



Policy Recommendations

Joint Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in South East Europe”
and the
Centre for Security Studies, Bosnia and Herzegovina¹

“Faster Euro-Atlantic Integration – A Precondition for Lasting Peace and Stability in the Western Balkans?”

General Outline

The EU and NATO represent the wider political framework which all Western Balkan countries aspire to. Since 2000, the perspective of integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions has become a central factor of influence in these countries. Ten years later, the Western Balkan countries should be entering a new phase in achieving these goals: in the terms of integration processes, all states need to consider new strategies and policies to increase functionality and self-sustainability. Ensuring peace, implementation of reforms, confronting regional security challenges as well as re-establishing credibility among themselves are among the main priorities for their future membership in the institutions.

By improving the co-operation within the region, both EU and NATO need to establish a clear enlargement strategy towards the Western Balkans. The given clear perspective of membership will additionally broaden and strengthen bonds between the Western Balkan countries and the EU and NATO. In that process the most important objective is the identification of serious obstacles in the Euro-Atlantic integration processes and the formulation of solutions to confront them. Encouraging multi-perspective discussions on topics relevant to the future of the entire Western Balkan area is the key to ensuring long-lasting stability.

Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Crossroads: Euro-Atlantic Integration or a Black Hole?

Following the general elections in October 2010, a wide spectrum of possibilities – from improvement to a further worsening of the situation – exists for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The new government taking its mandate for the next four years should clearly incorporate the

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Euro-Atlantic agenda into its government programme. All plans of closing down the OHR and moving towards a reinforced EU presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been further complicated by the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and need to be revised. Bosnia and Herzegovina is stable in terms of security, but not yet fully consolidated as a state, and is confronting a truly complicated situation. At the same time it has become obvious that in the past years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been increasingly lagging behind its neighbour countries. Therefore, new policies need to be introduced both by the local political elites as well as by the international community.

It is beyond question that Bosnia and Herzegovina will eventually settle into the framework of Euro-Atlantic integration, but organized crime and corruption are seriously undermining this process. The biggest threat to transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the influence of old political elites on the one hand and the new economic class on the other. The economy is still under transformation: the unfinished processes of privatization, the high degree of state bureaucracy or the influence of political elites devoted only to their (ethnic) constituency are just some factual examples why nobody is expecting big changes. At the same time, the political elites skilfully uphold the status quo and people are waiting for the new political elites to become active.

On the other side, the invitation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to become partner in the NATO PfP Membership Action Plan (MAP) alone represents progress at a historical dimension. The property imposition of the state, for example, is proof that this decision was made in pre-election time. From the perspective of the defence officials, such an unconstructive approach was received with great disappointment because it is lost in terms of full participation, except that Bosnia and Herzegovina can and is using their instruments. Bosnia and Herzegovina has done significant reforms in the security sector, such as defense reform. However, it needs faster and more effective implementation to remove the inability to fully participate in the MAP. Moreover, this is very important to support credibility within NATO.

The crucial problem for Bosnia and Herzegovina lies in the inability of its politicians to take the initiative. The international presence will continue, but without any good plans for the format of the future engagement. Bosnia and Herzegovina doesn't need any more technical help, however, there is no political agreement on how to move forward. There is little incentive to move closer to EU accession. The presence of the international community forces Bosnia and Herzegovina to focus. As the issues of Kosovo and Serbia are still on the top of their agenda they fail to do so. Speculations on closing down the OHR do not make sense, as it is too early for that. Some would say that there is a silent war going on in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through which it will not become a functioning state in the near future. The most alarming fact is the lethargy shown by the international community towards the current state of affairs. The police reform is a mutual failure by Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community alike which led the country into the current situation. Moreover, the problem also lies in the passivity of its citizens and the weak civil society.

Euro-Atlantic Realities in the Western Balkans countries until 2014

Each Western Balkans country suffers from the similar disease in regional issues: organized crime and corruption on all levels of society. At the current state of affairs, it is impossible to make any changes or to fully implement democracy.

Croatia, as an EU candidate and NATO member, plays a significant role in the region. Also, opening the hardest chapters for integration will represent a reality-check of its maturity as EU candidate on its way to membership. Croatia is a “closed story”, but economic blinders and discussions about the referendum on EU membership demonstrate the shallow approach and inactive attitude the Croatian government is taking toward EU accession. Overall, the government needs to be more active and reach out to each level of society.

Serbia never spelled out the aim of full integration into NATO in spite of different trends in the region. A year after joining the Partnership for Peace, Serbia in December 2007 declared military neutrality, which remains a cornerstone of its foreign policy until today. The question of NATO candidacy, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) of EU accession is the primary, Kosovo the secondary strategic goal of Serbia’s government. Until now, the government was trying to keep these two issues separate but this policy needs to be abandoned. This is a big challenge for Serbia, as it will need a new concept towards Kosovo as well as to speed up reforms in securing democratic governance. Moreover, Serbia needs to improve cooperation with its neighbours, which is one of the key indicators for progress in the whole region.

The unsolved name issue still shows the lack of political consensus among the main political actors in Macedonia. Macedonia will most likely become a NATO member soon after a solution has been found. The fact that the Macedonian people apparently do not want a solution should be of concern; nationalistic outbursts are proof of this. As the current level of poverty stands at 31%, and the unemployment rate remains generally high, EU membership alone will not help directly and immediately. Nationalistic populism and the lack of capacities produce more radical ideas. The bilateral conflict with Greece negatively influences the interethnic situation in Macedonia. Ethno-mobilization is kept high through historical myths; at the same time there is a lack of political ideas to lead the country forward. For this and many other reasons, the current status quo is unsustainable for Macedonia.

Montenegro has achieved relatively much in a short time. The first step to Euro-Atlantic integration was taken through joining PfP and the logical question arose whether the country should continue on this path and move toward NATO membership. In 2007, the government of Montenegro gave first clear signs of its willingness to join the Alliance. In 2008, the invitation to join the MAP was extended, after Montenegro sent soldiers to Afghanistan. In mid-December 2010, the country officially was awarded EU candidate status. Montenegro is a successful example in South East Europe, something that is also publicly recognized by the EU, USA and countries in the region and beyond. Still, much needs to be achieved. Although Montenegro seems to be the most stable country in the region, corruption represents a serious obstacle for further progress and establishing rule of law.

Albania recognized that Euro-Atlantic integration is a process where countries are fulfilling criteria to become a member of the club. Forcing them to meet these standards on the regional and domestic level is changing their interstate behaviour and interstate relations. Belonging to the so called fourth wave of democratization, the Western Balkan countries need an institutionalized dialogue to solve the situation. Albania, which at first had no expectations about its entry in the EU, changed its attitude after 2000, when its politicians had become more receptive to Euro-Atlantic values and principles. The conditions that the EU put on Albania also changed the political elites. This helped to overcome the destruction caused by the financial crash of 1997, which highly affected the entire society and the government alike.

Significant progress has been made in recent years, but there is still place for improvement and strengthening of the democratization processes.

An interesting idea was presented during the workshop: organizing a kind of multinational battalion, potentially called the “Western Balkans Battle Group”² for EU missions. There, cultural and language similarities could be an advantage in forming this joint venture. Any gain in inter-European abilities will push the process of reconciliation in the region.

Euro-Atlantic Policy towards the Western Balkans: a Regional Perspective

Greece and Austria felt the need to do something to support the governments and let them know they share the European vision. The initiative by Austria and Greece (North and South of the Balkans) was a symbolic act in encouraging cooperation with the UN and the EU-27. The message³ that was sent shows the willingness to see the region moving forward. This was also a reminder to domestic political actors that it is up to them to reform. As for regional cooperation, activities in Croatia and Serbia are of high importance, especially for the three constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Cooperation of NGOs and think-tanks is crucial for capacity building in the process of European integration. There is some fear in the region that parts of the Western Balkans could remain outside of the EU. There, the EU needs to mobilize the attention of local protagonists in setting necessary reforms and to keep the EU perspective credible.

On the other hand, Turkey’s current role is becoming more significant, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many people have welcomed, other criticized, this new role of Turkey. In general, Turkey’s foreign policy towards the Western Balkans is bringing a new political shift and vision. The high level of political dialogue is the essence of Turkish presence in the Western Balkans. Turkey is trying to increase the growth of warmer relations between the states by encouraging investment facilities and development projects. Some would say that Turkey’s active role in former Ottoman territories presents a form of neo-Ottomanism and in that way creates a negative perspective on promoting and supporting regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.

As a multilateral player, NATO is assisting in security sector reform in the region and is also actively involved in defence reform. Also, implementing and assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina in its ambitions within the PfP program and in supporting EU forces is the result of 15 years of dealing with crisis management in the region. There is an enormous support for MAP and NATO is leading an open door policy in willingness, ability and security. But to achieve this, a functioning democracy reflecting these values is needed. Additionally, a new strategic concept for Bosnia and Herzegovina is needed and maybe similar strategies could be used like in the case of visa liberalization and road maps. Much focus was put on the defence sector and none on other elements which need to be fulfilled on the way to integration. That is why NATO has to play a more responsible role in the region. Integration processes are more

² Vision of “Western Balkans Battle Group 2020”, May 2010, Centre for Civil-Military Relations, Belgrade, www.ccmr-bg.org/News/3791/Download+our+Vision+of+%22Western+Balkans+Battle+Group+2020%22.shtml (access on 1.11.2010.)

³ In January 2010, the Greek and Austrian foreign ministers launched an initiative for a new regional plan and the enlargement of the EU by setting 2014 as a target date for the accession of all countries of the Western Balkans into the EU.

than just fixing the security sector; it implies fixing the entire society and thus must be a locally driven process.

(Best) Practices of Cooperation from other Regions

Analyzing the lack of regional cooperation in the integration process in the Southern Caucasus is like opening the door to an even worse picture. That part of the world is a good example for what is called “negative integration”. In the respective political systems in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan there are many obstacles in the domestic political arena and it is pretty difficult to call for integration, when the countries are becoming even more totalitarian. Neither the economic development nor the OSCE have been able to positively contribute during the collapse of SSSR when new ethnicity conflicts began. The deep economic divide may spoil integration. Similar to the Western Balkans, also the Caucasus region needs to understand that there is a limit of money the international community will invest in the future. Nobody is willing to engage when there are political leaders who are convinced they should hate their neighbour.

Military co-operation in the three Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) began after their independence during the early nineties, and from the start the three states co-operated closely on defence matters. Initially, they had minimal military experience which posed a rather challenging environment. They had Russia as a common threat perception but different Nordic and NATO nation teams supporting the build up of their forces. The most helpful fact was their clear orientation towards NATO and the Nordic nations from the start. Through early co-ordination in education, developing academies and improving expertise, they showed that problems could be manageable. The multinational character of the institutions is very important and it works on the basis of common culture, language, policies as well as on defence interests.

Conclusions

Bosnia and Herzegovina has achieved significant progress in the peace building process during its post-conflict period. It can be considered a stable country in terms of security, with no possibility to reiterate the internal conflict or to present a threat for the stability of its neighbours or for the wider region. At the same time, it is evident that Bosnia and Herzegovina is still not a fully consolidated and functional state. In the last few years it is increasingly lagging behind the region in Euro-Atlantic integrative processes and violated some of the basic international standards related to human rights. Therefore, first of all Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to change its constitution and election law to fulfil a decision of the European Court of Human Rights regarding the violation of minority and citizens rights. The elections and the establishment of a new government could be the chance for introducing a new proactive European agenda by the truly dedicated political parties. It is clearly no longer possible to extend the existing status; the opportunity offered by a new government should be used for putting the real interests of citizens as well as the economic issues into the focus of government policies. Through such policy orientation it might be possible to address the most critical challenges like organized crime and corruption, which are undermining the further strengthening of democracy and the functionality of state institutions. In medium term, the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into NATO is more realistic than into the EU. Much stronger efforts need to be devoted to the political conditionality and political maturity.

Overall, the international community lacks a clear agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Seen from a Bosnian perspective, some of the existing institutions like the OHR seem to create more problems than solutions. However, these issues need to be tackled with special caution as the OHR still possesses the authority and power to unlock a potential stalemate in case of a worsening political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Initiatives which have been proposed over the recent period by the international community did not produce desired concrete results. The ongoing policy of “wait and see” needs to be replaced by a more proactive one. Strengthening the independence of the media and empowering the civil society ought to be as useful tools in promoting Euro-Atlantic values as were during through the process of visa liberalization.

The perspective of integration into the EU and NATO creates a wider political framework common to all Western Balkans countries. The clear perspective of the countries’ future membership will additionally broaden and strengthen interstate relations in the region. Regional cooperation is most welcome in terms of the economic perspective for establishing a wider market open towards the inflow of foreign direct investment, which currently is on a very unsatisfactory level throughout the region. Bilateral disputes between countries need to be treated separately from the processes of integration and need to be a matter of international arbitration if not negotiable on a bilateral level. Competitive and clear benefiting processes for the entire region as the visa liberalization could represent useful role models for fostering a path of integration and fulfilment of the criteria in the demanding negotiation processes. Lessons learned from successful regional cooperation in other parts of the world should serve as useful tools in establishing closer ties between countries from the Western Balkans.

Recommendations to Decision Makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Fully support the approach that Bosnia and Herzegovina will become a future EU candidate after fulfilling the “5+2 conditions and goals” and substantial constitutional reform.
- Create a stable government with parties following the pro-European agenda during the given election mandate and capacity to make progress in political decisions towards integration to NATO.
- Immediately start negotiations for amendments of the constitution and election law to enable full implementation of the verdict of the European Human Rights Court and comply with international standards in regard to minority and citizens rights.
- Put economic policy in the centre of government interest and create clear incentives for policy makers and citizens.
- All strategies must have an element of local ownership and accountability of political elites towards citizens and the international community.
- Impose a strategy for the promotion of Euro-Atlantic integration in order to gain public support for foreign policy goals.

Recommendations to the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina

- The International Community should reconsider its existing strategies and practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it is obvious that the anticipated exit strategy and the ad hoc initiative did not produce the desired outcome.

- The elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina probably will not bring enough significant changes in political balance of power and any “wait and see” policy is just a continuation of lethargy.
- The processes of Euro-Atlantic integration should be encouraged to enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to follow the speed of other countries from the region and not be blocked through insisting on far-reaching changes of the constitution for which there are no realistic preconditions and political will.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina should be helped to catch up with the other Western Balkan countries in the integration processes. The application for candidate status – after the conditionality for OHR closure is fulfilled – in this regard could be useful.
- Empowering civil society to act as the tool for pressure on governmental institutions as the positive experience of the visa liberalization process showed.

Recommendations for the Countries from the Region

- Create policies within the wider framework of integration into EU and NATO which will strengthen bonds between the countries.
- Consider ways to additionally improve regional co-operation, particularly in the economic area within the CEFTA arrangement.
- Establish regional fora for Euro-Atlantic integration in order to be able to articulate a common voice from the region and to promote regional interests during the accession processes.
- Provide mechanisms through which countries that are advanced in their integration processes can support countries lagging behind in some fields.