



CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Balkans Forward Foundation

Conflict of Interest Policy

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this Conflict of Interest Policy is to protect the integrity, credibility, impartiality, and accountability of Balkans Forward Foundation (“the Foundation”) by ensuring that all decisions, actions, and activities are made in the best interest of the Foundation and not influenced by personal, financial, professional, political, or other private interests.

The Foundation recognises that conflicts of interest may arise in the course of its work and that such situations are not necessarily misconduct in themselves. However, they must be identified, disclosed, assessed, and managed in a timely, transparent, and responsible manner.

This policy is intended to:

- Prevent actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest
- Safeguard the Foundation’s reputation and independence
- Ensure fair and objective decision-making
- Promote transparency and trust among staff, board members, partners, donors, consultants, volunteers, and the public.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all individuals involved in the work, governance, management, representation, or decision-making of the Foundation, including but not limited to:

- Board members
- Founder
- Directors and management
- Employees
- Consultants and external experts
- Interns and volunteers
- Project evaluators, selection committee members, and reviewers
- Any other person acting on behalf of or representing the Foundation

This policy applies regardless of whether the individual is paid or unpaid, full-time or part-time, temporary or permanent.

3. Definitions

3.1 Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when an individual's personal, financial, family, professional, political, or other private interest interferes, may interfere, or may reasonably be perceived to interfere with their ability to act objectively, independently, and in the best interest of the Foundation.

A conflict of interest may be:

- **Actual:** a conflict currently exists;
- **Potential:** a conflict may arise in the future;
- **Perceived:** it may appear to an external observer that a conflict exists, even if no improper conduct has occurred.

The Foundation treats all three forms seriously because even perceived conflicts can damage trust and credibility.

4. Guiding Principles

The Foundation shall manage conflicts of interest in accordance with the following principles:

4.1 Integrity

All persons covered by this policy must act honestly, ethically, and in good faith.

4.2 Transparency

Relevant interests and relationships must be disclosed promptly and fully.

4.3 Accountability

Individuals are responsible for identifying and reporting their own conflicts of interest.

4.4 Impartiality

Decisions must be based on objective criteria and organisational interests, not personal advantage.

4.5 Prevention

Conflicts should be anticipated and prevented wherever reasonably possible.

5. Examples of Conflict of Interest

Conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to, the following situations:

5.1 Financial Interests

- Holding ownership, shares, or financial interest in a company or entity that may benefit from the Foundation's decisions
- Receiving gifts, payments, commissions, discounts, or other benefits of higher value from a person or entity connected to the Foundation's work
- participating in a procurement, grant, consultancy, or recruitment process involving an organisation or individual from whom the person stands to benefit.

5.2 Personal or Family Relationships

- Being involved in hiring, supervision, contracting, grant selection, or evaluation concerning a spouse, partner, family member or other closely connected person
- Influencing decisions that may directly or indirectly benefit someone with whom the person has a close personal relationship

5.3 Professional or Organisational Interests

- Serving simultaneously in another organisation whose interests may conflict with those of the Foundation
- Using confidential information obtained through the Foundation for private or external benefit
- Engaging in outside work or consultancy that may interfere with responsibilities to the Foundation

5.4 Political or Public Roles

Participating in decisions where a political, public, or advocacy affiliation may compromise or appear to compromise independence or neutrality required in the Foundation's work.

6. Duty to Disclose

All individuals covered by this policy have an ongoing duty to disclose any actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest as soon as they become aware of it.

Disclosure must be made:

- At the beginning of employment, appointment, engagement, or cooperation
- Annually, if requested by the Foundation
- Before participating in a relevant decision, process, or activity
- Immediately when circumstances change.

Failure to disclose a relevant conflict of interest may constitute a breach of this policy and may lead to disciplinary or other appropriate action.

7. How to Disclose a Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest must be disclosed in writing to the appropriate person or body, depending on the role of the individual concerned:

- Employees, consultants, interns, and volunteers must disclose to the Executive Director or designated senior manager
- The Executive Director must disclose to the Board

- Board members must disclose to the Chair of the Board, or to the Board collectively if appropriate
- Selection committee members, evaluators, and reviewers must disclose before the review process begins and again if any conflict arises during the process.

The disclosure should include:

- The nature of the conflict
- The person(s), organisation(s), or matter(s) involved
- Whether the conflict is actual, potential, or perceived
- Any relevant background or relationship
- Any proposed steps to manage the situation.

The Foundation may use a standard Conflict of Interest Declaration Form for this purpose.

8. Assessment of Conflict of Interest

Once disclosed, the conflict of interest shall be assessed promptly and fairly by the appropriate authority.

The assessment shall consider:

- The seriousness of the conflict
- Whether the person can remain objective and impartial
- Whether the Foundation's credibility, fairness, or legal compliance may be affected
- Whether the conflict can be managed or must be avoided altogether.

Where necessary, the Foundation may seek independent advice or refer the matter to the Board.

9. Management Measures

Depending on the nature and seriousness of the conflict, the Foundation may take one or more of the following measures:

- Require the person to withdraw from discussion or decision-making
- Restrict access to information or documents
- Reassign tasks or responsibilities
- Appoint an independent reviewer or replacement

- Exclude the person from a selection, procurement, recruitment, evaluation, grant-making, or contracting process
- Require the person to end or modify the conflicting relationship or activity
- In serious cases, terminate the relevant engagement or role, in accordance with applicable law and contractual arrangements.

The selected management measure must be proportionate, documented, and aimed at protecting the Foundation's integrity and decision-making process.

10. Recusal from Decisions

Any person with an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest in a particular matter must not participate in:

- Discussions related to that matter
- Decisions or voting related to that matter
- Attempts to influence the outcome directly or indirectly

Where applicable, the recusal shall be recorded in meeting minutes or other internal documentation.

11. Gifts, Hospitality, and Undue Advantage

Individuals covered by this policy must not solicit or accept gifts, hospitality, favours, payments, or other benefits that may influence, or appear to influence, their decisions or conduct in relation to the Foundation.

Reasonable and modest hospitality may be accepted only where:

- It is lawful
- It is proportionate and appropriate
- It does not create an obligation or appearance of bias.

Cash or cash equivalents must never be accepted.

Where there is doubt, the matter must be disclosed and approved in advance by the Executive Director.

12. Use of Organisational Position and Resources

No person covered by this policy may use their role, authority, access, information, or Foundation resources for personal gain or for the benefit of related individuals or entities.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Using internal information for private benefit
- Directing opportunities, contracts, or visibility toward connected persons or organisations
- Using Foundation property, funds, data, or networks for unauthorised personal purposes.

13. Recruitment, Contracting, Procurement, and Grant-Making

Special care must be taken in areas where conflicts of interest are particularly likely to arise, including:

- Recruitment and hiring
- Procurement and purchasing
- Consultant and service provider selection
- Partner selection
- Subgranting or grant-making
- Evaluation and scoring of proposals or applications

In such processes:

- All decision-makers must declare any conflict before participating
- Any conflicted individual must be excluded from the process
- Decisions must be based on documented and objective criteria
- Records must be kept to demonstrate fairness and transparency

14. Confidentiality

Any person disclosing or involved in the handling of a conflict of interest must respect confidentiality.

Information shall be shared only with those who need it for legitimate organisational, legal, compliance, governance, or safeguarding purposes.

At the same time, confidentiality must not be used to conceal misconduct, bias, or improper influence.

15. Record-Keeping

The Foundation shall keep appropriate records of:

- Disclosed conflicts of interest
- Declarations submitted
- Assessments conducted
- Decisions taken and management measures applied.

These records shall be maintained securely and in line with applicable data protection and confidentiality obligations.

16. Breach of Policy

Failure to comply with this policy may result in appropriate action, depending on the seriousness of the breach.

This may include:

- Verbal or written warning
- Exclusion from a process or activity
- Termination of a contract, consultancy, or volunteer engagement
- Disciplinary action
- Removal from office or governance role, where applicable

- Referral to competent authorities where misconduct may involve fraud, corruption, or unlawful conduct

Deliberate concealment of a conflict of interest will be treated particularly seriously.

17. Protection Against Retaliation

No person shall suffer retaliation, intimidation, disadvantage, or adverse treatment for raising a concern, disclosing a conflict of interest in good faith, or participating in a review under this policy.

Retaliation itself may constitute a serious breach of organisational rules and may result in disciplinary action.

18. Responsibilities

18.1 All Covered Persons

All individuals covered by this policy are responsible for:

- Reading and understanding this policy
- Identifying and disclosing conflicts of interest
- Cooperating in any review or management process
- Complying with decisions taken under this policy

18.2 Executive Director

The Executive Director is responsible for:

- Ensuring implementation of this policy
- Receiving and managing disclosures from staff and others, where applicable
- Ensuring appropriate documentation and follow-up
- Overseeing compliance with this policy;

18.3 Board

The Board is responsible for:

- Reviewing conflicts involving the Executive Director or Board members
- Ensuring governance decisions are free from undue influence.

19. Related Policies

This policy should be read together with other relevant Foundation policies, including where applicable:

- Anti-Corruption and Fraud Prevention Policy
- Whistleblower Protection Policy
- Procurement Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Data Protection Policy
- Financial Policy and Procedures.

20. Review of the Policy

This policy shall be reviewed periodically and updated as necessary to reflect legal requirements, organisational growth, donor expectations, and good governance practice.