** United Nations Office in Belgrade**

**Daily Media Highlights**

**Friday, 21 February 2014**

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**LOCAL PRESS**

**Vulin: Kosovska Mitrovica residents will be guilty if their mayor is Albanian (*Politika*)**

Outgoing Serbian Minister without Portfolio in charge of Kosovo and Metohija Aleksandar **Vulin** urged Kosovska Mitrovica residents to go to the polls on 23 February and vote for Goran **Rakic**, the candidate of the Serbian (Srpska) Civic Initiative. “You must not allow one bit of possibility for an Albanian to become the mayor of Mitrovica, this must not happen. There is no paper and Brussels agreement that bans or permits this, you are banning or permitting,” said Vulin. He stressed that everything depends on Kosovska Mitrovica residents and that nobody should say tomorrow that the Serbian Government, boycott or anyone else is to be blamed if the mayor of Kosovska Mitrovica is somebody they don’t want. “You are to be blamed if you don’t take one hour of your life to go to the polls and mark what and who you want,” said Vulin. He noted that by voting unanimously in the repeated mayoral elections in northern Kosovska Mitrovica, they would allow for the beginning of the formation of the Union of Serb Municipalities in the province. It will be up to the government of the Republic of Serbia to take care about the status interests, the territory and integrity of the state, Vulin underlined. Miljana **Nikolic**, head of the healthcare center in Kosovska Mitrovica and candidate for MP on the slate of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), also called on eligible voters to cast their ballot for Goran Rakic, as in that way they will confirm the existence and legitimacy of Serb institutions in Kosovo and Metohija. Kosovo District Head Vladeta **Kostic** also urged Serbs in northern Kosovska Mitrovica to vote for Rakic. “On Sunday, we will vote for Goran Rakic because he is always there when we need him, because he is the candidate of Serbian Civic Initiative, and because he is supported by the Serbian government,” Kostic said.

**Voting in Kosovo remains uncertain (*Danas*)**

Even though member of the Main Board of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) Milovan **Decun** denies in a statement to ***Danas*** the announcement of Pristina officials that “only citizens with dual citizenship will vote at the Serbian parliamentary elections in Kosovo” and claims there are no obstacles to vote on 16 March in Kosovo and Metohija according to the 2012 model under the OSCE auspices, the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and Dveri Movement assess that the Republican Election Commission (RIK) is violating the Serbian Constitution and laws by leaving out Kosovo and Metohija from the decision on the number of polling stations. Drecun couldn’t comment on behalf of the SNS the decision made by the RIK where we weren’t able to receive an answer whether this body will resolve the issue of polling stations in Kosovo and Metohija by 23 February, when the deadline for determining and coordinating the number and addresses of polling stations expires. According to Drecun, “everything is still a live matter, since the negotiations with the OSCE are underway.” He claims that the unknown issues in conducting Serbian elections in Kosovo and Metohija “are not preventing anyone to conduct a campaign in Kosovo since it doesn’t depend on whether we will have polling stations or centers there.” “Belgrade needs to invest maximum effort in the negotiations with the OSCE and should condition, if needed, elections in Kosovo and Metohija with termination of negotiations. But, the authorities will not do this since they accepted with the Brussels agreement to do everything according to the Kosovo laws. The other reason is that the ruling coalition, primarily the SNS, knows that it will not receive votes there. That is why it is historically important for the RIK to determine polling stations in Kosovo and Metohija by 23 February. That is a small technical job, to copy the polling stations from 2012,” the DSS vice president Slobodan **Samardzic** told ***Danas***. Dveri requested yesterday the RIK to determine all polling stations for the parliamentary elections or else they will announce new steps.

**Strbac – Serbia cannot lose the dispute in The Hague (*Radio Serbia,* by Suzana Mitic)**

For the main hearing on the Croatian lawsuit for genocide against Serbia and the Serbian counter-suit, which will start on 3 March before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Serbian side has suggested eight representative witnesses and the Croatian side 12, president of the documentation-information center “Veritas” Savo **Strbac** told Radio Serbia. As an expert associate of the Serbian legal team in that process, Strbac points out that by having the main hearing opened Serbia has accomplished its goal, and he is sure we cannot lose that dispute. Strbac is also the only expert witness proposed by the Serbian side. In the International Court of Justice, where states appear as subjects, the evidence is mostly presented in the form of petition requests, and the focus is on the oral address to the court and the opposing side. However, this time the court has accepted the suggestion to hear witnesses, and in order for them to really appear before the court, the opposing side needs to ask for their cross examination. The depositions from other witnesses will be presented by the attorneys of each side in the summary, Savo Strbac explains.

“This is all I am allowed to tell now. At the moment, I cannot specify whose cross examination was asked for, and who will appear in the courtroom. Personally, I will be testifying as the only expert witness of the Serbian side, and the other seven are direct witnesses of genocidal events, those who had survived owing to the fortunate circumstances and had seen their families and friends suffering,” says our collocutor.

According to the definition of the UN Convention on the prevention and punishment for genocide, those charges are difficult to prove, Strbac stressed, he himself being a judge and a lawyer for a long time. Therefore, the Serbian legal team has opted for stating in the counter-suit that genocide had been done just in the “Storm” operation of the Croatian armed forces. He added the firm belief in the ability to prove it, and underlined that this process cannot be detrimental to Serbia. On the contrary, it will enable the presentation of the truth and thus help fixing the unflattering and unrealistic image that had been created in the world, in line with the “Hollywood’s black and white perspective” of culprits and victims in the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, according to which the Serbs are bad, while everybody else is good.

“I expect that if this court decides there was no genocide, we should also get the answer to the question – what is it then, if not genocide, when more than 7,000 people are killed, Serbs in this case, more than 400 thousand of them are expelled, all their property is destroyed and usurped, while their return is being impeded in any way possible, even 19 years after the war?”, Strbac says.

The Serbian legal team is comprised of distinguished national and international experts on the subject of genocide. They have been working seriously, thoroughly and with commitment over a long time, so we are ready for the process,” Savo Strbac concluded. In his opinion, the verdict may be expected by the end of this year.

**REGIONAL PRESS**

**Inzko expects concrete steps in the following days (*Srna*)**

The talks of the High Representative (HR) in B&H Valentin **Inzko** with the president and vice presidents of the B&H Federation on the appointment of judges in the B&H Federation’s Constitutional Court has demonstrated there are fields where they can agree and Inzko expects that concrete steps will be taken in the following days. The spokesperson of the Office of the HR Ljiljana **Radetic** told ***Srna*** that Inzko reiterated that the competent institutions in the Federation waited too long to fulfill their obligations and to completely empower this court and its council for the vital national interest, and that further delays and political games are not acceptable. She noted that Inzko talked with the B&H Federation President Zivko **Budimir** and Vice Presidents Svetozar **Pudaric** and Mirsad **Kebo** about the proposals for appointing judges in the Federation’s Constitutional Court that haven’t been presented yet, but which are of key importance for the rule of law in the B&H Federation. Radetic recalled that, in line with the B&H Federation Constitution, the president, with the consent of two vice presidents, has a clear obligation to propose candidates for the B&H Federation’s Constitutional, whose appointment needs to be confirmed in the House of Peoples of the B&H Federation.

**Venizelos: There is a will to overcome name issue (*Dnevnik*)**

After the meetings in Skopje, the state officials, the local political leaders and the whole society is prepared to participate in a dialogue with Athens not only concerning the name issue but the two-sided cooperation, Greek Foreign Minister Evenagelos **Venizelos** said after his visit in Macedonia, writes ***Dnevnik***. “After I met the Prime Minister, I have the impression that there is a common goal and the will to overcome the name issue and to start using the UN mechanisms,” said Venizelos. He told a press conference that it is not the name issue which hinders the negotiations concerning the Macedonian membership in the EU but rather the fulfillment of the criteria imposed by Copenhagen. According to him the Macedonian problem lies not only in the relations with Athens but also the relations Skopje-Sofia.

**Welcome and farewell Venizelos (*Utrinski Vesnik*)**

Greek Foreign Minister Evangelos **Venizelos** was put against a wall in Macedonia. There was a unified position of the state officials, the opposition, and the Albanian and Macedonian factor in the country in their request for Greece to support the acceleration of the state’s Euro-integration, which will justify Athens’ role as a Chairman of the EU Council, writes ***Utrinski Vesnik***. The media also stated that Venizelos listened to the Macedonian red line – a solution to the name issue within the UN and in accordance with the Interim Accord, the UN Security Council and The Hague International Court of Justice which will not consider the identity. Venizelos repeated several times that Greece was ready for the solution but new ideas were proposed neither by him, nor by the Macedonian politicians.

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

**Venizelos Sounds Upbeat Name Dispute With Macedonia (*BIRN*, by Sinisa Jakov Marusic, 21 February 2014)**

The Greek Deputy Prime Minister sounded a hopeful note on the possible resolution of the longstanding 'name' dispute during his visit to Skopje.

Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos - whose country holds the EU presidency - said he felt more optimistic on the “name” dispute after meeting Macedonian leaders on Thursday.

“I have the impression that the government, the political system and civil society in Skopje are ready to participate in a dialogue not only on the name issue but also on the enhancement of bilateral cooperation,” Venizelos said.

During his stay, Venizelos met President Gjorge Ivanov, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Fatmir Besimi as well as Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki.

He also spoke to Ali Ahmeti, the head of the junior ruling ethnic Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, as well as to the head of the main opposition Social Democrats, SDSM, Zoran Zaev.

Arriving in a double capacity both as an EU and a Greek official, Venizelos added that he was under the impression that his Macedonian interlocutors “understand very well that Greece is the real gateway towards the European perspective and the Euro-Atlantic destiny of this country.”

Despite repeated recommendations by the European Commission, the EU has not started talks with Macedonia, nor has it been invited to join NATO, owing to the dispute with Greece over its name.

Greece insists that Macedonia’s name implies territorial claims to its own northern province, also called Macedonia.

Venizelos said that both parties had expressed willingness to intensify “name” talks under the auspices of the UN. After almost two decades of negotiations the UN talks have failed to yield a compromise solution.

Speaking in Greece's capacity as president of the Council of the European Union, Venizelos meanwhile insisted that the main obstacle to Macedonia’s European perspective was not the “name” dispute alone but its “obligation to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria, and especially the major criteria of compliance with the principle of good neighborly relations” - with Greece and Bulgaria.

“We are waiting for some material, concrete and tangible steps in this critical field of good neighborly relations,” Venizelos said, adding that this “is a general European, international obligation”.

In December 2012, Bulgaria joined Greece in preventing Macedonia from obtaining a start date for EU accession talks.

While Greece justified its blockade on the grounds of the bilateral dispute over Macedonia's name, Bulgaria said it could not support a country that had failed to nurture neighbourly relations.

Macedonian President Ivanov meanwhile repeated the government's own line, which is that the key obstacle facing Macedonia in the European integration progress is "still the name issue”.

He said he had urged Greece to allow Macedonia’s EU accession talks to start alongside continuing efforts to resolve the name issue.

“Allowing parallel movement of the process for resolving the bilateral [name] issue and the process of accession negotiations... would benefit not only Macedonia but Greece as well, and the entire region,” the President said.

Venizelos for his part invited his Macedonian counterpart, Foreign Minister Poposki, to meet in Thessaloniki in April after which he said they might stage a new bilateral meeting, “here or in Athens”.

The visit on the part of the senior Greek official comes as part of a wider tour of the region, which is aimed at underlining Greece’s commitment to the European integration of the whole of the Western Balkans.

**Montenegrin Minister Says NATO Sole Option (*BIRN*, by Dusica Tomovic, 21 February 2014)**

Igor Luksic said that neutrality is not a realistic option for Montenegro, if only because it is more expensive than membership of NATO.

Montenegro's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Igor Luksic, said Montenegro had no option but to join NATO, if only for reasons of cost.

Maintaining military neutrality would involve building a defence system that would be more expensive for Montenegro than joining NATO, he said on Thursday.

"It would be more rational to invest such money in education, health or infrastructure [instead of defence]," Luksic said.

The minister added that NATO was also the guarantor of every kind of safety to a country and it was important for people to understand that it was the best option.

The minister stressed that by joining the alliance, Montenegro will not sacrifice its sovereignty because decisions in NATO are taken on the principle of one country one vote.

Montenegro joined NATO's Partnership for Peace programme, PfP, the first stage to joining the alliance, back in 2006.

It is currently conducting its fourth annual plan within the Membership Action Plan, MAP, which is regarded as a final step before joining the alliance.

Public support for NATO membership remains relatively low, however, and NATO officials have urged the government to try to increase levels of support.

The government has been reminded that NATO will not invite it to join the alliance of more than half of the population continues to oppose membership.

According to Luksic, current support for NATO membership is now around 43 per cent, which is about 5 per cent higher than it was last December.

**Constitutional reform 'crucial' for Bosnia-Herzegovina (*The Parliament*, by Doris Pack, 20 February 2014)**

High unemployment, economic stagnation, corruption and most importantly the lack of interest from the country's political leaders to consolidate and develop the common state are causing public dissatisfaction and this is very well understood

Political 'stalemate' is preventing Bosnia-Herzegovina's growth, says Doris Pack.

The current political stalemate prevents Bosnia-Herzegovina from developing its economy and providing a stable and prosperous future for its citizens. Local politicians must cooperate in the interest of the whole country.

Another crucial factor for the country's European future is to amend the constitution to adopt the ruling by the European court of human rights in the Sejdic-Finci case.

Constitutional reform is crucial to turn Bosnia-Herzegovina into a modern and efficient federal state.

To achieve any progress on its path towards the EU, the country's political leaders need to find a way to cooperate and progress on the reform path.

It is deplorable that 18 years after the end of the war, Bosnia-Herzegovina has not made many steps forward and is lagging behind other countries in the region thanks to its leaders.

The recent violent acts by all sides involved are unacceptable, but the people's protests should be heard. Non-peaceful demonstrations devalue the people's demands. These demands are fully legitimate.

High unemployment, economic stagnation, corruption and most importantly the lack of interest from the country's political leaders to consolidate and develop the common state are causing public dissatisfaction and this is very well understood.

Citizens have the right to express all their aspirations through peaceful means and the authorities have no right to impede them.

These events are a wake-up call which should be heard by the country's political leaders and should lead to better and more responsible governance.

**Bosnian people must 'peacefully' hold their politicians to account (*The Parliament*, by Sarah Ludford, 20 February 2014)**

The price of the political impasse and economic stagnation is being paid by the Bosnian people

The recent resolution adopted by the European parliament in response to the European commission's 2013 Bosnia-Herzegovina progress report reflects the widespread frustration among MEPs at the lack of progress made by the Bosnian authorities over the last year and I fully share this feeling.

The continuing failure to fully develop many of the features of a modern functioning state, such as an efficient administration, independent courts, a free and lively press and effective regulations, is not only undermining democracy and the rule of law, but also sabotaging economic development.

This is compounded by continuing corruption and the big threat from organised crime and money laundering.

The resultant toxic mix includes an unacceptably high unemployment rate, deterrence to foreign investment, and the loss of millions of euros in EU pre-accession grants.

The price of the political impasse and economic stagnation is being paid by the Bosnian people.

The recent news of thousands of demonstrators taking to the streets of Sarajevo and other cities to protest against the government's record comes as no surprise, although I utterly deplore the violence including the tragic and inexcusable loss of historical archives.

I want the Bosnian people to hold their politicians to account, but it must be done through peaceful protest and the ballot box.

**Failure in Bosnia (*TransConflict*, by Steven E. Meyer, 20 February 2014)**

Bosnia’s future as a single, unified state has never been promising, but without effective leadership the future will be bleak indeed. The recent riots need to be seen as a “wake up” call — not for political recrimination and scapegoating, but for intelligence, creative solutions, and cooperation.

The devastating riots in Bosnia have been a long time in coming, but they are the inevitable result of a broken political system. While the riots have been much more widespread and destructive in the Federation, the Republika Srpska too has witnessed demonstrations. This is the most serious blow to the viability of Bosnia – and its entities – since the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995. There are two underlying causes for the riots, which have finally been brought to the surface by a series of proximate events.

First, Western policy begun in the 1990s – and continued ever since – forced the construction of a state that satisfied Western interests, but had little to do with the interests and desires of the people who actually live in Bosnia. Bosnia is the result of Western expediency—establishing the successor states of Yugoslavia quickly, from the top down and virtually in isolation from each other. Western policymakers never understood the ethnic bases of political community in the Balkans and, therefore, found ethnicity to be an unacceptable foundation for modern society. The attitude in Washington, Brussels, Berlin and London was – and is – that a political community based on ethnicity is a false, broken ideology that was inconsistent with the modern “enlightenment” of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Western ambassadors to Bosnia have seen themselves more as “viceroys” in the traditional British sense of the term – charged with overseeing the development of Bosnian society – than as true representatives of their countries. The main occupation of too many American Ambassadors to Bosnia has been to guide Bosnia to a “better, more stable, prosperous future” – whether the people and leaders of Bosnia wanted their help of not. In the event, these “well-meaning” officials have made conditions worse by creating an atmosphere of dependence and expectation among the residents of Bosnia that too often is inconsistent with the interests and aspirations of Bosnian residents.

Second, Bosnian leaders – indeed, leaders throughout the Balkans – have been unwilling or unable to determine futures of their countries. Their reluctance is psychological – the product of generations of domination by outsiders which has led to a leadership class afflicted by self-doubt, insecurity and timidity. The net result is a sense that they need to have everything they do approved by one or more Western capitals. There is a sense that we are “too weak, too small and too poor” to act on our own for the benefit of our own communities.

Clearly, this has been less true in the Republika Srpska (RS), and, indeed, the RS leadership often defies this trend. But even in the RS leaders at times are too willing to “look over their shoulders” to see what the West thinks. The RS has taken refuge in Article IV (the current Bosnian constitution) of the Dayton Agreement which means it still finds it necessary to stay tied to a failed, nearly fictional state. The Federation has never found its political footing; Article IV is almost meaningless. Political community in the Federation is defined by political infighting, damaged leadership, poorly designed programs – or no programs at all – and ill-fated attempts by the U.S. Embassy to “correct the problems.”

While these two underlying issues have crippled Bosnia ever since 1995, the current violence has been brought on by the impact of the post-2008 economic and financial crisis. Bosnia already had one of the most depressed economies in Europe and the current economic/financial crisis has made it even worse. Levels of unemployment, poverty, public debt and corruption are already among the highest in Europe almost certainly will increase. There is no evidence that these riots are the result of political plots by malcontents and thugs to destabilize one entity or the other. They are the result of widespread desperation brought on by economic and financial conditions and the inability and unwillingness of the leadership to chart a way forward. Bosnia – and the entire Balkans – are unlikely to become European “economic engines” any time soon, but they can become stable, productive, economically viable countries if political leaders in the region can find the courage and resources to actually lead – and say NO to Western embassies and capitals.

Bosnia’s future as a single, unified state has never been promising, but without effective leadership the future will be bleak indeed. The Federation will become even more dysfunctional than it already is. The gulf between the Federation and the RS will deepen, hastening the disintegration of Bosnia. The EU will become an even more distant goal than it is now and investment will dry up even further. In short, these riots need to be seen as a “wake up” call – not for political recrimination and scapegoating, but for intelligence, creative solutions, and cooperation. If this does not sit well in Western capitals – so be it; they will learn to live with it.

Steven E. Meyer is a partner in the firm TSM Global Consultants and a Fellow at the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C. Before that he worked for many years at the Central Intelligence Agency, where his last position was as a Deputy Chief of the U.S. Government’s Interagency Balkan Task Force during the wars of the 1990s. After leaving the CIA, Dr. Meyer taught national security studies, American foreign policy and comparative politics at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. Earlier in his career, he taught at the University of Glasgow and the Free University of Amsterdam. He received bachelor’s degrees from the University of Wisconsin, an M.S. degree from Fordham University in New York and a PhD from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., both in comparative politics. He has published in several journals and is working on a book on the changing structure of the international system.

**Protests in a divided Bosnia (*Crickey*, by Charles Richardson, 21 February 2014)**

Recent protests in Bosnia & Herzegovina could be a sign of that country overcoming its ethnic divisions. Or they might not.

With much more serious violence happening in Ukraine and Thailand, it’s understandable that the anti-government protests in Bosnia & Herzegovina, which began about a fortnight ago, haven’t received a lot of media coverage. But they’re well worth another look, with a piece at Al Jazeera yesterday being a good place to start.

Edin Hajdarpasic, an academic specialising on Bosnia & Herzegovina, sees the protests in idealistic terms and argues that “The events in Bosnia are important precisely for raising difficult questions of freedom and democracy without conditions or prefigured answers.” But while many protest movements like to see themselves as unique, it strikes me that what makes these particularly interesting is not the goals or methods of the protesters but the context in which they’re acting.

Bosnia & Herzegovina is a rather unusual place. Despite its membership of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, it is not really an independent country. The most powerful official is not the president or the prime minister, but the high representative: a foreigner (currently Valentin Inzko, an Austrian diplomat) accountable to the international community for enforcing the Dayton peace agreement that ended the Bosnian war in 1995.

National institutions and national identity in Bosnia & Herzegovina are weak; the country is divided almost in half between two ethnically-based autonomous sub-units, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (for the Muslims and Croats) and Republika Srpska (for the Serbs). The result is a more or less permanent state of political stalemate.

No doubt this sort of semi-partition was a necessary step to end the war, but it was hoped at the time that a genuinely federal solution would develop as wartime animosities subsided. Paddy Ashdown, a former high representative, told CNN last week that the Dayton agreement “was an ideal solution to bring about peace, but that it is the ‘wrong basis to build a sustainable state’.”

The trouble is, there is no sign that the current crop of politicians – especially on the Serb side – have the will or the ability to put the country on more solid foundations. And the international community certainly hasn’t helped. Slavoj Žižek, a thinker I don’t normally have much sympathy with, is quite right to point out that “the way the EU effectively governs Bosnia entrenches partitions: it deals with nationalist elites as their privileged partners, mediating within them.”

With elections scheduled for next October, the real question here is whether, or how much, the people of Bosnia & Herzegovina are willing to go beyond the ethnically-divided basis of their state. Granted that this month’s protests are a sign that they are losing patience with their politicians, and that their grievances transcend ethnic differences, does that mean that ethnic division is on the way out?

Žižek tries to sound hopeful about this:

In one of the photos from the protests, we see the demonstrators waving three flags side by side: Bosnian, Serb, Croat, expressing the will to ignore ethnic differences. In short, we are dealing with a rebellion against nationalist elites: the people of Bosnia have finally understood who their true enemy is: not other ethnic groups, but their own leaders who pretend to protect them from others.

But he goes on to say that “The next and most difficult step would have been to organise the protests into a new social movement that ignores ethnic divisions …” – clearly implying that this hasn’t been done and probably won’t be. And in fact most of the reports of the protests suggest that they have been largely confined to the Muslim/Croat areas.

I’m all in favor of multi-ethnic movements and communities and countries. But that’s not something that can be imposed from outside; it can’t be artificially created or recreated. So while the imposed state of semi-partition is clearly not working for Bosnia & Herzegovina, it’s not obvious that getting rid of it will be conducive to ethnic harmony. It may. But it may also lead to deeper division, and possibly violence.

Official European reactions have been focused, understandably enough, on this danger. But history suggests that trying to keep a country together at all costs is usually not the best course of action. In fact, obsessively avoiding any talk of partition may end up increasing the chance of violence, by closing off opportunities for it to happen peacefully. (This, on a larger scale, is the same moral as I drew last year from Kosovo.)

If the Serbs of Bosnia & Herzegovina want to join with their Muslim and Croat compatriots and build a genuinely multi-ethnic state, that’s wonderful. But if what they really want is to leave and join Serbia, I don’t see why any great effort should be expended to stop them.

**Can Bosnia and Herzegovina survive its stagnation? (*The Malta Independent*, by Tarcisio Zammit, 21 February 2014)**

The recent unrest that erupted in Bosnia and Herzegovina should not have surprised the international community or the country's political representatives. Demonstrations began on Wednesday, 5 February, in the northern town of Tuzla, one of the leading economic strongholds and industrial centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in protest over the closure and sale of factories, following several botched privatisations, which had employed most of the local people. Protests instantly spread to other towns, including Mostar, Zenica, and Bihac. Police had to use rubber bullets and tear gas to quell the unrest in the capital, Sarajevo, where demonstrators threateningly approached the presidency building. Even in the Bosnian Serb capital, Banja Luka, hundreds of workers gathered in support. More than 130 people were injured in clashes between police and demonstrators during the three days of protest.

Public discontent in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been simmering for years and frustration was bound to boil over sooner or later. The country has been badly hit by the economic crisis and recovery is nowhere in sight. Its population of 3.8 million is decreasing both because of a negative natural growth rate and because the young are leaving in search of job opportunities abroad. Unemployment, at 28.6%, is the highest in Europe, with 63.1% of persons under 25 years registering for work. The average monthly salary is 816 BAM (Bosnian Convertible Marka) which is equivalent to roughly 420 Euros. In 2012 the economy shrunk by 1.1%, and economic indicators are consistently bleak. Old socialist-era industries have been left to decay, while political instability and the country's reputation for corruption have scared off foreign investment.

At the roots of the protests are exasperation and frustration at years of government inertia and incompetence, and at the inability of politicians to improve the situation. The country's problems have been left to accumulate for years, but now the situation has escalated to such an extent that analysts are beginning to ask whether Bosnia and Herzegovina can survive its stagnation and remain a single state.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has not recovered from the devastating three-year war that followed the break-up of former Yugoslavia in the early 1990’s. The 1992 – 1995 Bosnian war was fought to settle the issue whether the then Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina should remain part of the Yugoslav Federation or become an independent nation. It involved the three main ethnic groups, Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs and Croats, and was characterised by bitter fighting, ethnic cleansing, indiscriminate shelling of towns and villages, and massive cruelty, as subsequently documented by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The siege of Sarajevo, the Srebrenica massacre and the bombing of Mostar’s famous bridge still linger in people’s memories. The war was brought to an end by NATO’s widespread air strikes which forced Serbian forces to retreat and brought the leaders of the three ethnic groups, including the notorious Slobodan Milosevic, to the negotiations table at Dayton, Ohio, in December 1995.

Dayton brought an enforced peace but has not really settled the issue. Bosnia and Herzegovina became an independent state, but under international administration, and after nearly twenty years, ethnic nationalism remains too strong to allow for the healing of the ethnic divide and for the development of state institutions working for the common good. Bosnia and Herzegovina remains unable to take ownership of its future.

The immediate aim of the 1995 Dayton Agreement was to end the war and reach a regional balance within and around the newly created state, meeting as far as possible the political and territorial aspirations of the three ethnic groups. Its long term aim was to create incentives for Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs to cooperate in a state-building process leading to a unified, politically stable and economically viable Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The result of Dayton is a complicated political architecture that provides for government at State, Entity and District levels. It set up two entities, the Bosniak-Croat Federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic or Republika Srpska, each with its own president, government, parliament, police and administrative bodies. Overarching these entities is the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a tripartite rotating Presidency, a Council of Ministers, and a bicameral Parliamentary Assembly. The agreement imposes strict proportional representation among the three ethnic groups in all state institutions.

The main drawback of the Dayton constitution is that it created entities that are too close to being states in their own right, thus reinforcing separatism and ethnic nationalism at the expense of integration. Moreover, its complicated structures can easily lead to political deadlock, as has already happened far too often.

However, the highest political authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which was established by Dayton and made responsible for the implementation of the peace agreement. Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet fulfilled the conditions or reached the benchmarks set in 2008 for the closure of the OHR.

The Dayton constitution is now in need of urgent reform not only because it has failed in its long term state-building objectives, but also because the European Court of Human Rights has ruled in the 2009 Sejdic-Finci judgement that it is in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights. However, as Judge Giovanni Bonello, who was then member of the ECtHR, warned in his dissenting opinion, challenging the status quo and re-opening Dayton would be fraught with dangers.

The strongest encouragement for Bosnia and Herzegovina to resolve its ethnic divisions and embark on the necessary constitutional reforms comes from the European Union. At the Thessalonica Summit in June 2003, Bosnia and Herzegovina was offered a European perspective, leading eventually to full membership. As a potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina benefits from the EU’s Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, which provides financial and technical assistance for political and economic reforms.

But relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union are at a standstill. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement, an essential stepping stone in the pre-accession process, was signed in 2008, and ratified by all the member states by 2011, but has not entered into force because of lack of progress on constitutional reform, including the implementation of the Sejdic-Finci judgement.

To break this stalemate in June 2012, the European Union and Bosnia and Herzegovina launched a High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process and established a roadmap for EU membership. However, in its 2013 progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Commission admitted to complete lack of progress, and even recommended the postponement of decisions on further pre-accession assistance until the country is back on track in the EU integration process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's political representatives lack a shared vision for the country's future. Although the European perspective with its lure of EU membership is favoured by most local political leaders, they remain firmly attached to their ethnic interests, and unable to agree on an action plan for anchoring Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Union. Indeed, there is continued questioning by certain political players about the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a single state. The attitude of the Bosnian Serb leadership, in particular, gives rise to suspicions that its ultimate aim is to break away from the Bosniak-Croat Federation.

It is clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina’s system of government has reached breaking point, and that the current stagnation is no longer tolerable to its citizens. State institutions are under attack and there is a crisis of governance in both the Bosniak-Croat Federation and in Republika Srpska. Institutions at all levels are highly inefficient and politicians ignore difficult political choices.

The recent unrest should serve as a wake-up call both to local political representatives and to the international community. Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently needs to overcome its political impasse and strengthen its state institutions by developing a genuinely non-ethnic parliamentary democracy. The risk of its disintegration is much more real than many would like to think.

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