

The International Community and Bosnia-Herzegovina¹

Among the questions related to the further development of security in the Balkans that of Bosnia-Herzegovina is a dominant one. The formula of one state, two entities and three nations should satisfy all existing interests in the best and most democratic manner. Nevertheless, if one would try to imagine such a development in some other environment, and having in mind the recent war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as other historical experiences – the state ones and the national ones – then such an outcome might become very questionable. Optimists, who believe that after the war and all the suffering a certain critical mass that supports peace, development and stability has been created after all, find that the international presence, as well as the willingness to keep it for a longer time, is a crucial component of future stability. And it is the very question of the length of international presence, which acts both as a controller and a protector, within which the possibility of preservation of this model should be viewed.

If the forces of the international community, which signifies political, military and economic engagement – that should, in time, lead to the creation of a new, democratic society – remain present in Bosnia-Herzegovina long enough, then this model could be expected to work. In such a case the return of refugees and displaced persons could be achieved, as well as the creation of pre-conditions for a multi-cultural existence and certain common prosperity. Of course, the key question is for how long? Three or five years would not be long enough, rather a decade or two should be optimal. In another, extremely pessimistic alternative, all forementioned hypothesis would fall apart at the very moment when this time period would be shortened, or if the international community would rapidly withdraw from Bosnia-Herzegovina. In that case the three-sides formula would dissolve, and conflicts over the rights to return and over the territory, revenge and similar things would begin, with all sides seeking allies for their cause abroad.

1. The process of stabilisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is being aggravated by all those factions of a domestic political scene that are finding the calming down of the overall situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina not in their best interest. In search for reasons for such behaviour one can start from intentions of particular structures on all three sides to maintain their political positions, their economic privileges and wealth gained during the war or unstable post-war times; to activities of radical nationalists that see every step forward towards consolidation of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a state as their own defeat; and of those who find it easier to hide their war crimes under the cloak of instability.

Problems and challenges arising from such activities by political actors may be recognised in:

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- pointing to the inefficiency of the Dayton agreement and the whole peace process,
- obstructing the accepted postulations within the peace process and agreed upon activities of the central government,
- concrete ignoring of principles of the peace process,
- use of political means for advocating for division of Bosnia-Herzegovina in their own communities and criticism of every move made by the international community.

In observing the actors and main conflict factors that are making the stabilisation process in Bosnia-Herzegovina more difficult, it is possible to point to:

- influence by political coalitions on national concepts,
 - political influence on freedom of religions,
 - partisan political influence on humanitarian, financial and military assistance and support offered.
- a) The influence of political party coalitions in Bosnia-Herzegovina (HDZ, SDA, SDS) on national concepts is showing characteristics of confronting interests and exclusive positions in their mutual relations, which is consequently being manifested in advocating narrow interests of partisan groups. Every sharpening of their positions is conserving national interests, which is exactly what these parties advocate, and at the same time opens space for mutual compromise aimed at maintaining power and positions. Within such a political constellation, withdrawal of only one national party from the political scene would obviously be seen as “abandoning an unprotected population” and ways for re-filling such a national vacuum would immediately be searched for. A nation that would eventually be left without its leading political party in Bosnia-Herzegovina would be seen as a national group without its political voice, without its political representation and leadership, left to the mercy of the other two nations.

Holding strictly to such a conviction on the necessity of maintenance of national identity and its political representation through national political parties, all three political parties are upholding a common belief that withdrawal of any of the three parties would be counter-productive. None of the national groups is ready to undertake such a “risk”; therefore the national parties remain the loudest political actors advocating the separate national interests.

The attempts by the Social Democratic Party striving at development of a democratic concept of civic society, pushing national division and separation aside, represent the challenge and threat to the national parties and their leaderships. Within a firm commitment to nationalistic exclusiveness and separation in national centres, the social democracy is being perceived as something foreign, forced upon Bosnia-Herzegovina, something that is against the national criteria of the population and deranging the existing constellation of political forces.

Experiences on partisan policies in Bosnia-Herzegovina so far are showing that party policies may be viewed on the level of political fighting in which any weakness of the opponent is being used for strengthening their own positions. In such a situation it is impossible to contemplate -some stimulative pluralism or acceptance of ideas of creative national development and solidarity, that is so much needed in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

National interests in Bosnia-Herzegovina are being observed through certain political demands through which the development of national identities is being sought, along with removal of any factors that could place it in a subordinate position. Unsolved

national issues are influencing the overall problem and impairing the possibility for achieving unity.

The impact of national interests may be determined in the following:

- influence of Croatian policy of protection of Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was especially accented in the times of late president Tudjman. This influence was implemented mostly through the institutions of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- influence of the Belgrade policy of co-operation with Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, through the institutions of the Republika Srpska;
- influence of Turkish and Iranian policies supporting Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, achieved through the central institutions of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federation.

In approaching the national issue in Bosnia-Herzegovina the understanding of national influences and interests is essential, since national inequality may be recognised in various political developments and attempts of achieving superiority of one of the national subjects over others. On the other hand, political relations are showing that Dayton-established entities, along with the complex structure of all institutions of Bosnia-Herzegovina (entities, counties, cantons, municipalities) are directly dependent on the party coalitions' policies.

- b) Political influence on religious freedoms and traditions of the Serb Orthodox church, the Islam, the Roman Catholic church and the Jewish community in Bosnia-Herzegovina has a considerable impact on achieving certain goals based on national concepts and identities, as well as on cultural and historical relations. As a result of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina the political influences on representation of religion and religious freedoms within the overall population were strongly present. The unreligious part of the population, as a minority, was almost completely marginalised. Political influences on religious freedoms resulted in uncompromising advocating for protection of the national identities represented, which led to the situation in which the voice of those that were critical of some moral practices was ignored. It can be expected that only after disappearance of the existing bias and present correspondence of interests some level of separation between the party politics and religious concepts will occur. This would, of course, create a strong foundation for the protection of true religious freedom and make way for mutual adaptation.
- c) Political influences of political parties in relation to humanitarian, financial and military assistance are, so far, having a very destabilising impact on the overall peace process. Through these channels various forms of assistance, mostly from abroad, are being directed to protection and maintenance of separate national concepts, which inevitably results in differences in processes of national development. Given the overall poor efficiency of state institutions, such distribution of assistance controlled by national parties helps the development of narrow partisan interests and local political interests, firmly based on national platforms.

The influence of the international community on these notions may be seen through attempts to re-direct internal political interests in Bosnia-Herzegovina toward more favourable mutual relations which could primarily lead to an increase in the living standards. In strengthening the economic and social development, national interests can also be taken into account, along with facilitating a wider internal co-operation.

Insisting on wider development concepts, which should have relatively quick effects, the international community should also firmly initiate the process of a considerable reduction of domestic military forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a reduction that could lead to almost complete demilitarisation. Due to political changes in Croatia, the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) found itself in difficulties; the Republika Srpska, due to the internal economic situation, is also facing problems in covering even the minimum costs of its military; and even a slight decrease in foreign assistance to the BaH Army would result in problems for it, too. Maybe now is the moment to start a radical disarmament process, which should be kept on a line of maintaining only symbolic forces within the two entities.

Objections stating that this would only increase unemployment could be answered by the prediction that through initiation of public works and overall re-vitalisation of the economy, this part of the labour force could be well used.

2. Are the goals set forth by the international community, namely the full implementation of Dayton, realistic?

In answering that question it is necessary to start from the external view of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a view that although divided, prefers the implementation of the Dayton Accord and posts it as a realistic expectation, both nowadays and in the future.

Viewed from the Bosnia-Herzegovina perspective, Dayton was both needed and realistic. But the political party structures that were supposed to act within the Dayton framework and in the direction of the build-up of a unique Bosnia-Herzegovina and the creation of pre-conditions for accession to Europe, not only had no interest in such a development, but were acting as obstacles to such attempts. This is connected with their incompetence, as well as with a still present conviction that creation of a unique state is something unacceptable, something that would lead to supremacy of only one nation – Muslims. This concept, present in the Serbian and Croatian political establishment, makes the implementation of Dayton more difficult.

A complex structure of institutions and entities created by the Dayton Accord has only partially solved the problem of overall relations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, therefore the goals of the international community regarding the full independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina were slowed down. Dayton is still being perceived as an expression of the international community's resoluteness on establishing the peace, and all the disputes and disagreements in the past five years were solved through a series of new agreements, conferences and concrete decisions rendered by the representatives of the international community.

In economic and political fields, with respect for cultural pluralism in a multi-ethnic state, special attention must be focused on efficient solving of economic problems and on creation and enforcement of a uniform tax system, all with the intention to demonstrate that a unified Bosnia-Herzegovina is permanently, not only temporary, in the focus of the international community.

3. If it turns out that the implementation of Dayton is not a viable option, what can the international community do to stabilise Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Where fear rules and where consequences of war are felt, the willingness for compromise is high. For this reason political maturity and responsibility of those who are in charge of the peace process is necessary. A firm fight against fear, preventing the conservation of the state of war and war-like relations, encouraging respect for human rights of each and every citizen in all parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina with recognition of

differences, represent the minimum activities that should be undertaken by the international community.

In times when international relations are characterised by ever strengthening global interlinking and stronger integration processes, the solution to economic and political problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina must be grounded on the creation of overall social understanding and the acceptance of fundamental values that must be acceptable to all three nations. The process of regionalisation, or cantonisation, that should not lead to “closed-ness” and separation, should demonstrate the existence of long-range gravitation of one side to the other, and that, in the peaceful environment, foundations for development of new relations can be built. Delegation of certain authorities from the central government to regions could foster spontaneous development of such relations and a stronger proliferation of natural connections based on the citizens’ interest.

The international community might consider introducing some corrections: Simpler provisions that would point to basic political, economic, cultural, educational, scientific and military parameters of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a state and as a society should be drafted. Within such process of a certain correcting of the Dayton Accord maybe a thought should be given to the creation of a constitution that would not be enacted by the will of the representatives of the international community but rather adopted by the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina. But the beginning of such independent functioning of Bosnia-Herzegovina is maybe still somewhat distant in time.

Conditioned with the willingness of the international community for a longer engagement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the implementation of Dayton represents the best way for stabilising circumstances in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At this moment it would be difficult to imagine any stabilisation that would not be grounded on basic contents of the Dayton Accord. If, however, concrete courses of action would be sought, then they should be viewed as those that could relatively quickly and efficiently help the development of new relations and create conditions for at least some level of normal life. The stabilisation of Bosnia-Herzegovina should occur on such pre-conditions.

Starting from such a definition of tasks of the international community, the principal courses of action could be determined as follows:

- a) granting the economic assistance that, although objected to in the developed world as soon as it was announced, represents the starting point for all other developments. At this moment Bosnia-Herzegovina is in a deep crisis that is a result of the war, the destruction, and the inefficiency of the post-war reconstruction. National divisions make the development of some concrete forms of economic life that could improve the life of citizens everywhere even more difficult. Economic aid should not only create conditions for the beginning of a more normal life in all parts of the country, but at the same time foster the understanding that Bosnia-Herzegovina is being included in the process of positive changes and that the international community is not only offering resources, but is also firmly supervising their use.
- b) opposing the nationalistic political forces that were initially resolutely rejecting the return of refugees and displaced persons and later accepted it only formally (under the pressure by international community) while at the same time using every opportunity to make it more difficult, the international community should firmly insist on the principle of supporting and demanding the return of all persons to their former abode, except in cases when there is no willingness to do so. This would counteract all those deviations and manoeuvres aimed at disabling the return, or making it more difficult. Of course, along with the

demand for enabling the return for all, the need for normalisation of the economy must be taken into account as well, where international aid is absolutely necessary. Short of creating some basic pre-conditions for normal life (employment, educational system, health care, etc.) there can be no permanent return. Examples of restored houses, even whole towns, where no one actually lives, are accenting this basic aspect without which there will be no return.

On the other hand, if within the next few years the return of citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina into areas where they used to live does not happen, the chances for stabilisation, for implementation of Dayton, and for true creation of a unique state will rapidly decrease. Namely, it is becoming apparent that in areas where governments with nationalistic character, Serbian, Croatian or Muslim, were established, and where the national ethnicum was changed, these new, nationalistic forces are prevailing and preventing others from returning, and by that creating a new, altered, national being.

Some analyses are showing that a seven year period is roughly the crucial time for displaced persons to adapt to the new environments in which they are presently staying. If that is so, then obviously it is the time when part of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina, presently located in various parts of former Yugoslavia, as well as all over the world, will try to keep their present abodes and completely write off the possibility of ever returning to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The present image of an economically destroyed, divided country not fully safe for return is certainly not very appealing.

- c) Democratisation of the society is a constant topic on international agendas for Bosnia-Herzegovina and efforts should be made to instill democracy into everyday life through political life, the mass media, the educational system, and similar institutions. Of course, the fact that the democratic traditions in these areas are minimal must be kept in mind, as well as that even those few attempts of introducing the so-called socialist democracy, have, due to the war, turned into nationalist hatred.

Nevertheless, democratisation is indeed much needed. It has to be an inseparable part of the creation of new relations; it has to be felt as a constant effort of the international community, showing in every step of the way that Bosnia-Herzegovina cannot be left as some isolated, backward island in Europe, and that all European democratic notions will be, over time, transferred into Bosnia-Herzegovina as well. Nationally tainted positions, with their national political basis, that will always recognise a threat to their privileged national positions in calls for democratisation, will represent the biggest obstacle in this as well.

But, by combined implementation of economic, financial, political and legal measures, the international factors may strongly influence the build-up of new democratic foundations. In this they should never feel discouraged by the slowness of changes, by ups and downs within this process, since they have to be aware of the environment in which they act, of the war heritage, as well as of the wider neighbourhood.

4. Croatian and Yugoslav influences on events in Bosnia-Herzegovina are still very significant. National demands that are being tied to national corps, namely its political-national representation, is something that will remain present in Bosnia-Herzegovina for quite some time. For this reason these external activities from Croatia and Yugoslavia are part of everyday political life in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which at the same time has an impact on developments in Croatia and Yugoslavia – namely Serbia.

Along with general, similar positions of Tudjman and Milošević on division of Bosnia-Herzegovina in two parts, the policies that were seeking strong national strongholds in

Bosnia-Herzegovina emerged. The Republika Srpska, with Serbian national leadership, and the Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, with Croatian leadership, were meant to be those lines separating Bosnia-Herzegovina from its Muslim parts, and in which, allegedly, national interests were being successfully satisfied. Dayton has recognised the Republika Srpska as an entity, while the Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia is undergoing a long process of its dissolution and incorporation into the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

But in spite of these formalised developments on the path of creation or dissolution of national parts, it is apparent that their presence is much stronger than just a formal division based on the existence of separate entities. For example, the national corps of Croatian provenience remained loyal to the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, although the matrix political party in Croatia has practically dissolved after Tudjman's death. In the Serbian entity, in spite of many wanderings in relations between Belgrade and Banja Luka the main support is still being given to a national political core that is nourishing good relations with Belgrade, searching there for the inspiration for its political action. Even the dramatic deterioration in the Serbian economic situation did not disable the maintenance of Yugoslavia – Republika Srpska connections, especially by those political forces that are, within the Republika Srpska, gathering around national characteristics.

Both processes of national homogenisation will continue to exist even regardless of changes in their national centres. Croatian announcements on reduction of aid given to Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Serbian inability to assist the Republika Srpska have turned the national corps against the matrix states. Even more so, it has influenced the national forces to gather even more firmly around the “protectors” – the national parties. The verdict against General Blaškić was a message to Croats that they may survive in Bosnia-Herzegovina only united, led by the HDZ, and after the apprehension of Momčilo Krajišnik the same gathering happened in the Republika Srpska, around the SDS.

These relations may change, on the one hand, by improvement of the economic situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and a return of the population to a new, democratic Bosnia-Herzegovina that will be neither under Muslim, nor Croatian, nor Serbian domination; and on the other hand the democratic changes in Zagreb and Belgrade will inevitably have a positive impact on change of attitude regarding the need for a new quality in relations between Croats and Croatia proper, Serbs and Serbia proper, the same as these countries will have to change their position towards Bosnia-Herzegovina.

5. New, post-Tudjman Croatia is entering into transition with a huge delay. As a country that is trying to discontinue with the policy referred to as “ten lost years”, Croatia is radiating influence on its neighbourhood, especially on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Actually, if one focuses on the principal parameters through which the international community is viewing the changes in Croatia: Respect of the Dayton Accord, return of refugees and displaced persons, and co-operation with the Hague Tribunal, in each of those the past and presence of Bosnia-Herzegovina may be found. Dayton is firmly built-in in the core of Tudjman's policy, return of refugees means also the return of Croatian Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Croatia and return of Bosnian Croats to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and finally, in all existing or future International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) lists, war crimes committed by Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina, or by Croatian forces in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, are being mentioned.

Therefore, present changes are very significant in a wider context as well. They have their value for Croatia, but they will also serve the international community as an example of what should be done in other places. In an attempt to demonstrate the significance of this Croatian leap forward it could be concluded as follows:

- it shows that after the fall of a charismatic person it is possible to achieve a painless reform of regime in spite of the existence of a strong military and police apparatus, of the full control over everything that was resulting in some profit, of the controlled mass media, and in spite of the strong national political party – the HDZ.
- efforts directed at solving the question of the organised return of expelled Serbs may be used as an important showcase in micro relations. The present announcement of the eventual return of 60 000 Serbs is minimal compared to some 1 300 000 inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina who are not living in their previous homes. This is the reason why this Croatian pilot program may be used as a good indicator for Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- development of the democratic institutions will depend on the pace of democratisation in Croatia, which should also serve as an indicator to neighbouring countries.
- Croatian participation in the programs for Southeast Europe (SECI, Stability Pact) opens the doors to Europe for Croatia, but also offers opportunity to Europe to accentuate the need for regional co-operation, regional solutions and the need for development of good neighbourly relations.

But, in the case of Croatia, some caution should be maintained. Namely, Croatian elections were, to large extent, the result of biology, and less of resolute political action directed towards changes. By that, all those expectations on fast development of the country, faced now with even stronger demands by the international community, may result with resistance in the majority of the population that is still firmly supporting the ideas of a national state and a national identity. If foreign economic support and assistance in lifting Croatia from its economic difficulties does not arrive soon, apathy combined with discontent with the new political leadership may take over, which could easily taint the present images of the expected new Croatian development.

6. Under the basic condition that the international community is ready to stay in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, and in the whole area of Southeast Europe for a long time, then it is obvious that there should be:
 - a) Unanimous political will for such long-term action.
 - b) Vast use of all instruments available – economic, political, legal, and in some incidental situations, even police or military.
 - c) Conditioned with stabilisation of Croatian political circumstances, Croatia may become a significant co-operative factor and partner that will help stabilisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
 - d) The pulling down of Milošević's regime and rise to power of some other political forces may lead to new possibilities for the international community to funnel its policy into Bosnia-Herzegovina in an easier way.

Viewed as a whole, it may be concluded that considering historic, civilisational, religious, economic and transport conditions the whole area of former Yugoslavia is interlinked and interdependent to such an extent that it is impossible to even contemplate some partial stabilisation of only one part or another. Bosnia-Herzegovina represents only a part of the need for a wholesome tranquillising of the situation, the creation of normal life conditions and the beginning of co-operation that should recognise the need for co-existence, good neighbouring relations and accession to Europe. These should, at the same time, be the principal goals of the international community.