



JUDY BATT

IESUE/COPS/INF(07)09

19 November, 2007

INSTITUTE NOTE**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: POLITICS AS ‘WAR BY OTHER MEANS’
CHALLENGE TO THE EU’S STRATEGY FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS**

- **The EU now faces the prospect of dealing simultaneously with the violent fallout of a messy, unsustainable settlement for Kosovo *and* the secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina.**
- **If left unchecked, these developments will reignite Albanian secessionism in FYR of Macedonia and general destabilisation of the whole region.**
- **The spiral of escalation must be forcefully stopped by reinforcing the legitimacy and authority of the OHR in BiH.**

The eruption of the long-simmering political crisis in BiH has painfully exposed the failure of the most intensive effort ever at internationally-supervised state-building. Twelve years’ investment of human and financial resources has not succeeded in supplanting the ethno-nationalist obsessions that drove the 1992-95 war. Politics today is ‘war by other means’, still focussed on the issues that Dayton failed to resolve. Politicians are mobilising peoples’ fears of each other and mistrust of the EU in order to resist reforms, and BiH’s path to EU integration is blocked.

The EU’s much-bruited ‘soft power’ is not working. The EU perspective has simply not proved sufficiently powerful to reorient the BiH political agenda. Although all political leaders profess commitment to EU integration, they have deliberately escalated confrontational nationalist rhetoric and obstructed reforms wherever these challenge their power bases. Despite the fact that EU integration is supported by about 70 per cent of public opinion, and although politicians are almost universally despised and mistrusted, their sectarian nationalist rhetoric finds a ready response among the people.

Moreover, **the legitimacy and credibility of the OHR have been seriously weakened:** first by the premature experiment of 2005-06 in transition to ‘local ownership’, which only succeeded in reviving the dormant struggle over precisely who owns what in BiH; and more recently, by division within the International Community and Russian political contestation of the OHR’s use of the Bonn Powers. With ‘Leviathan’ in question, BiH risks descending once again into a Hobbesian ‘state of nature’ - a condition of ‘war of all against all’ where life is ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.’

What has gone wrong?

BiH's political elite comprises an obnoxious mix of ruthlessly single-minded masters of obstruction and brinkmanship; short-sighted obsessives; and corrupt, feeble-minded provincials lacking in strategic vision, political judgement and courage. Their politics are not irrational, but their rationality is patently not that of EU integration.

The real question is not why they are so bad, but why the voters let them get away with it. Why does the alternative offered by the 'EU perspective' exert so little traction in BiH? The EU needs to recognise clearly why its strategy, modelled on the successful experience with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, (CEEs) in the 1990s and early 2000s, is not working in the Western Balkans, and in BiH in particular.

- **Former Yugoslavia's 'post-communist transition' has not brought about a fundamental break with the past.** That has not been the aim of political leaders, who have used nationalism to stay in power, and war as a cover for avoiding reforms or diverting them in their own self-interest. The unfinished peace has allowed them to consolidate their positions by continuing to exploit 'greed and grievance.' While for CEE in the 1990s, there was no alternative to the EU, in BiH today there seems to be no alternative to the *status quo* – a convenient conclusion for the politicians which has broken the spirit of an exhausted, impoverished and mistrustful society, and now challenges the will of the international community, in particular the EU.
- **The specific post-conflict context of BiH** compounds the already formidable challenges of post-communist transition. BiH is an 'unfinished state', struggling with issues of national and state identity that the Dayton constitution failed to address. It is thus acutely vulnerable to the instability of the wider region where state borders are still contested. These unresolved issues constantly displace and eclipse the EU perspective on the political agenda.
- **Lack of credibility of the EU in the region.** The EU is seen as weak, indecisive and unreliable. The EU failed to prevent or stop war in the 1990s, and it could fail the region again: careless talk of 'enlargement fatigue' undermines the credibility of the EU's 'Thessaloniki commitment' to integrate the Western Balkans into the EU. The EU does not really seem to believe in its own strategic interest in the region.
- **The incentives offered by the SAP do not offer enough, soon enough,** to alter politicians' calculations and reshape their short-term interests and strategies for maintaining power. SAA-related reforms are costly to implement in economic and social terms, and the time-horizon is a long one: it could be ten years or more before BiH is ready for EU membership.

Where Next?

The International Commission on the Balkans chaired by Giuliano Amato aptly concluded that **'The real choice facing the EU in the Balkans is Enlargement or Empire'**.

But the choice has already been made by BiH's politicians. The enlargement route is blocked in BiH, pending resolution of the constitutional issue. It is clear that no progress can be made on this without a 'Leviathan' – an impartial 'law-giver' of undisputed authority and power capable of intervening to upholding the general interest in sustainable peace. This is the role of the OHR.

But the international will to drive the constitutional process forward while containing its explosive potential is much less in evidence than it was before. In 2005-06, the US spearheaded negotiations that produced the 'April package' (rejected by just two votes in the BiH parliament). The US now clearly wishes the EU to take over. The OHR/EUSR will have to take the lead in relaunching the constitutional process – once conditions permit. But the OHR can no longer take for granted the unambiguous support of the Peace Implementation Council. Russia's unpredictable behaviour now has to be factored in as an additional complication.

The EU must revive its strategic commitment to BiH, which requires first and foremost reinforcement of the legitimacy and credibility of the OHR.

The EU must sustain its united stance that **no questioning of the integrity of BiH will be allowed**. Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica's recent efforts to link the outcome of the Kosovo status process with the position of Republika Srpska in BiH must be faced down. EU hesitations over Kosovo have encouraged his unacceptable audacity. **He may now be calculating on the EU's lack of will to resist a determined attempt at RS secession, backed – as it will be - by a united and aggressively mobilised population.**

RS Prime Minister Dodik now sees himself in a position to get whatever he wants for RS, irrespective of the outcome in Kosovo. So there is no comfort to be drawn from his regular rejection of linkage of RS and Kosovo. Note, however, that he has argued that Serbia should be given 'some compensation' for the 'loss' of Kosovo.

It should be clear by now that Kostunica despises the EU. He has become convinced that Serbia will get EU integration on his terms, a conviction only confirmed by the initialling of its SAA on 7 November, after the 2007 'Progress Report' had described Serbia's performance in regional cooperation as 'good'. For Serbia, EU integration is an option, not a strategic imperative. **The assumption that EU integration along the prescribed SAA path will effect a fundamental political reorientation is as illusory with respect to Serbia as it is for BiH.**

The real prospect facing the EU is being left to deal simultaneously with the violent fallout of a messy, unsustainable settlement for Kosovo and the secession of RS (just wait for Karadzic and Mladic to emerge from the shadows to greet the jubilant Banja Luka crowd).

If these two developments are not decisively countered, **the survival of the already precarious FYR of Macedonia will be seriously in jeopardy**. The Albanians too would exact 'some compensation'. Instability would rapidly spread to the Presevo valley in southern Serbia, inhabited by a militant Albanian minority with barely contained secessionist ambitions.

The fragility of the assumptions on which the EU's strategy for the Western Balkans rests now needs to be recognised. **If the enlargement route is blocked, the EU has to gear up for 'empire' in order to unblock it.** Otherwise the whole region will drift back into chaotic dissolution and endless instability.