical questions are not really allowed anymore, which is probably the*

worst development'.<sup>149</sup> Another observer expressed concern over *'the ongoing politization of security issues and disregard for recommendations of oversight bodies'*.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, MPs voiced irritation over colleagues failing to respect the Rules of Procedure, resulting in lack of a quorum,<sup>151</sup> as well as over executive officials who do not attend committee meetings.<sup>152</sup>

In more **positive** terms, one observer noted *'increased involvement from international partners and technical support'*.<sup>153</sup> Several MPs also expressed interest in increased cooperation both domestically and internationally. As one legislator recalled, *'there have been several meetings with parliamentarians from the Federation of BiH, the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, as well as colleagues from Serbia, and that is very positive'*.<sup>154</sup>

#### CASE PARLIAMENTARY KNOWLEDGE POSITION

Most parliaments have a research division that helps MPs and committees with background research as well as quick analyses. Such units can build an internal base of knowledge that supports both lawmaking and oversight functions, while also serving as a bridge to external expertise from academia and civil society. In some parliaments, committees operate according to a defined knowledge agenda, which provides focus and continuity on complex policy areas. The PABiH has a Research Service, though little is known about its current activities. Observers suggest that MPs rarely request research, and one noted that it would be useful to *'analyse the work of this sector to see if there are possibilities to adapt them to modern trends in research consumption'*.<sup>155</sup> The PFBiH, by contrast, *'has a service that delivers technical, legal and administrative support but no dedicated research unit'*.<sup>156</sup> On the rare occasions when external analyses reach parliament, few MPs show interest, even when findings are presented in plenary sessions.<sup>157</sup> The NARS is said to have a Research and Analytical Department, yet the same pattern persists: low demand from MPs and limited initiative from staff. As one observer commented, *'MPs are informed that they can turn to the research department – two MPs have done so over the last ten years'*.<sup>158</sup>

#### Capacity

In the RS, parliamentary **oversight** of security remains challenging. Still, one MP observed that *'there has been a noticeable increase recently in the engagement of parliamentarians in conducting parliamentary investigations and public hearings'*.<sup>159</sup> Other representatives noted that *'the working atmosphere is good and less confrontational than in plenary work'*.<sup>160</sup> But they also acknowledged that colleagues frequently breach the Rules of Procedure by failing to attend meetings – a pattern mirrored by government representatives who often do not appear before the Security Committee. As one observer summarised, *'oversight is formal rather than substantial. Parliament approves strategies and budgets but rarely participates in policymaking or in monitoring implementation'*.<sup>161</sup>

In the NARS, the work of parliamentary **support staff** is generally respected and appreciated, although some MPs would welcome greater assistance in areas of technical expertise and public affairs. One external observer noted that *'there is a lack of expert staff with knowledge in security and legal matters'*.<sup>162</sup> At the same time, there is also merit in boosting the expertise of existing staff. As one participant explained, *'European integration is a complex process. Staff are not trained for the moment when, during committee sessions or in caucus service, amendments are introduced – whether an amendment is harmonised with EU law or not'*.<sup>163</sup>

As in the PFBiH, most observers hold a critical view of MPs' work ethics in the NARS. One observer recalled that *'at the start of a mandate everyone wants to join the Committee on European Integration because they heard you get an official passport'*.<sup>164</sup> Another commented that *'the Parliament lacks ethics. Ruling party MPs never accept good proposals from the opposition. If a proposal is good, why not accept it regardless of where it comes from?'*.<sup>165</sup> And indeed, observers note a clear imbalance between the ruling parties and the opposition. One observer explained that opposition members face significant challenges, as they are not respected by the NARS leadership, while some opposition leaders even face physical threats. As one opposition MP stated, *'a government campaign implies that the opposition is toxic and should be erased from the political scene'*.<sup>166</sup> Overall, the National Assembly remains docile to government policy. There is little space

for opposition MPs to provide a counterweight through critical questioning or the initiation of legislation.

### Cooperation

The NARS is not actively cooperating with independent **oversight institutions** in monitoring government policy and spending. Because the NARS Security Committee meets infrequently, it also conducts few visits to security agencies. As in the PFBiH, the NARS has an Audit Committee that meets regularly to review reports from the Audit Office. However, as one observer noted, audit and ombudsman reports *'are reviewed but they rarely lead to concrete measures or changes'*.<sup>167</sup> With regard to the Ombudsman, one observer recalled that *'The former Ombudsman was a true professional that maintained a solid working relationship. The current one does not cooperate and is always busy. The former Ombudsman did raise the bar. He stood up for issues, even going against the majority to support the Committee and Serb-related matters'*.<sup>168</sup>

Cooperation between parliament and **civil society** *'exists but is not systemic. It mostly depends on individual initiatives. Civil society is still often viewed with suspicion, especially if it is critical'*.<sup>169</sup> MPs seldom make use of think tank research, and NGO-led capacity building efforts are rare. Nonetheless, there is a growing tendency to engage through debate and training initiatives, albeit on a case-by-case basis. One such example is the BIHOS project, in which civil society organisations work with the state and entity parliaments of BiH. At the same time, as one observer noted, *'In earlier years, while the government was trying to present itself in a different light, there were seminars and trainings, but now conferences are being organized with sovereigntists and right-wingers from Europe'*.<sup>170</sup>

Elected representatives and observers generally support greater **international cooperation** and advocate for stronger interparliamentary engagement within BiH, referring in particular to the meetings between the Security Committee of the PFBiH House of Representatives and its counterparts. One MP explained: *'Communication with other parliaments in BiH could be better quality and more frequent. It is important to promote trust and cooperation, not only in BiH but also in the region. There are contacts and parliamentary cooperation*

*initiated by certain professional circles, but it should certainly be included in regular parliamentary plans'*.<sup>171</sup> Regionally, the NARS focuses on cooperation with Serbia, seeking to deepen relations through visits and exchanges.<sup>172</sup> Internationally, members of the NARS have expressed interest in strengthening ties with their peers in the EU.

## Part V. Recommendations

Bosnia and Herzegovina's parliaments remain caught between a complicated governance system and a lack of political will. Legislatures and their supporters should focus on what can realistically be improved, rather than on what remains blocked. This approach is essential, even if only to be prepared for the moment when change does come – whether through a new EU prioritisation of BiH's accession process or if the Trump administration starts seeing BiH's predicament as an opportunity to shine internationally. Until that time, the recommendations below focus on what is feasible under **current circumstances**. They therefore refrain from proposing major reforms that are currently unlikely to happen, such as amending state level legislation, scrapping the ethnic veto, introducing a subpoena mechanism to compel government testimony before committees, enforcing sanctions for breaches of parliamentary Rules of Procedure (for instance, salary reductions for repeated absences), establishing a binding code of conduct for parliamentarians, or revising the composition and remuneration of Independent Boards.

The recommendations below are designed to be **feasible** and to promote inclusive cooperation and capacity building. They are deliberately non-political, as neutrality is often a prerequisite for effective collaboration in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the emphasis lies on parliamentary security committees, most points are also applicable to other committees.

**To the European Union, its member states and partners:** Now that the EU has indicated its readiness to open accession negotiations, it should renew and expand its support for democratisation in BiH. The EU and its member states – together

with Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom – remain the only actors both willing and able to provide such assistance. The US has halted democracy support while the OSCE and UNDP work on modest, primarily EU-funded budgets. A division of labour in which the EU and OHR focus on the executive while the OSCE and UNDP support the legislature is no longer sufficient. The prospect of EU membership requires a broader and more coordinated approach from Brussels. Member states have a key role to play by sharing practices and delivering funding. Because BiH's security and governance structures were developed in the early 2000s, the challenge today lies in reinvigorating parliamentary practice and aligning standards of oversight with those of other Western Balkan EU candidates. EU support should be generous but also firmly conditional, applying constructive pressure where necessary. Ultimately, parliamentarians and civil servants need to implement changes themselves.

To the **Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina**: The blockage of legislation and most oversight work has fostered a perfunctory culture in which the JCDS and JCSWISA largely go through the motions without delivering useful output. New projects involving committees, civil servants, and elected representatives should aim to push the PABiH out of its comfort zone. Engagement could focus on increasing committee visits to the Armed Forces, police, and other security agencies, while also pushing MPs to meet with civil society and the broader public. Both the JCDS and JCSWISA would benefit from dedicated security experts – either seconded from the parliamentary research service or externally through civil society organisations – to help develop a knowledge agenda and inform legislative deliberations. Rather than focusing solely on legislative blockages, parliamentarians should begin assessing the impact and relevance of existing laws through a structured process of Post-Legislative Scrutiny.

To the **Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**: Among the parliaments assessed in this study, the PFBiH is most constrained by BiH's complicated governance system. Positioned between the more operational canton level and the abstract state level, it has too many MPs with too little to focus on. This has resulted in an inconsequential parliamentary culture in which

many elected representatives do not feel obliged to put in work for their pay. Increased attention to the Security Committees should focus on those MPs who are active and engaged. These individuals – regardless of political affiliation – should be identified and encouraged to collaborate through structured exchanges and workshops outside the parliamentary setting, allowing them to share experiences and work together. New initiatives in the PFBiH could also explore the establishment of a joint security committee for both houses and assess the feasibility of drafting a dedicated oversight law, similar to the frameworks that already exist in the PABiH and NARS.

To the **National Assembly of the Republika Srpska**: The political development of the RS has rendered the NARS docile, as the legislature follows government policy. New initiatives with the NARS are possible but need to stress their non-political character. Both MPs and civil servants are keen to cooperate with peers from the PFBiH and PABiH. Given their limited exposure to European parliamentary practice (aside from existing ties with Serbia), the NARS is likely to welcome cooperation projects that include strong capacity building components. If the NARS claims to support closer cooperation, this commitment should be tested through active participation in new initiatives. Conversely, if the NARS rejects EU-funded programming, it will become increasingly difficult for the RS to still pay lip service to European integration.

### To parliaments and donors:

There are plenty of matters in which **capacity building for parliamentarians** is warranted. Most urgently, MPs in BiH need to understand how parliamentary oversight of the security sector functions and what powers they hold. An obligatory induction training for newly elected MPs – developed and delivered by local NGOs – would be a useful starting point. Another valuable practice would be to create a training team of experienced former MPs and civil servants who can liaise with new parliamentarians in a peer-to-peer format. MPs would also benefit from guidance on reviewing draft budgets and implementing a PLS process for existing legislation. The trick will be ensuring regular participation in training and experience-sharing exercises.

Trips to exotic places in or outside of BiH should be avoided unless there is a formal commitment to attend all working sessions and an intention to follow-up on participation.

**Capacity building for parliamentary staff** is often a more rewarding approach than focusing solely on MPs. Staff should receive training on emerging security threats, particularly those related to cybersecurity and disinformation, given their handling of sensitive information and the vulnerability of parliamentary systems. There is also a clear need for staff to gain a better understanding of the practical implications of aligning BiH's legislation with EU standards. A follow-up to the earlier EU Twinning project – drawing on lessons learned – would be valuable, ideally focusing on civil servants instead of parliamentarians.

**Capacity building within security-related committees** should focus on scheduling, as most committees currently lack a culture of forward planning and regular meetings. Outside pressure by donors in combination with civil society engagement, could help committee staff and MPs establish realistic annual workplans and conduct regular evaluations of their implementation. Moreover, the security expertise of committees could be strengthened through a more active role for the parliamentary research service at the state level, developing and maintaining a knowledge agenda for security-related committees. At the entity level, parliaments could reinforce their knowledge base by engaging part-time seconded academics and think tank experts to provide background research and information.

Recent developments mark a positive beginning for **parliamentary cooperation in BiH**. Security committees from the state and entity levels have already met on two occasions, complemented by several exchanges under the BIHOS programme. Many MPs from different governance levels (including the cantons) have expressed a genuine interest in meeting, exchanging practices, and sharing experiences. Building on these pilot meetings, it would make sense to build a network for parliamentarians and staff, coordinated by local NGOs from Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and other cities. Such a network should be explicitly apolitical and non-partisan, ensuring that cooperation is driven by professional engagement rather than

political or ethnic divides. Civil society coordination would reduce the risk of activities being derailed by political disputes or sensitivities. The network could exist through the organisation of joint sessions, peer-to-peer trajectories, and study visits within BiH for both MPs and staff.

**Parliamentary staff cooperation** could bring significant benefits at both regional and international levels. Civil servants in the parliaments of neighbouring countries have often been more exposed to international training programmes, and cooperation with them would offer valuable opportunities. Internationally, there is interest in peer-to-peer trajectories (beginning with in-person and followed by online sessions) with EU member state parliaments to better understand procedural practices and institutional standards.

Security committees are often inactive in engaging directly with other oversight actors such as audit institutions, ombuds offices, anti-corruption agencies, NGOs, think tanks, and investigative journalists. Projects designed to foster more **inclusive cooperation** between these actors could help to transform the passive culture that prevails in most committees. In addition, closer ties with universities could also be established to develop training programmes where students of political science and security studies get acquainted with security sector oversight and can already start contributing through network meetings and internships at oversight institutions.

The recommendations outlined above, if implemented, should foster a more **active, responsible, and independent culture** of security oversight. Those MPs who are committed to their mandate would gain the tools and skills to perform oversight. Staff members are increasingly professional in their work and are acknowledged and respected by their employers and MPs. Parliaments, in turn, would share practices with one another, building networks of governance that focus on achieving what is possible rather than avoiding what seems difficult. Most importantly, active, responsible, and independent parliamentary oversight will ensure that BiH's police, armed forces and intelligence service remain professional, accountable, and non-political – never instruments of parties, ethnic groups, or individuals.

**To conclude**, if the EU and member states are keen to get the reform process started again, the country's parliaments are a good place to start. They can act as a force multiplier for wider reform. With 638 elected representatives across the state, entity, and canton levels, and an even greater number of civil servants, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the human capacity to strengthen democratic control of its security sector. Establishing a healthy culture of oversight cannot be achieved overnight or through a handful of short-term projects. It requires a sustained, long-term commitment from both Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions and its international partners. European donors must be generous and firm; the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina determined and forward-looking.

# Endnotes

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- 86 Interview with observer 29 June 2025.
- 87 Interview with practitioner, 24 April 2025.
- 88 Interview with observer, 29 June 2025.
- 89 Interview with observer, 30 May 2024.
- 90 Interview with observer, 29 June 2025.
- 91 Interview with practitioner, 21 April 2025.
- 92 Interview with practitioner, 21 April 2025.
- 93 Interview with observer, 11 July 2025.
- 94 Interview with observer, 17 June 2024.
- 95 Interview with observer, 25 June 2025.
- 96 Interview with practitioner, 6 February 2025.
- 97 Interview with observer, 29 September 2024.
- 98 Interview with observer, 17 March 2025.
- 99 Interview with observer, 11 July 2025.
- 100 Interview with observer, 30 May 2025.
- 101 Interview with observer, 2 July 2025.
- 102 Interview with practitioner, 21 April 2025.
- 103 Interview with observer, 30 May 2025.
- 104 Interview with observer, 29 June 2025.
- 105 Interview with observer, 28 May 2024.
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- 107 Interview with observer, 30 May 2025.
- 108 Interview with observer 29 June 2025.
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- 110 Interview with observer, 11 July 2025.
- 111 Interview with observer, 17 June 2024.
- 112 Interview with observer, 11 July 2025.
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- 114 Interview with observer, 17 June 2024.

- 115 Interview with practitioner, 21 April 2024.  
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123 Interview with practitioner, 24 April 2025.  
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129 Interview with observer, 14 October 2025.  
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131 Interview with practitioner, 18 April 2025.  
132 Interview with observer, 27 September 2024.  
133 Interview with observer, 26 June 2025.  
134 Interview with observer, 6 July 2025.  
135 Interview with observer, 27 September 2024.  
136 Interview with observer, 22 October 2024.  
137 Interview with observer, 22 October 2024.  
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141 Interview with observer, 27 September 2024.  
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143 Interview with observer, 27 September 2024.  
144 Interview with practitioner, 18 April 2025.  
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146 Interview with observer, 20 June 2025.  
147 Interview with practitioner, 17 March 2025.  
148 Interview with practitioner, 17 March 2025.  
149 Interview with observer, 26 June 2025.  
150 Interview with observer, 19 June 2025.  
151 Interview with practitioner, 17 March 2025.  
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157 Interview with observer, 22 October 2024.  
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159 Interview with practitioner, 17 March 2025.  
160 Interview with practitioner, 17 March 2025.  
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162 Interview with observer, 20 June 2025.  
163 Interview with observer, 14 October 2024.  
164 Interview with observer, 14 October 2024.  
165 Interview with observer, 14 October 2024.  
166 Interview with observer, 20 June 2025.  
167 Interview with observer, 19 June 2025.  
168 Interview with observer, 14 October 2024.  
169 Interview with observer, 19 June 2025.  
170 Interview with observer, 20 June 2025.  
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## Greenwood Papers

David Greenwood (1937-2009) was research director at CESS from 1997 to 2007. At CESS, he was a principal researcher and mentor to his colleagues. To borrow a phrase of his own, David Greenwood was 'a construction worker on the building site of democracy'. This series of research reports, formerly called the Harmonie Papers, is dedicated to him.



## CESS

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## BIHOS – Bosnia and Herzegovina Building Inclusive Oversight of Security

BIHOS seeks to strengthen democratic governance and inclusive oversight of the security sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the state, entity, and canton levels. By investing in capacities through providing tools, skills, and techniques to oversight actors; fostering cooperation among parliaments, civil society organisations, and other oversight actors; and by promoting a culture of oversight that is critical and constructive, BIHOS contributes to better informed, more effective, and inclusive oversight of the security sector in BiH.



BIHOS is implemented through intertwined capacity building and research components. The former includes tailor-made training courses and trajectories, as well as peer-to-peer consultations, training-of-trainers' courses, and study visits. The latter consists of a needs' assessment exercise, a sequence of expert labs, and an extensive study of parliamentary security sector oversight. The project is implemented by CESS from the Netherlands, in cooperation with the Centre for Security Studies (CSS) and the European Defendology Center (EDC) from BiH.



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