

# Crossing Borders?

## Activities of the Trade Unions

Interview with Jasmin Redzepovic, International  
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### What is the remit and mandate of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

The ICFTU today has 145 million members in 154 countries and territories and is the largest trade union organisation in the world. The World Confederation of Labour is the second largest trade union worldwide. Incidentally, both organisations have resolved to amalgamate in 2006 so they can work together to provide strategic responses to the challenges of globalisation. We work with around 70 trade union confederations in Central and Eastern Europe, not with sector-level trade unions, and in turn each confederation has a number of member organisations. The ICFTU started working here at the beginning of the 1990s when free and democratic trade unions were being formed in Eastern Europe, at a time when they were beginning to reform. These trade unions were no longer being run on a socialist basis but were more orientated towards the market economy and had to represent the interests of the workers in the changed political and economic environment.

Our office in Sarajevo is responsible for South East Europe. We have predominantly worked at bilateral and trilateral level with trade unions in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia, Albania and Croatia. The mandate of our office is to advise the trade union confederations and implement programmes that help to strengthen their capacities. We also represent, on a global level, the link between the trade union movement and the international institutions. In conjunction with the member organisations, we are attempting to develop a policy for this region and function as a coordinator, facilitating the work of our affiliates. In addition, we coordinate the youth network for South-East Europe from our base in Sarajevo as well as a network of economists from the trade unions. All these networks involve trade union activists and experts.


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**Until the end of the 1990s, you were active in the peace movement and you then decided to switch to trade union work. What made you do this at the time and what attracted you to this field of activity?**

I gained some years' experience working in the peace movement as an actual volunteer, not as an employee of an organisation but as an activist, and I later worked as a trainer at the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA). During this time I noticed that our activities were reaching many people, including many young people, and winning them over to our cause. These people were then disseminating that knowledge throughout their own organisations. But nothing was being done for the workers. They were being confronted with all the issues from the past and with the old customs and conditions in the companies and factories, some of which were still being run by management from the former Communist party. Now that the parliaments of both entities have passed a privatisation law, we are witnessing the catastrophic results for workers in this country. These are problems that are not usually considered in peace work. The most important level in people's everyday lives is generally their work – which here in Bosnia unfortunately includes the shadow economy – as well as social welfare and healthcare, from which many are excluded here. Organising something with the people, firstly by motivating them and then offering them appropriate answers and concepts on how they can change things is a great challenge for me, personally. This is really the best opportunity for practising nonviolence in this context. I am also glad that there are organisations such as CNA that continue to work in parallel in this field of peacebuilding work, for instance by raising issues with the public panels on the subjects of: "How did I come to be at war? How did I become a soldier?" These are the right questions to ask.

Last year, when I applied for the job of team coordinator (I was still a programme coordinator then), I did not only address the issue of social justice, which is the trade union's motto after all, but also conflict prevention. We have to invest a lot in communication skills, especially in this region, as we do not have a cultural tradition of dialogue. It is practised at best by a small "elite" but this is an isolated minority. However, the new employers in private companies show no mercy as they will exploit everyone and then drive them away. This means that people must have real qualifications and must also be able to communicate and deal with conflict situations. In my opinion, this particular issue is also very relevant to trade unions.

**So for you, it is about the combination of nonviolence and social justice, about connecting both of these requirements. What are the lines of conflict in Bosnian society today and how can the trade unions help to overcome these?**



The trade unions must identify the issues of the ordinary workers – and not only their issues but also those of the unemployed – and introduce these into the public arena as a key topic. They must openly admit that our problem today is the high level of corruption and the bankruptcy procedures in which workers are simply and mercilessly dismissed and driven into poverty, as there are no safety nets to catch them and no healthcare system. We must make the public aware of the dangers of privatising the pension and healthcare systems.

**Does that also mean making a key issue of the contrast between those in work and those out of work? Is there a line of conflict here?**

Precisely. It is a case of safeguarding the interests of both the unemployed and employed. After all, we do not protect workers because they are working, but because we want them to keep their jobs. And the question is, what do we do with those people who lose their jobs in the areas in which, also in our opinion, cut-backs in personnel have to be expected in the long term (for instance in public services)? The question, therefore, is “what will happen after this”. We need good projects to develop concepts for this, and trade unions must also be involved in a social dialogue. This is difficult in the current political conditions but I believe that some progress can be made.

**One of the problems facing trade unions in most of the industrialised nations is the fact that they have to represent the interests of their members, that is, those that have work. At the same time, there are many people who are unemployed. In Bosnia, this accounts for more than 40% of the population and includes particularly vulnerable groups who are scarcely able to draw attention to their concerns (predominantly women, the war-disabled and the elderly). How do the trade unions here deal with this contradiction? Are they able to realise better working conditions in companies and administrations and also become active for those who are unemployed and socially marginalised?**

In today's Bosnia, it is only in the public administration sector that trade unions can say that they work solely for their members. It no longer works this way in industry. Industrial trade unions have thousands of members; however, these are not only paying members as unemployed workers are also regarded as members. Definite attempts are being made in the privatisation processes to do something for these people, too. As I see it, the Bosnian trade union confederation is pursuing a fairly clear policy of not only supporting their paying members, but also society as a whole. For example, a section was formed to give the jobless the opportunity to make their issues heard, although this is not working very well as hardly anyone in it is actively committed. The two confederations also

try to discuss such issues in the Socio-Economic Councils of the entities and propose social initiatives to be taken up by the government. They also endeavour to have a say on how the loans from the World Bank and the IMF are used and to make the case for applying for international loans for social measures as well as for developing infrastructure and public administration. This is about how the pension commitments should be met: in other words, the contributions that were not paid in for the workers during their employment and for which they are not receiving any equivalent value today. The trade unions are interested in obtaining funds for measures that will help those affected get what is rightfully theirs.

**There is a strong tendency in Bosnia to say that nothing can be changed within the framework agreement created by Dayton. What do you think about that?**

I do not agree with the argument that we must first amend the Dayton Peace Agreement in order to be able to have a more social state. What I would say is: “We need a better welfare system, better protection, and our children in this country have the right to have future prospects. The politicians must take responsibility not only for the political future but also for economic and social development. Such and such has been identified as a social problem and we believe that these principles or those principles have to be implemented in a democratic country.” We must make suggestions and not only say: “Such and such is not possible as things are regulated like this or like that in the Dayton Agreement.” That does not help anyone and paralyses all activities.

**What is the precise criticism of the Dayton Peace Agreement in relation to your field of work?**

The Dayton Peace Agreement conferred the responsibilities for social welfare, labour legislation and privatisation on the two entities, not the state as a whole. This means that we do not have a unified labour law that guarantees, for example, that rights will be harmonised in relation to collective bargaining, for instance. We have different salaries from canton to canton and people working in healthcare are moving away from areas like Gorazde and going to Sarajevo as they are paid higher salaries there. The next step will be that some of the population of Gorazde will leave as there will no longer be a doctor there. So it has far-reaching consequences. It creates migration processes, not only between the two entities but also between different regions within the entities. The legislation for the whole country must definitely be harmonised. It is no use to anyone if the number of new employees increases continuously in the capital city and investment is only made there as a result. This automatically means that it is decreasing somewhere else where it will become even more difficult to guarantee

a minimum level of services and infrastructure. The contrast in the Republika Srpska between Banja Luka and Eastern Bosnia, which is practically empty land, is just as extreme.

**Is the strong movement from the country to the towns, which was caused by the war, still continuing? Is Bosnia-Herzegovina experiencing a real rural-urban exodus?**

Yes, this trend is very strong. It is compounded by the problem that there is no sustainable process for the return of refugees. I believe that the trade unions should also exert more influence in this area and concern themselves more with returnees.

**How do the Bosnian trade unions themselves define their role and mandate? What objectives do they have and how are they organised?**

We have the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bosnia-Herzegovina which celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005. It sees itself as the successor organisation to the pre-war trade union and it is active in the Federation, but not in the Republika Srpska. Even so, it wants to call itself the “Confederation of Bosnia-Herzegovina”. It participates in the Socio-Economic Council with the employers and the Federation government. In 1992, another trade union confederation was formed in the Republika Srpska, so we now have two trade union confederations. The one in RS, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Republika Srpska, represents approximately 150,000 members and takes part in the Socio-Economic Council with the employers and the RS entity government. There is also another small trade union in the Brcko District where we also have a separate labour law. In precise terms, we have three labour laws, those in the two entities and one in the Brcko District. One can only imagine what it is like for a worker who was previously employed in the Federation and established an employment record there, who then went to Republika Srpska during the war and obtained a new employment record, and who now works on a building site in the Brcko District. He has to go to various administrations, which have no links with each other, and provide copies for each. Submitting several forms to different institutions opens the door to a high risk of manipulation. It is so difficult and confusing for ordinary workers to find their way around such a complicated administration system, and they are scarcely able to exercise their rights in these circumstances.

**So a unified umbrella trade union would be important to respond to this specific issue and also to prevent the trade unions being played off against one another. What is preventing the trade union confederations from pulling together?**

The trade union confederations and workers will have to deal with this different labour legislation in the entities and also in the Brcko District for a long time. For us, it is not about rushing a new labour law through that will replace the existing one and transcend the entity level. At this stage it is more about creating minimum common standards.

**For years now, international trade union associations have been calling for Bosnian labour legislation to be adapted to international standards. Among other things, it is a case of establishing democratic principles and rights: the right of association, the right of collective bargaining and concluding contracts with employers, the “equal pay for equal work” principle and the protection against the discrimination of various groups. Have these standards been realised in the existing laws or are there still shortfalls?**

We have the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Bosnia-Herzegovina has ratified practically all the ILO conventions formerly ratified by Yugoslavia. One could therefore assume that the legislation guarantees freedom of association, freedom of collective bargaining, protection against discrimination, etc. However, things are different in practice. For example, we still have an unresolved problem on which the International Labour Organization has been working for years, namely that the state authorities here actively refuse to register trade unions when they want to obstruct them for political reasons. This includes, for example, the Trade Union Confederation of Bosnia-Herzegovina here in Sarajevo, which pursues a clear, multiethnic policy that we support. We have worked with this confederation as it complies with our criteria and comprises *bona fide* organisations. We do not want trade union institutions that define themselves in ethno-national terms. We therefore do not want to support any model that creates a Serb trade union confederation in Republika Srpska, a trade union confederation representing the Muslim-Bosniak workforce in Sarajevo and a Croat trade union confederation in Western Herzegovina, followed by a joint umbrella organisation comprising all three.

**Ten years after Dayton, are the trade unions still organised in accordance with the ethnic divides?**

Partly yes, but this cannot be interpreted in such simple terms. Interpreting it like this would mean that it is impossible to form joint structures and also that we are accepting structures that are under the powerful influence of the nationalist forces. The trade union confederation in Sarajevo is also active in the Croat-dominated parts of the country but, in order to avoid a trade union “war”, does not yet operate in the Republika Srpska. They wanted to establish unity and

solidarity on another level, namely via a joint umbrella organisation. The trade unions managed to achieve this a few weeks ago, after dogged efforts on our part, having all worked on this together for nine years in our “Trade Union Advisory Project”.

The process took place as follows: our aim from the outset was to form a common, democratic trade union organisation for the whole country and during the last two to three years we had been negotiating on an agreement to form the basis for a common statute. This met with rejection in radical nationalist circles in the Republika Srpska. The leadership of the two trade union confederations then held negotiations and both confederations signed a protocol on the principles on which a joint trade union confederation should be based. This was ratified here in Sarajevo but not in Banja Luka. We subsequently proposed drafting an agreement to be put before the general boards of the two Confederations of Trade Unions for ratification. We prepared an agreement within the negotiating teams and this was ratified in the Federation but not in the RS.

Both confederations had already applied for membership of the ICFTU. An ICFTU mission then arrived in November 2003 and established that there was still no joint organisation. The ICFTU agreed with its partners, the SSRS and SSSBiH, to take more time (until April 2004) to finalise the process and it was stated clearly: “If either of the two organisations declines to follow the joint agreement or has any other demands that we do not feel are justified, we will then accept the other.” And, in fact, that is just what we did. The RS confederation declined on the basis that it could not accept the name of the other confederation, the fact that it called itself “Confederation of Bosnia-Herzegovina”, etc. We told them that they could call themselves however they wanted, like “Confederation of Trade Unions of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Republika Srpska”, and said: “You can call yourselves whatever you wish. The main thing is that you cooperate and pursue the same objectives.”

Organisations have to be *bona fide*, financially independent, democratically organised and multiethnic in order to gain entry into the ICFTU. In our opinion, the Republika Srpska confederation did not fulfil the criteria for admission to the ICFTU as it wanted to continue to operate in only one area of the country. The SSSBiH was affiliated to the ICFTU in June 2004, but subject to the recommendation that the two confederations should move closer together, should continue to strive towards forming a joint organisation and that, in the event of a unification of this confederation in Sarajevo, its membership should be transferred into the new joint confederation at the ICFTU. We finally achieved this in June 2005 after the RS confederation took this decision voluntarily and ratified the agreement. As I said, it took nine years for this step.

**I gather that you see this as a clear success of your policy and also of your advisory function?**

That was the aim of our project and it was achieved after a very long time. It took nine years for them to take this step. We now have a joint organisation but this does not mean that our work is over. The next challenge is to make this into a functioning organisation. In the middle of July we will hold the first Presidency meeting of the new confederation and must discuss how everything should now proceed in practice, which office the confederation should occupy in the trade union building in Sarajevo, what its telephone number will be, who will work there, to whom instructions should be given, and which information channels should be set up. As yet, this does not have a sound basis and workable structures must first be developed.

**Looking back at the experiences of the last ten years, could it be said that strong centrifugal tendencies also existed in trade unions, with efforts to reinforce the lines of conflict in the country or at least reproduce them in their own organisational structures?**

I would not say that the trade unions have reinforced the lines of conflict but they have obviously shown insufficient willingness to overcome the divisions or offer anything to counter them. This was especially true in the Republika Srpska. There was one group there that was prepared to form a joint, inter-entity confederation and one that was not. As long as this continued to be case, the organisation would have split if we had driven the process too much. That would not have been in our interests as we need a strong confederation there.

**What do you currently see as the most important task of the newly created confederation? Should it primarily deal with labour legislation, its adaptation to international standards and its practical implementation?**

For the moment, the fact that the confederation actually exists is an important and positive signal for the workers as they are able to see that they are all collectively represented in an organisation that deals with state institutions. Up until now, the state had not really concerned itself much with the issues of the working population. A labour law has been passed at state level but this applies solely and specifically to the members of parliament and the safeguarding of their earnings. They have achieved that. A labour law was created solely for parliamentary representatives in order to ensure that the members in the RS did not earn less than those in the Federation. The motto here was: "The same salary for everyone".

**At least the parliamentary representatives were in agreement at state level about this ...**

That is obviously very easy for them. But to do something similar for the population and the workers is a lot more difficult.

Another challenge for the trade unions was to monitor public finances. In Bosnia, we are the last country in this region to introduce VAT for the benefit of public revenues. The question is: “What will the state do with these resources?” The Council of Ministers announced that the money should benefit the poor. However, at state level, there are still no socio-political instruments to implement this, as the ministries for social affairs, labour issues and war veterans are located at entity government level and not at overall state level. I fear that, once again, an additional administration will be set up at state level but that the administration at entity level will not be reduced accordingly.

**Another level of bureaucracy, then, that will cost money.**

Yes, another bureaucratic apparatus may arise that will absorb all the funds and have nothing left to distribute. A year ago, an Initiative on Poverty Reduction was launched. An Action Plan was developed and passed by the Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina. A three-year plan – 2004 to 2007 – was also developed which sees a joint umbrella trade union organisation, an employers’ association and the Council of Ministers forming a state-level joint economic and social council by the middle of 2005. In our opinion, this level should deal with the issue of how the funds from the VAT receipts should be used.

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**I would like to return to the subject of the privatisation of nationally owned companies in Bosnia. Were the trade unions able to influence this process? Were they even involved?**

The trade unions could definitely have exerted more influence on the process if they had had more skills, experts and analytical studies. But that was immediately after the war and the resources were not there. When privatisation was first mooted in Bosnia, some trade unionists were in favour of this in principle but wanted fair privatisation. However, there were others who were sceptical and took the view that: “The state took people’s property away during the war and now they want to sell it. That is why we are against privatisation.” Instead of working on this issue on a more concrete basis and investigating the best and most socially acceptable way of implementing the privatisation process, they adopted a general approach to the issue.

**So there was a position of denial that was not very constructive?**


Ordinary people and the trade unions had the motto: "That is our property and we will not allow it to be taken away." People initially did not realise that there was no alternative to privatisation as no one had the money to invest in these companies. It was only after 2001 that people started looking at the subject differently and attempted to offer constructive intervention. However, by then, many small and medium-sized companies had already been privatised. In December 2004, the steelworks in Zenica were privatised. Immediately after the war, a company came from Kuwait and bought 50 percent of the shares, investing 65 million marks. Production then started. Before the war, the entire complex employed 22,000 workers. Today there are about 4,500. Now only the major firms, such as the energy supply companies, waterworks and telecommunications companies remain. Public Services International is in principle against the privatisation of such public enterprises. Experience shows that ordinary citizens, the small consumers, have to pay higher prices after privatisation and also receive a poorer service than before. However, the most important thing is to prevent numerous workers from being made redundant without social safety nets or opportunities for retraining available to them. I can only hope that at least some sector-level trade unions will put forward suitable proposals on how these companies in this region can be restructured and privatised in a reasonable way.

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During the last 18 months, the trade union confederation in Sarajevo has been implementing a very intensive and important campaign to overhaul the privatisation process. The President of the confederation has received several open threats and threatening letters. He was also physically attacked and now has a police bodyguard.

**His life was threatened due to his commitment to this issue?**

Yes, because certain powerful people, who have privatised many concerns illegally and bought shares, now believe that their interests are being jeopardised. He tried to combat corruption in the privatisation process and has also developed draft legislation on this issue, thus taking tangible steps to prevent things from continuing in this way. Therefore, in 2004, protests were organised in Sarajevo against the new law on bankruptcy and liquidation, on which the World Bank and the IMF, in particular, had an influence. In this region, we are witnessing the pressure being exerted by these international financial institutions in the demands for increased flexibility in labour market policy, which means the relinquishment of employment protection and compensation rights. An appropriate law was to be passed in the Federation. However, this was at variance with other existing laws and could not be implemented; nor, indeed, could the



other laws. The trade union confederation here in Sarajevo informed us of this and asked us to become involved in the matter as well, which we did. The trade unions as part of civil society are now consulted more frequently by the World Bank after dealing almost exclusively with the government for the past ten years. A high-level delegation of the IFCTU led by our Secretary-General has regular annual meetings and discussions with the World Bank in Washington. The trade unions in Bosnia then developed a joint paper on the subject of poverty in Bosnia that gave an overview of both the government's proposals and those of the trade unions. Our office in Washington contributed to this paper, as did the American Center for International Labor Solidarity.

**Do you see an opportunity for the trade unions, if they pull together, to lead the Bosnian state towards some kind of social legislation? Do you have an image of a social state that the trade unions can take to the members of parliament and political decision-makers?**

This is a very important political question. As we have seen recently with the example of police reform, it is very difficult to structure anything at all statewide. The Republika Srpska is against it as the constitution would have to be amended and it does not wish to amend its constitution. I believe, however, that at least some issues can be achieved today, even at sub-state level. We already have all the necessary instruments in place to implement appropriate political measures at entity level. My opinion is that, very often, the government is simply not transparent or just follows what the World Bank and the IMF say and then presents their proposals as solutions.

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The problem here in Bosnia – and also in the neighbouring countries – is that we do not receive enough direct investment and we therefore remain dependent on these international financial institutions. We must create a totally different climate in order to attract direct investment. It is not enough to simply comply with the international financial institutions' demands for flexibility in the labour market in order to trigger economic development. Even if the labour laws were structured as flexibly as possible, there would still be no incentive to form companies as there is no political framework. Now, as before, the administrative regulations are so complicated that they simply deter investors. There is also no trust in the legal system as there is a lack of joint legal frameworks, and too many differing regulations exist in the various cantons, entities and municipalities. Who can provide you with guarantees under these circumstances? There is still no legal framework that is able to gain control over the black market within the entities. This market, however, creates stiff competition for other producers.

**How high is the unemployment rate in Bosnia at the moment and how many people do you estimate to be involved in the shadow economy?**

In the Republika Srpska we have 220,000–230,000 workers and there are 390,000–400,000 in the Federation. We also have almost as many pensioners as workers. Officially, 43 percent of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina that are fit for work are unemployed and one can assume that 20 percent of them carry out illicit work. The World Bank assumes that unemployment is only at around 20 percent as the others work illicitly and receive income. We feel that one should not look at it this way since these people have no protection and no contracts. It is primarily young people and women who work in this area. For example, in the canton of Tuzla, the largest canton in the Federation, unemployment stands at more than 50 percent. Out of the 140,000 jobless in this canton, more than 80,000 are young people, those just starting out in their careers. One can therefore assume that half of them work in the shadow economy. We are seeing a reduction in gross domestic product with a parallel rise in the share of the shadow economy. The state has lower revenues due to corruption and illicit work, which is really an absurd situation.

**You have mentioned the problem of corruption several times. Fighting corruption was also an important concern of the Stability Pact for South East Europe. How successful were these initiatives in tackling the problem? What building blocks have been created for the trade unions here?**

There is a network at the international level that accompanied the Stability Pact, and at the Bosnian level the implementation of the privatisation law is forming a very useful starting point. One problem is that corruption is contributing to a general loss of confidence in politics. Let me give you an example. In 2004 the British-Indian Group LMN, one of the largest steel companies in the world that has also acquired production facilities in Skopje and Sofia, bought a mineral mine in Republika Srpska. It also purchased a steelworks in Zenica (FBiH) on the condition that approximately 1,400 jobs in the steelworks were shed. These people were supposed to receive redundancy payments of €3,500. That is a lot of money for these people as the average salary here in the canton of Sarajevo is around 650 KM (€325) and is even a bit lower in the Zenica-Doboj canton. The trade union and the workers agreed to accept the deal. We discussed this immediately with the trade union and asked: “What will these workers do in two or three years’ time? Most of them are around 50 years old, they cannot retire but they will not get any other work either. Maybe they will use the money to buy themselves a cow and that will be it.” We offered support to work on a project to retrain these people for companies that will work for the



steelworks and are involved in building the motorway in this area. We proposed that part of the funding for this project would come from the redundancy money and that potential funding from the World Bank and other donors would cover the rest. However, the response of the affected workers was: “Better to take the 3,500 euros today than experience corruption again tomorrow. The money will only disappear, we will not be properly trained and we will get no work.”

I gave this example to illustrate that there is no confidence here at all after all the experiences of corruption. This kind of problem also affects the trade unions, and it will be a great challenge to build trust between the trade unions and the people in this country. If someone comes and says: “I will give you 100 KM today”, then it will be accepted without any consideration of whether it could be better used elsewhere. This is a serious problem as it makes it almost impossible to achieve anything in this kind of atmosphere.

**Does that mean that trade unions are also suspected of corruption to a certain degree? After all, many trade unions fund themselves more via the real estate that they still own, or via rental income, than from the low membership dues. There was an investigation into a trade union which was suspected of misappropriating funds. Was this cleared up and was it an isolated case? Or is the people’s mistrust justified?**

In this case, I would not use such a harsh word as “corruption”. The committees of both confederations act in a very transparent way. It is not a case of just two people meeting; more than 50 people meet and make resolutions in accordance with their statutes. They prepare regular financial statements on their income, expenditure and who pays what. Trade unions sometimes receive donations but these are also disclosed. However, there are isolated cases when trade union representatives do things in a company trade union or other trade union structures that do not completely comply with the statutes. You should be aware that 50 percent of the membership dues still remain within the local company trade union organisations. This is a consequence of the socialist era. It is not easy for the trade union confederations to track how this money is spent in all cases. The workers from the relevant factory or company or the members control this, and the company trade unions control the branch trade unions. A basic process of control therefore does exist here.

However, one problem is that the trade unions have not yet formed any information structures to ensure maximum transparency. It often happens that information exchanged between committees is not passed on to the members, which means that they can be manipulated. Instruments of democratic control do exist, along with clear rules in terms of who is accountable to whom, but the

people within this chain do not always do everything they should. Therefore, corruption in trade unions occurs more as a result of the lack of transparency. In some cases, this can also be used to spread rumours and make allegations about people, which can hardly be refuted if there are no documents to prove otherwise.

However, I would like to mention something else. In my opinion, the problem of “corruptibility” is more about the relationship between employers and trade unions. In some cases, we have clear evidence that employers are attempting, by various means, to use the trade unions for their own interests and make them dependent on them. On a certain level, some trade unions have unfortunately accepted this. However, such trade unions, both company and sector-level unions, are generally excluded from the confederation.

**I would like to talk about a subject of personal importance to me. This is the issue of the age structure of trade unions and also the question of what is being done to motivate young people to show commitment to society and its interests.**

We have four or five programmes in Bosnia, namely a so-called youth programme, a women’s programme, an education programme, a legal advice network and a capacity-building programme for trade union members and leaders. In 2000 the ICFTU held a congress that recommended trade unions to work more with NGOs and form specific structures within the trade unions for young people and women. The two confederations in Bosnia did just that, with both forming a section for young people and one for women. They then also established corresponding sections at regional and sector level and granted the youth and women’s sections additional voting rights in the higher decision-making bodies.

**Has the number of young people active in this area risen as a result?**

Not really, but the basis for creating additional space for young people and women has been achieved. Both groups are now more involved in trade union work. However, getting young people in particular to do voluntary, unpaid work is not easy. Unlike in the socialist era, people cannot just say to their private employers or even state administrations: “I am going to a trade union seminar”. They will not be getting time off from their jobs to do this and will not be paid, so they do not come. Appropriate legislation or collective agreements are therefore required that allow young people time off to attend seminars and educational activities for a specific number of days a year.

**What does the membership structure look like at present? Can you say what percentage of members are young people?**

I do not have any specific figures on this. However, I would say that, for more than ten years now, several sectors have not been employing young people at all, particularly the industrial sector. Management from the pre-war era still tends to be active here for the most part. New sectors now exist in which young people are employed, but these have no trade unions. All in all, there are generally not many young people in the trade unions, except perhaps in public services, the electrical industry or the education sector.

**Have the trade unions considered ways of reducing the high percentage of youth unemployment?**

We are currently working with the Belgrade office of the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* (Friedrich Ebert Foundation) on an overview of young people in the trade unions, youth unemployment and approaches to overcome this. We hope to be able to run a project on this basis, perhaps also with EU funding. The trade unions are now working on these issues too but they simply do not have enough people and resources for activities.

**In terms of trade union work, what is the greatest challenge in Bosnia for the future?**

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Firstly, I think that the trade unions need economists who can develop sound analyses of the economic situation. They also need good legal experts to frame better legislation. During the next three to four years, I am afraid that much more will be said about flexibility in the labour market and that it will become even more difficult for the workers in this respect. Secondly, I feel that the issue of privatising pension funds is also worth discussing and forms a key challenge. The third challenge is healthcare. What should it be like? Who will be entitled? A fourth key challenge for the Bosnian trade unions lies in European integration. I feel that this is very important for a stable Bosnia and a better future. An important task will be to coordinate this work with the European Trade Union Confederation, which operates in the EU member countries but which also intends to work with the acceding countries and implement programmes. That also affects the Western Balkan countries.

Bosnia-Herzegovina has 16 conditions to fulfil before the start of negotiations for entry into the European Union. As yet, the trade unions here have not enough information and knowledge of how they can participate in this process because, among other things, they do not have enough people with the appropriate education or training. There are specific European directives that

must be dealt with and the question will finally be asked: “Where is your law?” The government will then come up with a bill and the trade unions will have to assess this legislation and investigate how the matter is regulated in Ireland or Croatia, for example, and compare it with our situation here. They must know their way around the legislation of the European member states with respect to labour and social affairs, and this will be a great challenge in the coming years. It will not be achieved without obtaining advice at international level and investment should therefore be made in advisory projects. It is important that the European Commission provides direct funding to the trade unions for projects which should be implemented in partnership with other stakeholders, like the employers. The projects should allow the trade unions to learn which criteria have to be fulfilled, which rules have to be observed, which accounting processes are required and how they themselves can assess whether the project goals have been achieved.