

## **Report on the third ELF training for coalition managers in Western Balkans**

The third event of the ELF's „Train the Coalition Managers“ serial, titled „Around the Coalition Negotiations and Further“, was held in Sarajevo, BiH, on 11-13.05.2018, facilitated by the FNF Western Balkans Office.

Participants came from the liberal political parties Naša stranka (“Our party”) from BiH, HSLS and HNS from Croatia, and LDP from Serbia. Most (except those from BiH) previously participated in the serial. Included were current or former MPs, local councilors and alderpersons. Numerous have had previous experience in coalition building and/or management. Participating organizations have had a long history of coalescing, with varying results.

FNF lecturer Anne Solsvik presented experience of coalition building and management gained by the Venstre party in Norway. Focus was on the role of human factor in coalescing, e.g. proper choice of negotiators, team building and communicating the ongoing and outcome to party members and supporters.

Another lecturer Mark Verheijen and his VVD party colleague Matthijs van Meel presented Dutch experience in coalescing: general outline of political cooperation as a feature of political culture in Netherlands and specifics of the VVD as the biggest and a ruling party. Emphasis was on affirming liberal values and principles through coalescing in a complex multi-ideological environment.

Participants further discussed the presentations made during the event in Split and clarified details to those from BiH who had missed them. Naša stranka presented its own political and coalition experience. Additional input came from its member from Mostar, on the complex electoral situation in the city, itself currently run by technocrat interim local government.

Specific challenges - pros and contras - of coalescing with centre-left versus centre-right political parties were further discussed.

Participants role-played a debate in a fictive local council of Sleepyville on a hot topic (the building of a mosque in the town), which included the exercise of building local ad hoc thematic coalitions and subsequent analysis of the debate dynamics.

The outcome of the event was clearer understanding of the complexity of coalition building and management, and of the role of human factor in it. Side-benefits were better insight into the situation in BiH in the election year 2018 by liberals from neighboring countries and an increased self-esteem by BiH liberals regarding their coalition potential prior or after elections.