

External Evaluation of the 2018-2023 Programme and the Climate Programme in Serbia, Kosovo, and Montenegro, funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and the German Foreign Office, and implemented by the Belgrade Office of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation

Executive Summary

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List of Abbreviations

AA	Auswärtiges Amt
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EU	European Union
GCP	Group for Conceptual Politics
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HBF	Heinrich-Böll-Foundation
KINAS	Kosovo Institute for Applied Sustainability
NDB	Ne Davimo Beograd/We Do Not Let Belgrade Drown
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RERI	Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute
SLAPP	Strategic Law Suits against Public Participation
SNS	Sprska Napredna Stranka/Serbian Progressive Party
ToR	Terms of Reference
URA	Civic Movement United Reform Action

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of an external evaluation of the 2018-2023 Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (HBF) programme in Serbia, Montenegro (AA-funded) and Kosovo (BMZ-funded); the evaluation also considered the BMZ Climate programme.

Political Framework Context

The evaluation finds that the HBF programme is working in a highly complex political context, and which has been deteriorating along numerous parameters—including democratic values; human rights; and the rule of law—since the start of the programme period in 2018. A fickle accession process has undermined public confidence in the prospect of EU membership. The February 2022 aggression against Ukraine has further amplified anti-Western sentiments and pro-Russian support, in particular in Serbia. While the three countries nominally continue to pursue an EU-integration agenda, its future is uncertain, and will also depend on the ability of the EU to transform itself, as well as the accession process, including the extent to which it can leverage a response, based on EU-values, of Serbia (and Montenegro) to Russia.

Methodology

The evaluation was conducted in November and December 2022, and responds to the evaluation questions of the Terms of Reference which were adjusted and reflected in an Evaluation Matrix. During the preparatory phase of the evaluation, a specific focus was introduced to better capture/describe the current situation around resources, including the organisational set-up (such as staff perceptions on the workload); and working processes. The evaluator adopted a three-pronged approach combining desk review of documentation; in-depth stakeholder interviews; and synthesis of findings.

Findings

Organisational set-up

The HBF Office in Belgrade is overseeing the implementation of the country programmes in Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo, as well as part of the BMZ Klima programme. Most of the programme's activities take place in Serbia, while the portfolios in Montenegro and Kosovo are significantly smaller.

There are currently 8 staff working for the office: 3 full-time programme coordinators (with the replacement, via an open competition, of one programme coordinator for component B); 2 programme assistants; 1 financial coordinator and 1 financial accountant and 1 technical/logistical assistant (on a part-time, 75% basis); there is currently no Office Manager/secretariat function.¹ In 2020, a second assistant position was created to support the implementation of the programme in Kosovo. However, challenges due to the geographical scope of the programme remain, including long travelling times to Kosovo and Montenegro.

¹ Such a function exists in the Sarajevo Office, on a part-time basis.

The Programme

The country programmes have two components, each; the programme objectives have been adjusted at the mid-term junction in 2020.

Component A: Democracy and Development

2018-2020 (AA: Serbia/SRB and Montenegro/MNE; BMZ: Kosovo/KOS)	2021-2023 (AA: Serbia and Montenegro; BMZ: Kosovo)
<p>Overarching objective SRB/MNE: Increased citizen and NGO participation in political processes contributes to democratic reforms (social, economic and environmentally sustainable) and supports the EU accession process.</p> <p><i>Overarching objective KOS: Increased participation of citizens and civil society organisations in political processes contributes to societal, economical and ecologically sustainable democratic reforms and supports EU approximation.</i></p> <p>A1: An alliance of critical actors acting as pressure groups have delivered concrete contributions to a more meaningful EU accession, the Berlin Process and Berlin Plus focusing on socio-ecological and gender-sensitive transformation and the rule of law.</p> <p><i>KOS: An Alliance of critical actors acting as a pressure group has made important contributions for a meaningful shaping of the EU association process and the related Berlin processes, with a focus on socio-ecological and gender sensitive change and rule of law</i></p> <p>A2: A network consisting of independent cultural scene and independent urban initiatives develop and push for models of participative and gender-sensitive decision-making on urban public goods. (no A2 for KOS)</p> <p>A3: Relevant stakeholders have established a resource centre offering capacity building and assistance to selected vulnerable groups in developing their own economic initiatives (cooperatives, social enterprises...) and providing them with a platform for actors (local/national public, administration, political institutions, independent experts...). (no A3 for KOS)</p>	<p>Overarching objective SRB/MNE/KOS: Progressive change actors increase the space for independent thinking and acting, to support the development of a free, democratic and European society in Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo.</p> <p><i>NB: A1 – A3 are the same for all three countries.</i></p> <p>A1: Progressive agents of change are organisationally and/or conceptually strengthened in developing programmes and policies which promote government accountability and the rule of law and foster meaningful political debate.</p> <p>A2: Progressive actors in the fields of housing, spatial planning, digital rights, and independent cultural production develop, introduce, implement, and advocate for cooperative and gender-sensitive models of social change.</p> <p>A3: A new generation of women's and LGBT+ groups and initiatives are empowered to fight gender-based violence and to advocate for gender equality in policy and society.</p>

Component B: Environment and Energy (SRB/MNE 2018-2020)/Energy and Environmental Policy (KOS 2018-2020); Green New Development (SRB/MNE/KOS 2021-2023)

2018-2020 (AA: Serbia/SRB and Montenegro/MNE; BMZ: Kosovo/KOS)	2021-2023 (AA: SRB and MNE; BMZ: KOS)
<p>Overarching objective (SRB and MNE): The programme component contributes, in compliance with the EU accession process, to environment and energy-related legal processes, legislation and its implementation, in order to support the development of more resilient societies (<i>communities</i> – KOS) and an increasingly decentralised and sustainable energy system.</p> <p>B1: Coalition 27 and a broader alliance of civil society organisations, including human rights organisations, use diverse political and legal instruments to monitor, advocate and engage in the implementation of environmental legislation according to EU standards</p> <p><i>KOS: Representatives of communities organise in a network, and develop, and present sustainable and climate-friendly models of energy administration.</i></p> <p>B2: Representatives of local communities, organised in a network, develop, demonstrate, and showcase sustainable climate-friendly energy governance models. (<i>no B2 for KOS</i>)</p> <p>B3: Cyclists' community is sustainable and politically clearly positioned pushing for a change in/towards sustainable urban mobility. (<i>no B3 for KOS</i>)</p>	<p>Overarching objective (SRB and MNE) The programme contributes to a discussion about national development agendas with view to sustainability criteria in accordance with the EU accession process and develops economic solutions that help make communities more resilient, sustainable and effective.</p> <p><i>KOS: The programme contributes to the development of a national sustainability agenda, to the sensitisation of the public, to the building of a community of different actors in all sectors that engage in the promotion of a sustainable development (in general) and rural development (in particular).</i></p> <p>B1: Coalition 27 and a broader alliance of legal groups, use and improve diverse political and legal instruments to monitor, advocate and engage in the implementation of environmental legislation according to domestic and EU standards.</p> <p><i>KOS: A network of non-governmental organisations and other actors develops proposals for sustainable development in the policy and public discourse.</i></p> <p>B2: A network of good energy serves as a reference point for quality assurance for local energy developments and advocate for a more friendly environment for sustainable energy solutions.</p> <p><i>(no B2 for Kosovo)</i></p> <p>B3: Rural development actors are able to connect, network and grow together through the platform to create local tailor made "green" solutions for sustainable businesses.</p> <p><i>KOS: Actors of rural development can connect and network via a platform in order to develop tailor-made "green" solutions for sustainable enterprises.</i></p>

BMZ Climate Fund

Country	Component	Overarching objective
East and South-East European EU Neighbouring Countries and the EU	A strengthening of regional and climate political analysis and stakeholder networks	The programme contributes to the acceleration of socially just climate political and energy modernisation in the Eastern European and South Eastern European region
Serbia	B Emerging initiatives for exemplary climate friendly	The programme contributes to the mainstreaming of climate protection

	development models in the fields of forest/biomass management, ecotourism, agriculture and small RES deployment, embrace concepts developed by HBF and partners and promote sustainable development.	aspects in the economy, politics and society and contributes to an improvement of framework conditions for an ambitious climate protection policy in Serbia.
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Findings

Relevance: The overarching objectives for the two main programme components—Democracy and Development and Environment and Energy/(2018-2020)/Green New Development remain relevant after having been adjusted (and streamlined to apply to all three countries), at mid-term juncture, in response to the changing environment.

HBF programming tools and instruments allow for flexibility to accommodate changing contexts and to react to emerging opportunities; thus, programme objectives reflect a necessary level of generalisation. However, what the HBF programme in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo wants to achieve (and why and how) could be spelled out clearer. There are thematic areas (dealing with the past; digital commons; rural development) that, while currently covered by cooperations and own activities, are not supported by everyone in the team. Clarity, at the level of programme objectives and the theory of change (at programme level in addition to the component level), about the building blocks and value tenets that underpin these would therefore be helpful for the next programming period.

At output level, the programme objectives are translated into cooperations on a considerable variety of themes under the Democracy and Development component, which are highly relevant to the context of Serbia as well as regionally; the programme has also thematically responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though the second half of the programming period has seen the introduction of a specific programme goal, gender equality remains underrepresented; this echoes the findings of the 2019 mid-term self-evaluation. The Kosovo country programme, while thematically in principle relevant, faces challenges posed by the relative density of big bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors and organisations, and which have skewed motivations and cooperation incentives for potential HBF partners. In Montenegro, there is currently only a very limited number of cooperations. Regional cooperation, for example through the specific BMZ Climate budget line; the Western Balkans Strategy Group, as well as international cooperation administered by the HBF Berlin Office and other HBF offices, have been highlighted as particularly relevant formats by HBF partners.

Effectiveness: The programme works predominantly through cooperations with often long-term partner organisations. At the cut-off juncture (June 2022) for the external evaluation, the Belgrade Office had implemented, or was in the course of implementing, over 160 activities (including cooperations and own activities); this number does not include numerous smaller cooperation activities with HBF partners implemented through two “container” envelopes, even though these are formally accounted for as “own initiatives”. The sheer amount of cooperations make it challenging for any evaluation to correctly and fairly reflect on all results achieved.

Under the Democracy and Development **component**, undoubtedly the most significant result—at impact level—of the work in Serbia is the emergence of Do Not Let Belgrade Drown/Ne Davimo Beograd (NDB) as a green-left political party actor, reflecting a decade-long arc of support and cooperation with the HBF Belgrade office (and HBF partners beyond but also other international actors). The success of NDB is not least a validation of HBF’s theory of change, which seeks to identify, nurture, and support nascent green actors so that these become active political forces in the countries in which HBF works.

The success of NDB also stems from HBF’s long-term support to and cooperation with an ecosystem of organisations around NDB, including organisations such as Ministry of Space/Ministarstvo Prostora, and Who Builds the City?/Ko Gradi Grad?, and others. Through theoretical/conceptual outputs, these actors feed into; stimulate; lead and participate in debates around urban, green-left policies that have culminated in the participation and success of NDB in recent local and national elections, and in their current formation as a political party.² Support to the consolidation of NDB and the ecosystem around it should remain a priority for HBF—even though there is now a need to review existing partnerships with view to understanding the effectiveness of some of the activities and outputs beyond an already established circle of actors.

HBF is supporting cooperations in the area of dealing with the past—a highly relevant topic not only for Serbia, but the Western Balkans region as a whole. HBF is acknowledged as one of the few organisations that consistently supports this topic in Serbia—and where others, including big multi-lateral and international donors hesitate to provide support. HBF has nourished relationships with smaller as well as long-standing key actors and HBF’s support has been key to facilitate the financing, and eventually the successful production of a theatre play to mark the 25th anniversary of Srebrenica. In an environment marked by pervasive ethno-nationalist and manipulated historical narratives that are used as a political tool, HBF support cannot be expected to affect a significant shift. Nonetheless, there is a moral imperative for this support in a landscape almost void of dissenting voices.

Results of the cooperations in Montenegro and Kosovo are more challenging to identify. In Kosovo, HBF partners with important organisations—but is often one among many, and bigger, contributors. In Montenegro, cooperations have dwindled to a very small number.

Although dependence on external funding is less severe than in other countries in the region—individuals in several partner organisations pursue professional careers as architects etc.—the departure of historically important donors, such as the Open Society Foundations, make in particular HBF partners working on human rights, including LGBTQI+ issues, highly vulnerable. HBF support remains pivotal in particular for these partners.

Under the Environment/Green Development component, HBF has funded cooperations and own initiatives which, in combination, represent a balanced mix of continuity of themes and partners on the one hand, and support to innovative and emerging themes and opportunities on the other hand.

² NDB is, at the time of writing in the preparatory process of becoming a registered political party (i.e. NDB is not yet a political party).

Working with the RES Foundation on the Green Energy Network, integrated alternative models of energy production at the local level have been piloted in several communities in Serbia, including with view to empowering these communities to access EU pre-accession funding for the roll-out of these models. Through cooperation with RERI, numerous cases of strategic litigation on environmental issues have been successfully pursued, and thus, a contribution has been made to the upholding of the rule of law; HBF's support was crucial in regional cooperation with partners in Kosovo and Montenegro, which benefit from the organisation's expertise and legal advice, including on the highly problematic small hydro-electric power plants.

Long-term support to Coalition 27 has strengthened this group of civil society actors with a stake in monitoring of the implementation of chapter 27, Environment and Climate Change, of the EU accession process. The Coalition's annual shadow reports provide a powerful, evidence-based, alternative voice to the Serbian government's report and are a constant public reminder of the need to involve civil society in decision-making around environmental policies and decision-making.

Through HBF support, consistent intellectual input has been provided to inform the public debate on air pollution—an issue that has gained considerable traction since 2019—as well as just green transition and energy poverty. Emerging and innovative themes were supported, for example Elektropionir, an effort that champions citizen-led energy cooperatives as a driving factor for energy transition, as well as an experimental effort, in Kosovo, to test the possibilities of protein production as part of a food security agenda. Results were often amplified at the regional level through the special BMZ Climate budget line.

In 2019, HBF commissioned a **social media strategy**. There seems scope for a more decisive tackling of the implementation of its recommendations. The office is present on Facebook and on Instagram, but not on Twitter. Posts and contributions on Facebook and the Belgrade Office's website are covering important themes (including in Albanian), but there is a lack of these being embedded in a recognisable editorial policy.

Efficiency: Key challenges lay ahead in terms of the efficiency of the programme administration. With the current amount of cooperations (and those numerous small-scale ones that nominally are labelled as own cooperations), human resources are stretched. This is amplified by a lack of clarity, and agreement, around tasks and responsibilities related to (inevitable and necessary) administrative rules and procedures.

Sustainability: Prospects for sustainability of programme results depend on the trajectory of the EU accession process, in particular in Serbia. As the country is nominally pursuing an accession agenda, this means that at least formally, there is a commitment to upholding EU values. This also provides a degree of protection for HBF's partner organisations, even though in reality, the operating environment for many has become highly oppressive, and many HBF partners have spoken about physical and emotional exhaustion, as well as a sense of futility and demoralisation. NDB is currently transitioning to become a green-left party—this transition in itself is marking an organisational maturing and thus, sustainability of the results achieved with the contribution of HBF and others. There is scope to explore how to bring the results of some of the cooperations to a wider audience—for example, some HBF partners were not aware that it had supported important work on the urban commons

(a flagship topic), or that partners were working on housing issues—a topic with potentially considerable traction among a wider population. The Western Balkans Strategy Group, an important regional initiative supported by the programme, has been found highly relevant by participants, but stakeholders suggested that the limited financing was posing a challenge to its sustainability.

The results of the work on environmental themes, too, depend on the EU trajectory of the region. Regional countries have joined the 2020 Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which provides a framework for green transformation, including the exit from the dependence on fossil fuels; the reduction of air-, water-, and land pollution, the development of a circular economy, protection of biodiversity and agriculture and food production. This, in principle, provides the potential for sustainability and further development of results of the work of HBF partners. At the same time, international developments, including the Russian aggression in Ukraine, have a bearing on issues such as decarbonisation, as well as the overall attitude towards the EU accession process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The next programme cycle will benefit from a **more precise formulation of the rationale of the work and the objectives**—at overall programme level, and at component and sub-component levels, as well as of working methods and suitable indicators to achieve them. The objectives as currently formulated are good in that they are “catch-alls” for a considerable variety of themes and topics, and how these fit into the objectives is intuitively understood, but maybe not always sufficiently clearly articulated.

The upcoming programme should, in a wide stakeholder consultation process with NDB and the organisations around it, discuss **what strategic, organisational, and practical support HBF can provide in the process of NDB’s transition to a political party**. A key issue would seem to be how, against the emergence of eco-populist movements in Serbia, to ensure NDB’s “green” profile remains recognisable in addition to its “left” values/policy positions. Other needs indicated by stakeholders were a greater public visibility of NDB with the European Green movement and German Green party—not least to even clearer position NDB as a pro-European force in the Serbian public debate and recognition.

In general, there is scope to assess how **gender equality** should feature in the next programme period. While the current programme features gender to some extent at the programme objectives level, there remains scope to strengthen it – in particular gender mainstreaming across cooperations could be improved, among other, this would require a proactive dialogue on this topic with HBF partners, and an insistence in planning and implementation to include credible gender aspects.

HBF, through its cooperations, has in the current (as well as preceding) programme period identified, opened up, and shaped expertise and insight into **topics that are highly relevant for the context of Serbia**. The **next programming period should consider how to take these outside the currently ringfenced circle of organisations and individuals**.

The programmes in Montenegro and Kosovo would benefit from a substantial overhaul. A strategy should be developed on how to go about the identification of new, possibly nascent/emerging actors who could benefit from a strategic partnership with HBF. In Montenegro, a separate discussion should reflect on the experience of the support to URA and what this implies in terms of the potential of political education in the region. Here, too, a renewed effort is needed for the identification of new HBF partners, though the relatively small size of the country (and the financial envelope of the programme) also sets some limits.

In terms of working methods, the current ratio of cooperations vs own initiatives should be up for an open debate. Panel discussions, debates, exhibitions, roundtables etc. are a key ingredient of the work of German political foundations (and which are not donors in any traditional sense). They are an important vector through which the public debate can be shaped, as well as a way to identify new potential partners, including in locations outside of Belgrade. A constructive suggestion from the deputy director was to consider an integration of own initiatives into cooperations with partners, and where HBF programme staff could be in charge of the conceptualisation of some of the events within the cooperations—this would seem an excellent idea and a good way to test out the potential of and “appetite” for such events.

The current programming period has had, to date, over 160 individual activities, as well as numerous smaller scale cooperations administered through the “container” funds. The effort associated with the responsible administration of such an amount of cooperations is considerable. It is exacerbated if the quality of the paperwork does not comply with rules and regulations, and if there is a lack of consensus on who is in charge of ensuring it does. There is an urgent need to a) consolidate the number of activities to a manageable number, and b) ensure that everyone in the team understands and applies the administrative procedures and rules.

There is **scope to review how HBF presents itself and its operations publicly.** This includes issues such as the consistent advertisement of internship and job opportunities on the website; and a more rigorous implementation of the social media strategy, including a clearer editorial policy and visibility of HBF’s project partners.