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Report – Public Panel Discussion

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Perspectives for a new European agenda 20 years after the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreements **13 July 2015**

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The Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft (SOG), Munich, and the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin, with financial support of the German Federal Foreign Office, organized in July 2015 two interlinked events on Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- A **public panel discussion on 13 July 2015** entitled *“Bosnia and Herzegovina: Perspectives for a new European agenda 20 years after the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreements”* hosted by and at the Austrian Embassy in Berlin.
- An **expert seminar on 14 July 2015** at the premises of the SWP in Berlin with the title *“A new agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Perspectives and challenges after the Stabilisation and Association Agreement”*.

The two events brought together a number of researchers, policy makers and diplomats from Bosnia and Herzegovina (henceforth, BiH or Bosnia), Southeast Europe, Germany and the institutions of the European Union (EU).

The events took place in the run-up to the Western Balkans conference hosted by the Austrian Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann in Vienna on 28 August 2015. The Balkan conference followed on to the first of its kind held a year ago in Berlin and is to be continued in Paris 2016. The purpose of these meetings is to reinvigorate the EU accession perspectives of the region. An important aspect of this endeavor is overcoming the perpetual crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Introduction

In June 2015 the Stabilisation and Association and Agreement (SAA) between the EU and BiH entered into force. The SAA is meant to bind contractually Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Union. At the same time, the country continues to encounter a number of constitutional and societal challenges. The country's governing parties appear unable to overcome the divisions and to establish a more functional political system and a more prosperous economic environment. The aftershocks of the war 1992-1995 have further frayed social capital, eroded trust and confidence in international institutions, including in international criminal justice, and marginalized and impoverished huge parts of the population. Protests in many cities of the country in 2014 shed a spotlight on the state of degradation, desperation and the overall perturbing situation. Therefore, in the wake of the 20th anniversary of the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreement, it is pertinent to take stock of new developments, review enduring problems and start sketching elements for a new agenda that brings the European perspective for Bosnia and Herzegovina to life.

13 July 2015 - Public Panel Discussion — Austrian Embassy in Berlin
“Bosnia and Herzegovina: Perspectives for a new European agenda 20 years after the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreements”

Reflecting upon Bosnia in 1995, when the country was torn apart and in light of the Srebrenica genocide that is also commemorated in 2015, many participants expressed their strong conviction that justice must be served and reconciliation achieved. It was also reiterated that the EU integration perspective is realistic for the Western Balkans and that the EU supports the so-called “Berlin Process”, i.e. annual Western Balkans conference since 2014 hosted by different EU member-states and meant to enhance the EU integration of the Western Balkans. However, a consequential political dialogue within the country is essential. The Austrian hosts highlighted the importance of paying attention to the developments and situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although more pressing crises such as the difficulties of economic governance in the Eurozone, the conflict in Ukraine and the war in Syria and the rise of the “Islamic State” absorb much of the attention of European and international policy-makers.

Panel discussants:

- Mr **Archie Tuta**, *Head of Political and Economic Department Office of the High representative (OHR), Sarajevo*
- Ms **Ana Trišić-Babić**, *former Deputy Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently freelance analyst, Banja Luka*
- Mr **Jasmin Mujanović**, *PhD candidate, York University, Toronto / Sarajevo*

Moderator: Ms **Marzenna Guz-Vetter**, European Commission, Representation in Germany, Berlin

New and menacing developments on the global political scene are capturing the attention of the international public and decision makers. Yet, BiH is far from having achieved the necessary degree of political and economic resilience, which is necessary for starting negotiations on EU membership.

Mr Tuta described the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina focusing much on an inner perspective while there is a desperate need to look beyond borders. He maintained that Bosnia is a democracy, with legitimate representatives, where citizens cast their votes in regular elections. Accordingly, the international community works with elected leaders as they legitimately represent citizens. The Berlin Initiative¹, in his opinion, offers a novel tool as it is open to supporting only those who deliver results. “Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to reintegrate again”, he emphasized.

Ms *Trišić-Babić* thought that Bosnia is more focused on the region than striving for EU membership. She recalled the situation in 2005 when the SAA was initiated and EU integration was the top priority of the country. However, soon after, impeded by the controversial police reform and unfavorable political dynamics, the EU debate within the country faded away. She pointed out that the SAA came into force only this year. In the meanwhile, Croatia has become full EU member state in 2013, Serbia is holding a dialogue with Kosovo, and all these are relevant issues for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ms Trišić-Babić called for a more active civil society and more engaged citizens, who will push for change and thus overturn the stagnation in the country. She pointed out to the close links between the countries in the region, their interdependence, but also to the influence of external actors such as Turkey.

Mr *Mujanović* portrayed the society in the country in critical terms, highlighting a chronic lack of responsibility, not only by the politicians but also by the citizens, who, in his words, often expect solutions to come from “elsewhere”. He remarked that BiH had no functional government from 2010-2014 but nevertheless a number of high-ranking EU diplomats engaged in meetings with various Bosnian politicians - while at the same time neglecting civil society and citizens, who felt locked out of all the processes. He advocated change in which the new stakeholders will take charge over policies as the current elite in his words does not include honest brokers. Mr Mujanović argued that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a fully-fledged democracy, but an exhausted electoral system

¹ The **Germany–United Kingdom Initiative for Bosnia and Herzegovina** is an initiative of the foreign ministers of Germany and the United Kingdom, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Philip Hammond, for acceleration of Accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Union. The initiative was announced at the so-called Aspen Initiative Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The foreign ministers called on local Bosnian politicians to begin with necessary reforms as soon as possible after a new government is formed after the Bosnian general election, 2014.¹ Many observers estimate that Bosnia and Herzegovina is at the bottom in terms of EU integration among the Western Balkans states seeking EU membership. Florian Bieber, political scientist and expert on ethnic conflict at the University of Graz, warned that in case the Germany–United Kingdom Initiative for Bosnia and Herzegovina fails, the EU for an extended period of time will not show interest in the country. The Bosnian Presidency adopted the plan on 29 January 2015. – see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany%E2%80%93United_Kingdom_Initiative_for_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina

captured by political parties that unavoidably produces blockages. His assessment was that the EU lacks continuity in its policy towards the country and provided an illustration referring to the obligation of BiH to implement the 2009 decision of the European Court of Human Rights, the so-called “Sejdić-Finci” case.² If the decision was not implemented, the EU said that the next national elections would be considered as faulty and therefore would possibly not be recognized. Despite these statements, the EU lowered down the constitutional reform condition soon after the elections 2015. This was damaging for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Reflecting upon the 2014 protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Mujanović added that back then civil society had its own “Maidan”, especially because it was the first time after many years that citizens of different ethnicities stood for same political demands.

Mr Mujanović reiterated his belief that the international community should use its mandate in BiH to exercise more robust pressure on the governing elites when conditions are ignored. He also strongly advocated banning so called „closed door” sessions, referring to the political discussions in the parliaments’ session held in secrecy.

14 July 2015 - International Seminar - SWP, Berlin

“A new agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Perspectives and challenges after the Stabilisation and Association Agreement”

The international Seminar at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP) was held under *Chatham House Rules*. The following topics have been discussed:

Panel I: Towards a new political economy

Panel II: Rebalancing Ethnic and Civic Values

Panel III: Internal Security, EUFOR and NATO

Panel IV: Elements of new European agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina

² Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci are citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They were born in 1956 and 1943 respectively and live in Sarajevo. The former is of Roma origin and the latter is a Jew. They are both prominent public figures. The BiH Constitution, in its preamble, makes a distinction between two categories of citizens: the so-called “constituent peoples” (Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs) and “others” (Jews, Roma and other national minorities together with those who do not declare affiliation with any ethnic group). The House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly (the second chamber) and the Presidency are composed only of persons belonging to the three constituent peoples. Mr Jakob Finci enquired with the Central Election Commission about his intentions to stand for election to the Presidency and the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly. On 3 January 2007 he received a written confirmation from the Central Election Commission that he was ineligible to stand to such elections because of his Jewish origin. From the Council of Europe website; more information about the case at http://www.coe.org.rs/eng/news_sr_eng/?conid=1545.

The seminar concluded on the note that dealing with Bosnia and Herzegovina, given its central geopolitical position in the Western Balkans and the fallout of the recent wars in the region, continues to be a critical task for the EU and its member states. They have vowed to establish peace and prosperity on the whole continent – and this cannot be achieved without the region becoming also part of the European Union.

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