European Integration, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Stability in the Western Balkans: A New Strategy

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Abstract

The February 2014 protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina have shown clearly that Bosnia-Herzegovina is still- 20 years after the signing of the Dayton Accords- the key country for security in the Western Balkans. These protests have also shown the limits of the influence of EU policies in the region, and have again sparked local and international discussions about the future role of the international community in general, and the EU in particular. Besides the discussion about quick and large-scale change to the Dayton Constitution, some observers and students of Balkan politics have pointed to the need for partial reforms, while others favour the idea that the international community should stop meddling in Bosnian affairs. The early reactions of EU officials to the events in Bosnia-Herzegovina have prioritised socio-economic measures rather than constitutional reforms. The following article stresses the importance of an increased EU commitment to Bosnia-Herzegovina under a revised and comprehensive strategy. The new strategy should include improving the economy as one of its priorities; however, the EU should also increase its efforts for constitutional reforms and assume more responsibility to make the Bosnian state functional. The article also highlights that recent events in Bosnia-Herzegovina have illustrated the urgency for a more decisive enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans and argues that the integration of the Western Balkans and Turkey with the EU are not rival processes but complementary. The article first examines the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans in the post-Dayton period and then makes suggestions to improve security and stability in the Western Balkans.

Key Words

Bosnia-Herzegovina, Western Balkans, Euro-Atlantic Integration, economy, security, stability.

Introduction

The early 1990s witnessed regime changes in the communist Balkan countries as well as the collapse of the state of Yugoslavia. The collapse of Yugoslavia resulted in several wars between Serbia and the former republics in the country that had promoted their independence. A war between Slovenia and Serbia in 1991 was followed in the same year by another war between Serbia and Croatia. In 1992 the Bosnian War broke out, claiming the lives of more than 100,000 people. The

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Bosnian War continued until the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995. It was US leadership and not European that put an end to this European war. The declaratory diplomacy that was used in European foreign policy failed.[1] The lack of political willingness and unity among the European countries was one of the most important factors contributing to the indecisiveness of the EC/EU during these wars, preventing European countries from taking the lead in international efforts to stop them.

Security and defence have traditionally been considered taboo in the European integration process.[2] However, the failure to address the crisis in the Balkans contributed to a reform aimed at strengthening European political and military capabilities.[3] The Franco-British St. Malo Declaration in December 1998 marked the first important step towards a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).[4] The ESDP was then agreed by the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999 and was established by the European Council in Cologne in June 1999. Step-by-step the EU has built up its political and military capabilities, becoming a central player in the Balkans in the areas of conflict prevention and management.[5]

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Strengthening the military and police responsibilities of the EU in the Western Balkans has not meant a departure from its traditional emphasis on soft power.[6] The EU has continued to pay attention to values which have been considered fundamental elements of European identity since the Copenhagen summit of 1973, such as respect for human rights, the principles of representative democracy, the rule of law and social justice.[7] EU soft power is being exercised through the influence it exerts on the neighbouring countries by promises of association and possible accession to European institutions.[8]

Despite the EU's increasing role in conflict prevention and management in the Western Balkans, the EU's efforts have not always been successful and have produced mixed results. That the common security and defence policies fall within the EU's inter-governmental category, and hence that the member states dominate the decision-making process, is one of the most important factors responsible for this. Moreover, the presence of other international organisations in the region and the regional policies followed by countries such as the USA and Russia are other important factors influencing the results

of EU projects in the Western Balkans. Finally, in the Western Balkans, the EU has faced a more challenging political scenario and has had to deal with post-conflict countries dominated by deep-rooted ethnic tensions. In this context, Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its fragmented society and complicated state structure, is still the most fragile country in the region.

> The establishment of the "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe" (SPSEE) in 1999 and the "Stabilisation and Association Process" (SAP) in 2000 were turning points in the approach towards the Balkans that was adopted by the international community in general and by the EU in particular.

The February 2014 protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina led once again to a questioning the functionality of the Dayton constitution and have intensified the voices favouring changes. Another subject central to the discussions triggered by these protests was the future role of the EU in Bosnia. As is the case with the Dayton issue, there is no consensus among international observers about the mission of the EU in the region. In contrast to calls to stop the international community's intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this article stresses the need for a more active EU policy, supported by a stronger economic strategy towards this country. Given that peace and stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina is interconnected with peace and stability in the Western Balkans as a whole, the article not only focuses on Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also argues that the EU should follow a more decisive enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans and Turkey.

The Euro-Atlantic Integration of the Balkans in the Post-Dayton Period

Since the end of the Bosnian War the EU has introduced a number of projects aimed at strengthening the role of the Union as a political actor in the Balkans. The EU launched the "Royaumont Process" under the French presidency in December 1995 to facilitate the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords. This process focused on promoting regional projects in the field of human rights, culture and civil society.[9] In April 1997, the EU General Affairs Council adopted the "Regional Approach (RA)" and established economic and political conditions for the development of bilateral relations with Macedonia, Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Albania. The RA covered regional cooperation,

market economy reforms, the protection of minorities, the rule of law and respect for human rights. This process excluded Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia, which were assigned to a different category as all three had signed European agreements and lodged membership applications in the period 1993-96. The RA outlined the borders of the future Western Balkan grouping, established the conditionality regime linked to the 1993 Copenhagen criteria without making explicit reference to accession and made the regional cooperation a prerequisite for inclusion into European institutions and policies.[10]

As far as NATO is concerned, its interest in the Western Balkans can be traced back to 1992 and the first deployment of its military assets in support of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) during the Bosnian War. Later on, in 1995-96, a NATO-commanded multinational Implementation Force (IFOR) was deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina to help police the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords. NATO sent further troops to Kosovo as part of the Kosovo Force (KFOR) after the coercive air campaign which ended Serbian control of Kosovo in 1999.[11] Like the EU, NATO developed its own regional cooperation policy in the mid-1990s under its Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. The PfP envisaged collaborative activities with third countries, such as joint exercises and exchange of military personnel. The PfP,

like the EU's enlargement policy, formed a bilateral platform involving individual partner governments and NATO. It became an important tool in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries in the region. In this context, PfP also led to a range of confidence-building measures between the armies of the Republika Srpska and the Bosnian-Croat Federation.[12] Today, all the countries in the region are members either of NATO, such as Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Albania, or of the PfP, such as Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

With the end of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the Balkans entered a new era regarding Euro-Atlantic integration. The establishment of the "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe" (SPSEE) in 1999 and the "Stabilisation and Association Process" (SAP) in 2000 were turning points in the approach towards the Balkans that was adopted by the international community in general and by the EU in particular. With these projects, the West moved away from its traditional policy of containment and intervention. Although the process was not absolutely clear, European integration of the Balkans seemed to be the new aim of the EU. The admission of Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia to NATO in May 2004; the granting of full EU membership to Slovenia in 2004 and to Romania and Bulgaria in 2007; that Croatia and Albania joined NATO

in 2009; and that Croatia has finished membership negotiations and became a full EU member in 2013 are clear signs of Western commitment in the region.

The Stability Pact was formed in the wake of the policy failures of the 1990s and in response to the pressing need for stabilisation in the Balkans. It was also the product of the growing awareness of the interdependence of the region. This pact, which has been described as the "most complex political venture of the 20th century",[13] was founded by more than 40 countries and international organisations. The Stability Pact was an intergovernmental body providing a forum for cooperation with no independent financial resources or means of implementation. It was basically modelled on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) with three working groups matching the three dimensions of this body. Working group 1 was focused on democratisation and human rights; working group 2 dealt with economic reconstruction and trade development, investment and infrastructure construction; and working group 3 was devoted to security issues. The Stability Pact, in which the EU played an important role, demonstrated the long-term commitment of the international community to the Balkans.[14] The Stability Pact was replaced in 2008 by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) as a new body to guide and monitor regional cooperation in the

Balkans.[15] The RCC was an important step towards the implementation of the principle of local ownership and is connected with the Southeast European Cooperation Process, SEECP.[16]

Aspirations towards closer European integration by the states of the Western Balkans had initially generated little support in the EU, which had envisaged a form of limited integration through cooperation and trade agreements and some form of association. However, the establishment of the Stability Pact has drastically changed the EU's approach to the Balkans and has held out the prospect of eventual EU membership. The EU contributed to the Stability Pact by developing the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). After the democratic reforms in Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the EU launched the SAP at the 2000 Zagreb Summit.[17] This new and ambitious process was specifically designed for the Western Balkan countries and consisted of six elements: i) the development of economic and trade relations with and within the region; ii) the development and partial redirection of economic and financial assistance; iii) assistance for democratisation, civil society, institution building and education; iv) cooperation in justice and home affairs; v) the development of political dialogue (including at a regional level); and vi) the conclusion of new Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA). The

most important element was the last, since this would create the basis for realising the others and open the way for eventual EU membership.[18] The effective implementation of the SAA is a prerequisite for any further progress towards EU membership.

The conditionality of the SAP was designed to accord with the situation of Western Balkan countries. The regional countries were supposed to introduce a market economy, privatise state-owned property, re-establish economic cooperation, respect human rights, minority rights and democratic principles and cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). These conditions had already been formulated at the 1997 EU Council. However, additional criteria were added on an individual basis in accord with the stage or flexibility of the reform process. The SAP is based on the 1993 Copenhagen criteria and it is rather a process whereby the Western Balkan countries prepare themselves for EU entry and start their reforms.[19] In June 2003, the Thessaloniki Summit confirmed the SAP as the main EU policy framework for Western Balkan countries.[20]

In 2001 Macedonia became the first country of the former Yugoslavia to sign the SAA with the EU, and this agreement was gradually signed by all the countries in the region except Kosovo. As for Kosovo, the EU started pre-accession negotiations with this country through an SAP tracking mechanism in 2002. This was followed in 2006 by a European Partnership Policy.[21] However, this process stalled after the declaration of independence by Kosovo in 2008 because of internal divisions in the EU over the recognition of this country.[22] In 2010 the EU reiterated that Kosovo had a European perspective in line with that of the Western Balkans[23] even though the road map for Kosovo was not clarified.

Since early 1999 impressive progress has been achieved in stability and security in the Balkans. The collapse of authoritarian and nationalistic regimes, first in Zagreb and then in Belgrade, created a new regional environment in which the initiatives of the international actors met with less resistance than in the past or actually received cooperation and support from the local leaderships. Progress in reconciliation, democratisation and institutional reform is evident in several countries in the region. Nevertheless, despite these positive developments, the Macedonian crisis in 2001 and the violence in Kosovo in 2004 have shown quite clearly that stability and security in the Balkans are still fragile.

The ongoing disagreement between Serbia and Kosovo over the independence of Kosovo and the tension between the Serbs in the northern part of Kosovo and the central administration constitute some of the major problems in the region. Macedonia, which was

on the brink of a civil war in 2001, is still not free from some serious political problems, even though it now enjoys much greater stability. On the other hand, the integration of Macedonia with the EU and NATO has been blocked by Greece. Another Balkan country, Albania, seems to be much more stable than it was in 1997; however, it has weak democratic institutions and often faces domestic political crises. As for Bosnia-Herzegovina, although the development and aid policies of international organisations and external donors were designed to stimulate local growth capacity, the country still remains heavily dependent on foreign assistance. More importantly, coexistence between the different ethnic groups still remains problematic and requires the continued presence of an international military force.[24] The February 2014 protests have indicated that Bosnia-Herzegovina is still the most fragile country in the region.

A stabilised Balkans will offer more economic opportunities for EU countries, which are already economically quite active in the region.

Within the framework of its long-term strategy of ensuring the stability and integration of the Balkans, the EU has assumed growing responsibilities in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict resolution in the region, and this trend is likely to continue in the coming years.[25] In 2001, EU mediation played an important role,

alongside the US, in the signing of the Ohrid Agreement between the Albanian minority leaders and Macedonian officials. This agreement, which improved the rights of the Albanian minority in Macedonia, brought to an end the military conflict between the Albanian guerrillas and the Macedonian army, which might well have turned into a civil war. The implementation of the Ohrid Agreement is now one of the key aspects of the relationship between Skopje and Brussels. In 2002 the EU was also successful in brokering the Belgrade Agreement between Serbia and Montenegro, which wanted to break away from Yugoslavia. Although the establishment of the joint state of Serbia and Montenegro was not a final solution for its status, the mediation of the EU contributed to the avoidance of an armed conflict between the remaining two components of Yugoslavia.[26] This process established a basis for a peaceful separation of Montenegro from Serbia in 2006.

As in other parts of the Balkans, Bosnia-Herzegovina has also witnessed the increasing influence of the EU in the post-Dayton period. Between 2002 and 2011 the High Representative (HR) of Bosnia-Herzegovina was also the European Union Special Representative (EUSR).[27] In January 2003 an EU-led

police mission took over from the UN International Police Task Force (IPTF) and, although limited in size and avoiding any active engagement in executive policing, it helped build and monitor the local police force. The EU carried out its first military mission under the "European Security and Defence Policy" (ESDP) in Macedonia (CONCORDIA) following an agreement between the EU and NATO in March 2003, which allowed the EU to have access to NATO planning resources. This mission was a serious test for the EU's ESDP and it was followed towards the end of 2004 by the replacement of the NATO Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia by the EU Force (EUFOR).[28] Operation ALTHEA in Bosnia was a bigger military operation than the previous one in Macedonia and showed that the EU could merge its military capabilities with its diplomatic and economic instruments.[29] In 2008 the EU established the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), the largest civilian mission ever launched within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The main target of the mission was to assist Kosovo authorities, particularly in the police, judiciary and customs sectors. The EU now plays an important role in the stability of Kosovo through EULEX, the EU Office and a double-hatted EUSR/Head of Office.

There is a general belief that instability in the Balkans may easily spill over into EU countries. The illegal trafficking of migrants, arms and drugs, and the links between the criminal gangs in the Balkans and those in Western Europe, as well as the possibility that international terrorists may use the region as a safe area for their operations in Western countries, seem to be the major concerns of the EU states. At the same time, a stabilised Balkans will offer more economic opportunities for EU countries, which are already economically quite active in the region. The EU has tried to establish links between the SAP and the diplomatic and crisis management initiatives of the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the local special representatives in the Balkans. The failure of EU stabilisation efforts in the Balkans would deal a serious blow to the EU's credibility, since it is in this region that the EU's security and defence policies are being tested.[30] In the words of Javier Solana, the former EU High Representative, EU foreign policy was initiated in the Balkans and the EU has invested too much to allow the countries in the region to slip away from the EU centre of gravity.[31] All of the above factors increase the importance of the Balkans to the EU, while for the Balkan countries growing EU influence means security, political stability and economic prosperity. Thus, the full integration of the Balkans within the EU seems to be the best option in the interests of the

Balkan countries as well as of the EU itself.

The EU was plunged into a serious crisis after the French and Dutch rejection of the European Constitution in 2005. The failure of referenda on the EU Constitution in two founding members of the EU has caused concern in the Balkan countries. "Enlargement fatigue" seems to be a factor involved in the outcome of the referenda in both of these countries. According to many commentators, there was a general feeling in Western Europe that in admitting 10 new members in 2004, eight of which were former communist states in Eastern or Central Europe, the EU had moved too far and too fast. Despite the fact that Croatia is now an official EU member, and Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia have been given candidate status, the mood in the EU has seemed to have become less accommodating to new applicants.[32]

Although most of the local leaders have tried to put a brave face on it and have insisted that the rejection of the European Constitution need not have a directly negative impact on their accession to the EU, the new situation has caused a slow-down in the enlargement process for all Balkan countries. Yet it has strengthened the hands of Euro-sceptics throughout the Balkan countries and slowed down reform. It is noteworthy that on the day after the French referendum the Bosnian Serb parliament rejected a police reform package regarded as one of the most important conditions in the negotiations of the SAA between the EU and Bosnia-Herzegovina.[33]

However, the Treaty of Lisbon, signed by EU leaders in 2007, improved the capabilities of the CFSP. In accordance with the Lisbon Treaty, a new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was to increase the influence of the EU.[34] A new European External Action Service (EEAS) was created (in 2011) by merging the Council and Commission foreign policy departments to provide a coherent and consistent support to the High Representative. As for the decision-making process, the Commission would no longer be able to make proposals in the area of the CFSP. The Lisbon Treaty also limited the CFSP instruments available to European decisions (on positions, actions and arrangements for implementation) while the principle of unanimity was confirmed for CFSP, preserving member states rights to cast a veto on specific policy proposals.[35] Despite these positive developments, the financial crisis in the euro-zone seems to have undermined the EU's renewed focus on the Balkans. Even though the formal commitment to Balkan integration remains and the enlargement machinery still rolls, there are strong disagreements between the Commission and the Council as well as among member states as to how to proceed with the integration process.[36]

> EU decision makers should be very careful regarding the definition and timing of the conditions, in which a balance should be struck between their aims and the political, socio-economic and cultural realities on the ground.

There is a widespread belief within the EU that European integration will not be completed without the full integration of the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia). However, the conditions of the SAAs, which are designed particularly for the Western Balkans, are more severe than those demanded from the Central and East European countries. The signatories of the SAAs are not only required to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria but also to participate in regional cooperation. Yet the SAAs do not offer any guarantee for full membership, even though they may constitute an important step towards European integration. Some of the Western Balkan countries are being considered as "potential candidates" for EU membership, but this term has no official definition and does not confer on the holder a de jure right to EU membership. It seems that membership prospects will depend very much on the dynamics of EU enlargement.[37] Although the strategy of stabilisation and integration followed by the EU towards the Western Balkan countries has produced some promising results, it has also been confronted by some important dilemmas.

Towards Greater Security and Stability in the Western Balkans

The EU's strategy and policies towards the Western Balkan states are of great importance for the political stability, economic prosperity and security of the region. Political conditionality is one of the most controversial aspects of EU policy towards the Western Balkans. The advocates of tough conditionality and of more tactical conditionality have different arguments to justify their positions. In the 1990s political conditionality became an important tool for the EU to force a policy change and to ensure the compliance of the Central and East European countries with its values. Its importance increased in the 2000s when the EU was faced with more challenging and demanding questions in the Western Balkans, Turkey and in its neighbourhood. Despite the fact that without political conditionality many of the changes would not have been carried out or would have taken longer for their implementation there has been a reaction to it in most Western Balkan countries.[38] EU decision makers should be very careful regarding the definition

and timing of the conditions, in which a balance should be struck between their aims and the political, socio-economic and cultural realities on the ground. However, once the conditions are laid down, the EU should keep to its commitments and stand by them. A watering down of the EU's accession criteria would send a wrong signal to the region and set a precedent for a new resistance to the reform process.

The EU should restore the credibility of its approach to the Western Balkans and formulate its priorities with a united voice. The differing priorities of different European institutions are contributing to confusion over the requirements to be fulfilled. For example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina the Commission has always favoured an end to the Bonn powers (such as removing public officials from office or adopting binding decisions) while the Council has been more cautious and keener on retaining an international presence. Divisions also remain regarding the powers of the EU special representatives in the post-OHR (Office of the High Representative) era. These and similar

internal divisions between the EU institutions and the member countries encourage the local politicians in the exploitation of EU division to their own advantage. The lack of benchmarks and clear guidelines creates ambivalence in the policy of the EU towards the region. The EU, for example, has failed to clarify the standards in the key areas in which Bosnia-Herzegovina needs reforms, especially as regards the police and the constitution.[39] Lack of clarity shows the EU's relative lack of interest in the specifics of a conflict and creates a space for local actors to manoeuvre, possibly legitimising initiatives that are in both spirit and practice far removed from fulfilling EU goals.[40]

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is de facto an international protectorate, conditionality is not working as "conventional conditionalities" as was the case of Central and Eastern European countries. After the Dayton Accords, the peace-building and state-building processes occurred simultaneously. Both of these processes were limited by the state structure that was shaped by the Dayton Accords. That both NATO and the

> That Bosnia-Herzegovina is composed of two different entities and that the legislation process can easily be blocked by an ethnic veto makes the situation more complicated. The EU should revise its strategy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina and a post-conflict paradigm should play a more dominant role.

EU have interchangeably played roles of "peace builder" and "state builder" made the imposition of conditionality more complex. Emphasis was put on the state-building agenda rather than the acquis. However, NATO conditionality during the defence reform process was successful due to the use of local triggers and strong international leadership, while the absence of such leadership, as well as a lack of a conducive international and domestic atmosphere, would in the end cause the failure of the police reform driven by EU.[41] Despite conventional conditionality not at play during the defence reform process, and that the power of the OHR rather than a socialisation process of local elites played a decisive role, the success of NATO clearly shows the importance of international leadership.

The EU should be more creative and contribute more actively to the solution of regional problems instead of waiting for the local countries to solve their problems on the risky and uncertain road leading to the EU. EU policies should consider the regional realities and take into account country-specific problems. The weakness of the state institutions and the fragility of democratic practices are important factors which make the possibility of crisis in the region more likely.[42] In addition, the EU has difficulties in overcoming the deep interethnic divisions in countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo. Although EU officials have underlined the ethnic problems in the Western Balkans and pointed out the need to adjust the process of enlargement to the specific conditions of the region since the first SAP annual report, there is a gap between the EU's declared goals and its efforts on the ground. The EU should divert further resources towards the promotion of inter-ethnic consensus and devote more energy to strategic thinking on how to address these problems.[43] The EU should have realistic aims and try to reduce the risks of conflict rather than eliminate them.[44]

> The future European and democratisation prospects of Western Balkan countries depend on the development of the middle classes that have slowly been re-emerging in the region in the post-2000 period

While Bosnia-Herzegovina signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2008 it has lagged behind its neighbours. Ongoing ethnic tensions in Bosnia-Herzegovina have prevented that country from carrying out the necessary reforms for Euro-Atlantic integration. That Bosnia-Herzegovina is composed of two different entities and that the legislation process can easily be blocked by an ethnic veto makes

the situation more complicated. The EU should revise its strategy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina and a post-conflict paradigm should play a more dominant role. The EU should not only focus on the outstanding political questions but also on the target factors influencing the likelihood of conflict.[45]

In 1995/96 there were 54,000 peacekeeping troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The number of ALTHEA troops was 6,300 in 2004, but in 2007 the number fell to around 1,600. The force now numbers some 600, and a single manoeuvre battalion of the EUFOR remains in Sarajevo. The tendency among EU members to reduce the number of EUFOR troops and the possibility of turning ALTHEA into a training and monitoring mission is raising questions about ALTHEA's ability to preserve a safe and secure environment in Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to the results of empirical researches the expenditure on international peacekeepers strongly reduces the risk of violence in the post-conflict situation. Given that Bosnia-Herzegovina is still a fragile post-conflict country, the presence of international combat forces is of great importance for its security. The EU should therefore show more determination in its commitment to Bosnia-Herzegovinian security and should not weaken the presence and mission of the EUFOR.[46]

Another crucial factor for the security of the Western Balkans in general

and Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular is cooperation between the EU and NATO. In 2003 the "Berlin Plus" Agreement was signed between the two organisations, guaranteeing access to NATO capabilities for the EU.[47] The main reason for the agreement seems to have been the problems in the handover of the Macedonia stabilisation mission from NATO to the EU. It was the first time that the EU had assumed responsibility for a military operation and it faced some difficulties. Yet this deal between NATO and the EU can also be seen as an attempt to establish ground rules for Macedonia and for other theatres in the region. The EU-led operations in Macedonia and later in Bosnia-Herzegovina were heavily dependent on NATO military resources. The EU forces in the Balkans now operate under arrangements which are known in NATO-speak as Berlin Plus.[48]

It is important to note that NATO, even after the formal handover to EU-led forces, has retained its military headquarters in both Macedonia[49] and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Though the NATO headquarters in Sarajevo and Skopje are small they have symbolic significance. The continued presence of NATO shows the challenges in implementing the July 2003 EU-NATO agreement on the Balkans. Generally these headquarters are working with the governments to secure defence sector reforms. But in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in

addition to that work, a NATO force has been given the task to apprehend indicted war criminals and to thwart the attempts of the militant Islamists to establish a foothold in that state. Also, the continued presence of NATO and US troops is of great importance in providing a degree of reassurance to the local population that EU forces by themselves cannot provide. This has been more the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where for many Bosnians of all ethnic backgrounds the record of the 1990s war proves that the EU on its own is unable to deal efficiently with a serious breach of security.[50] All the developments since the early 1990s in the Balkans have shown very clearly that it is very important that EU and NATO develop means and methods of cooperation to prevent any duplication or rivalry and to guarantee the overall security in the Balkans.[51]

The future European and democratisation prospects of Western Balkan countries depend on the development of the middle classes that have slowly been re-emerging in the region in the post-2000 period.[52] There is a direct correlation between poverty and security. Poor people are affected by different kinds of violence, such as ethnic-regional conflict, human and drug trafficking, terrorism, etc. There is a growing literature that points to the relationship between economic growth and security.[53] Research shows that levels of per capita income and the rate of economic growth are important factors

in reducing the risk of conflict.[54] That an estimated 30% of the Balkan population lives on $5 a day and that it is slightly worse than the highly vulnerable portion of the lower middle-class stratum[55] shows the fragile structure of the local economies. The high unemployment rates in Western Balkan countries are another factor undermining security in the region. In Kosovo, unemployment is very high, holding at 35.1% despite a new registration system that was launched in 2012, which officially reduced the number of the registered unemployed by 22%. This sharp reduction was the result of the new registration system rather than any improvement in the labour market. Moreover, the number of unemployed Kosovars with university education is rising, and there are few job opportunities for young Kosovars. There are thus significant weaknesses in the labour market of Kosovo.[56] Unemployment in Macedonia is also very high, at 28.8%, and youth unemployment was 51.7%, in 2013. As in Kosovo, there are deep-rooted structural impediments in the labour market of the country.[57]

Bosnia-Herzegovina is another country which has a high unemployment rate, with the officially registered unemployment rate reaching 43.8% in June 2012. The drastic difference between the registered and survey-based labour figures shows the existence of a large informal labour market and certain structural rigidities.[58] Unemployment is particularly high

among the young population (15-24), where it has reached 63.1%.[59] Although there is a certain amount of stability in the macroeconomic and financial sectors in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are serious problems at the microeconomic level. The 5+2 objectives/conditions put forward by the international community to close down the Office of the High Representative refers only to fiscal sustainability.[60]

> One of the most important consequences of the protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the fact that the economic problems have the potential to easily transform into ethnic conflicts.

Despite the impressive economic developments in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, poverty rates have remained high and constitute an important impediment to the socio-political stability in the Western Balkans. Moreover, the pattern of poverty in the Western Balkans includes quite a large segment of the local population living in extreme poverty (in 2005, 12% in Kosovo and 4.7% in Albania). Extreme poverty is particularly apparent in the Roma communities living in different countries in the region.[61] According to research conducted by the United Nations Development Program in

Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia in 2009 (near the start of the global and regional economic crisis), considerable tension between rich and poor was seen as a major problem. Bosnia had the largest number of respondents (88%) who saw rich-poor tensions as a problem. This even exceeded the percentage indicating the existence of the ethnic cleavage (79%). The second highest figure was in Macedonia where 57% of those surveyed indicated tensions between rich and poor groups. The combination of perceived intergroup tensions of both a socioeconomic and ethnic character differentiated Bosnia from other countries in which the research was conducted.[62]

The mass protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina in February 2014 have indicated the strong correlation in the Western Balkans between peace and stability and local economic conditions. These protests were triggered by the collapse of state-run companies which left hundreds of people unemployed in Tuzla. They spread rapidly to the more than 30 towns, including the major cities of the Bosniak-Croat Federation, and escalated when the party and government buildings in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica and Mostar were attacked, with some set on fire. Clashes with police resulted in hundreds of injuries, and the leaders of the Una-Sana, Zenica-Doboj, Tuzla and Sarajevo cantons resigned.[63] The demonstrations reached a critical

dimension when some protesters crossed to the Croatian side at Mostar and attacked some government and party buildings.[64] The abolishment of the cantons and of the Republika Srpska were also among the demonstrators' demands.[65] The possibility that the demonstrations could turn into an ethnic conflict drew the attention of the international community to Bosnia.

> That the UN-sponsored negotiations between Greece and Macedonia that have been continuing for years have brought about no result shows the necessity for the EU to take a greater initiative in this issue.

The fact that the demonstrations were held in Bosniak-inhibited areas and that the overwhelming majority of the demonstrators were Bosniaks has led to some discussions about the dynamics of the protests. Some Serbian and Croatian politicians insisted on the term "Bosniak Spring" instead of "Bosnian Spring", while there were other comments which called it the "Bosniak antibureaucratic revolution".[66] The politicians who considered the protests a Bosniak ethnic movement stressed that it was now time to create a Croatian entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. On the other hand, Milorad Dodik, the Serbian leader of the Republika Srpska, reiterated support for the Croatian demands of a third entity and argued that Bosnia-Herzegovina as a state has no chance to survive.[67] Moreover, he threatened a referendum on outright independence for the Republika Srpska if a deal on Bosnia as a confederation of three units were not possible.[68] The demonstrators had no homogenous structure and were composed of different groups. However, their demands and complaints, put forward during protests and in public plenums established in different cities, were similar, and basically economic and social.[69] Unemployment, difficult living conditions, dysfunctional local administrations and deep distrust of politicians constituted the main concerns of the protesters.[70] Reviewing corrupt privatisations of local companies, lowering salaries for official, and scrapping benefits and other payments to politicians were some of the concrete demands of the protesters.[71]

One of the most important consequences of the protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the fact that the economic problems have the potential to easily transform into ethnic conflicts. The existence of two different political entities and the cantonal structure of the Bosniak-Croat Federation make the decision-making process very complex and delicate. The inability of the Bosnian administration to produce consensus on

the main political and economic issues is outraging the Bosniaks who are suffering under tough economic conditions, while the centralisation efforts face particularly strong resistance from the Bosnian Serbs. Moreover, the majority of Bosnian Croats would like to create their own entity in Bosnia-Herzegovina.[72]

The EU should increase its commitment to Bosnia-Herzegovina under a revised strategy. The improvement of the Bosnia-Herzegovina economy should be included among its priorities. Another important aim of the EU should be the fight against corruption. Breaking the link between crime and politics would contribute to the long-term stability of Bosnia-Herzegovina.[73] Even though these aims are already on the EU's agenda, the EU's efforts are not sufficient to achieve them. One should not forget the fact that the most important problem in relations between the EU and the Balkan countries seems to be not so much the lack of ideas as the absence of the political will to put them into practice.[74] To promote the economic development in the region, the EU needs more resources than those offered by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II). The European Investment Bank, the European Commission, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development should increase their commitment to the "Western Balkans Investment

Framework".[75] The EU should pay special attention to the economic cooperation of the regional countries within the framework of the "SEE 2020 Strategy", which was sponsored by the Regional Cooperation Council. The realisation of this project, which aims to stimulate high and sustainable economic growth through greater competitiveness and create one million jobs in the region in the current decade,[76] should be carefully monitored by the EU. And, the EU, in cooperation with international financial organisations such as the World Bank and IMF, should explore further means to encourage economic growth and strengthen competitiveness in the region. The economic development and the reduction of corruption in the Western Balkans will make important contributions to the stability in the whole region including Bosnia-Herzegovina. The citizen plenums established by Bosnian demonstrators in several cities of Bosnia provide important information about the economic, social, and political concerns of Bosnian citizens. The complaints of common Bosnian citizens should be taken into consideration by EU officials. Even though the demonstrators were mainly Bosniaks, their economic problems are also representative of those of Croats and Serbs living in the region. It is important to note that some rallies were also held in Zagreb and Belgrade in support of the protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The EU's early reaction to the Bosnian protests underlines the need for socio-economic measures in the short term. While the EU again urged local political leadership to carry out the necessary reforms to improve governance, there is no indication that the EU will assume a major responsibility on this issue.[77] The EU should increase its pressure on local politicians to create a functional state structure. As Paddy Ashdown, the former high representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina, stated, the country should have some internal integrity before it can join the EU.[78] In other words, the new EU strategy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina should be a comprehensive one since the success of economic, social and other reforms are dependent on the functionality of the Bosnian state. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission concluded in 2005 that constitutional reform was indispensable in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2009 that the Bosnian constitution was violating the European Convention on Human Rights, since it required that the three-member Presidency and the parliamentary House of Peoples be equally divided among Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats through restricting others' access. However, the reforms that have been attempted by western countries since 2006, which have focused mainly on state-building rather than human rights, have yet to bring about any concrete results.[79] The EU, along with the US, should take the necessary lessons from these failed attempts, such as the "April Package", "Butmir Process," and "High Level Dialogue", and explore some new ways to carry out the necessary reforms to make the Bosnian state functional.

Macedonia's membership in the EU and NATO is of great importance not only for the domestic political stability of this country but also for the peace and stability of the whole region.

Relations between Serbia and Croatia and their policies towards Bosnia-Herzegovina are of great importance for the stability of the Western Balkans. The EU has made an important contribution to the "conflict-transformation" in the two countries and it seems that there is no longer any risk of war between Croatia and Serbia.[80] For both countries, the preservation of good relations with EU is more important now than the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina.[81] Croatia has pursued a "no-problems" foreign policy during its EU accession talks and has paid special attention to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Croatia backed Bosnia's NATO and EU bids and cooperated with EU and US diplomats in putting an end to the political crisis there. Croatia has also

supported Bosnian territorial integrity and promoted the integration of the Bosnian Croats.[82] The fact that Croatia has become a full EU member is not only an important contribution to the peace and stability in this country, but also in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Western Balkans more generally.

As for Serbia, which is a key player in the region, the EU's conditional diplomacy played a vital role during the creation and dissolution of the Union of Serbia and Montenegro between 2002 and 2006, even before the country's official EU candidacy. The union of Serbia and Montenegro, which was created by the 2002 Belgrade Agreement and mediated by Javier Solana, the then High Representative for the CFSP, was a temporary solution. During the transitional period relations between the two countries were shaped by the prospect of closer integration with the EU. The referendum on Montenegrin independence, which ended this union, was made in 2006 under the supervision of the EU and resulted in a non-violent separation of the two countries.[83] The Belgrade Agreement can be considered an instance of conflict prevention rather than of conflict settlement and resolution.[84] Another important example which shows the capacity of the EU to contribute to the peace and stability of the region is the fact that the socialisation effect created by the presence of the EU in Serbia influenced the Serbian

government`s decision not to militarily respond to Kosovo`s declaration of independence.[85]

On 2 March 2012, the EU granted candidacy status to Serbia[86] and accession negotiations between the EU and Serbia started in January 2014. These developments are of great importance not only in the promotion of democracy and stability in Serbia but also for peace in the Western Balkans. The cooperation with the ICTY has been the most important factor in shaping relations between Serbia and the EU since 2000.[87] Serbia had already signed a SAA with the EU in 2008 but it was suspended due to lack of cooperation with the ICTY. However, the prospect of EU integration has encouraged Serbian leaders to cooperate with the ICTY and the political atmosphere has also started to change. The Serbian parliament's apology in March 2010 for the massacre of more than 8,000 Bosniaks in Srebrenica was an important step towards peace in the region, even though the Serbian parliament avoided the use of the term "genocide". The insistence of some EU countries on cooperation with the ICTY as a precondition for any progress on its EU integration finally resulted in the handover of Ratko Mladic to the ICTY on 31 May 2011. The trial of the person most responsible for the Srebrenica genocide was a giant step forwards towards peace and stability in the Balkans.

> The examination of the EU's absorption capacity shows that the full membership of three Western Balkan states would not create a serious absorption burden for the EU.

However, despite these positive developments, the EU has been unable to exert significant influence on Serbian policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina. Serbia's complex agenda has forced the EU to devote enormous energy and resources into keeping Serbia on track while supporting the independence of Kosovo to the detriment of some other priorities in the Western Balkans, such as those regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina.[88] However, Serbia's closer integration with the EU in the future may offer some important opportunities for cooperation over Bosnia-Herzegovina between the EU, Croatia, and Serbia. This cooperation could play a key role in the political future of this country. Serbia has the capacity to pave the way to European integration for Bosnia-Herzegovina by encouraging pro-EU policies in the Republika Srpska. Moreover, Serbia, which is following a policy of neutrality, will also play a decisive role in NATO membership for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

From a constructivist point of view, it is possible to argue that the convergence of European and Serbian identities will take more time than was the case for Croatia. In contrast to Croatia, where the European identity was strong even before EU membership, the European idea in Serbia is not universally shared, and alternative identity narratives built around the myths of Kosovo and cultural affinity with Russia are challenging it. Yet the perception of the previous relationship with Europe as negative is another important factor weakening the European identity in Serbia.[89] Moreover, in the March 2014 Serbian elections, Aleksander Vucic and his nationalist Serbian Progressive Party (SND) gained a clear victory. However, even though during the Yugoslav wars Aleksander Vucic supported the idea of "greater Serbia", he has followed a pro-European policy since 2008. The important deal between Kosovo and Serbia in 2013, sponsored by the EU, could not have been done without his permission. Finally, even though he is a Russophile, Vucic has kept silent on the comparison between Crimea and Kosovo made by Putin[90] while Milorad Dodik, the leader of the Republika Srpska, has argued that the decision to join Crimea with Russia was legal.[91]

Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008 has strained the relations between Kosovo and Serbia. More than four years after independence, following the decision of the International Steering Group that Kosovo had substantially implemented the terms of the Comprehensive

Settlement Proposal (CSP), Kosovo declared the end of the supervision of its independence and the mandate of the International Civilian Office in September 2012.[92] In this new process, the EU will assume more responsibility for the full implementation of the CSP, the promotion of a multi-ethnic Kosovo and complete decentralisation and the implementation of the Kosovo-Serbia agreements.[93] Despite the strong EU presence in Kosovo, the fact that five EU members have not yet recognised its independence prevents Kosovo from having a clear European perspective. However, there is no legal obstacle to the signing of an SAA with Kosovo.[94] Kosovo is now participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process and it has engaged in the Stabilisation and Association Process Dialogue (SAPD).[95] This process will not only strengthen the European perspective of this country but also create conditions for the Serbian minority to be able to feel that they are an integral part of Kosovo's future.[96]

The EU-sponsored dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has played an important role in the reduction of tension in the region. It has produced a landmark deal, the "First Agreement on Principles Governing the Normalisation of the Relations", on 19 April 2013, which was complemented one month later with an implementation plan. The establishment of the association of Serbian municipalities, the integration

of all police in northern Kosovo into the Kosovo police force, the integration of all judicial authorities within the legal framework of Kosovo, and the 2013 municipal elections in northern Kosovo were the most important parts of this deal. Both parties have also promised not to block the other side's progress in their respective integration processes with the EU. The implementation of the other agreements reached between the two countries during the dialogue process, such as the ones concerning the regional representation of Kosovo, integrated border management (IBM), free movement of persons, the recognition of university diplomas, customs stamps, civil registries and cadastral records, are continuing despite some problems.[97] The most important challenge for Kosovo is now the integration of the Serbs in the north and with Serbia as a key country in the relationship between the Kosovar Serbs and the Kosovo government. The fact that Serbia took all these steps, despite protests from the Kosovar Serbs, also shows the importance of the growing EU-Serbian relationship for peace and stability in the region. In this context, it is important to note that the developments in Kosovo and in relations between Serbia and Kosovo are being followed closely by Serbs in the Republika Srpska. An independent Kosovo still has the potential to serve as a precedent for the Bosnian Serbs to declare independence of Republika Srpska. This likelihood seems

to remain at least theoretically on the agenda of the Bosnian Serb leaders until the recognition of the independence of Kosovo by Serbia.

> Turkey's full membership in the EU will also increase the credibility of the EU in the eyes of Balkan Muslim communities who consider Turkey their natural ally or protector, making EU a more powerful political actor in the region.

Another post-communist country in the region with deep ethnic problems is Macedonia. The Republic of Macedonia declared its independence in 1991 and, due to its peaceful political transformation in the 1990s, was considered a success story among the former Yugoslav republics. However, Macedonia found itself on the verge of civil war in 2001 and only avoided it as a result of mediation by NATO and the EU. The Ohrid Agreement signed between the leaders of the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority in 2001 initiated a new period in the political life of Macedonia. As a result, the implementation of this agreement became an important factor in the relations between Macedonia and the EU.[98] Macedonia was granted the status of candidate country by the European Council in December 2005, but the dispute over the name between Macedonia and Greece, which rejects the use of "The Republic of Macedonia" as its name, remains the main obstacle blocking the Euro-Atlantic integration of Macedonia.

Although the European Commission has made several recommendations to the Council to open negotiations with Macedonia since 2009, the Council has not decided on the Commission's proposals.[99] In 2008, Greece also prevented Macedonia from obtaining NATO membership. Macedonia brought this issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and in December 2011, the ICJ concluded that Greece had violated the Interim Accord between the two states. However, no pressure was put on Greece by either NATO or the EU in the aftermath of the ICJ judgement.[100] That the UN-sponsored negotiations between Greece and Macedonia that have been continuing for years have brought about no result shows the necessity for the EU to take a greater initiative in this issue. Macedonia's membership in the EU and NATO is of great importance not only for the domestic political stability of this country but also for the peace and stability of the whole region.

The integration of the Western Balkan states with the EU seems to be the best option for the interests of both sides. The concepts such as "enlargement fatigue", "absorption capacity" or "local

ownership" should not prevent the EU from strengthening its commitment to the Western Balkan states by developing more concrete and attractive membership prospects. Although the Western Balkan states were given assurance in 2003 that they might join the EU once they satisfied the conditions, they have still been offered no timetable[101] and the road to full membership is still full of uncertainties. The only exception is Croatia, which became a full member of the EU in 2013. The examination of the EU's absorption capacity shows that the full membership of three Western Balkan states would not create a serious absorption burden for the EU. Despite their important problems, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia are politically and economically close to the objective benchmarks of the EU. Moreover, these three states reached similar economic and political levels in comparison to Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia in the years of their accession, while having smaller population burdens than Bulgaria and Romania.[102]

Finally, Turkey's eventual full membership in the EU as a large Muslim country will strengthen political stability and security in the Balkans. Even though the possible effects of Turkey's EU integration at the international level have been comprehensively discussed in the literature, there is relatively less research on its possible effects on the Balkans. Turkey has a tradition of strong cultural

and historical relations with the Muslim communities in the Balkans that can be traced back to the Ottoman period. Turkey's full membership in the EU will also increase the credibility of the EU in the eyes of Balkan Muslim communities who consider Turkey their natural ally or protector, making EU a more powerful political actor in the region. During the Bosnian War, Turkey stressed the need for the use of force to end the Bosnian War in diplomatic forums, yet avoided any unilateral action that could have provoked the proliferation of the conflict throughout the region. Turkey supported EU action in the Balkans and sent peacekeeping troops to the region. Turkish troops sent to the Balkans were welcomed by the local community and have proved successful in their missions. Moreover, the increasingly close ties between Turkey and Serbia in recent years have resulted in the establishment of the tripartite mechanism between Turkey, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has created a new forum for the discussion of regional problems. Despite Serbia's later withdrawal, the tripartite mechanism has shown the ability of both key countries in the region to cooperate in a pragmatic way.

Turkey's integration in the EU will contribute to regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and strengthen the integration of the Muslim and Turkish minorities with the political and social systems of their own countries. It is also

important to note that the integration of Turkey and the Western Balkans with Europe are not rival processes, as asserted by some EU officials, but complementary ones. As a Muslim Balkan country, Turkey's integration with the EU can play a key role in European integration and in the security of the Western Balkans. Within the framework of the EU, Turkey, along with the other Muslim communities in the region, will symbolise the harmony between different civilisations and cultures and help to reduce ethnic and religious tensions.

Conclusion

The Bosnian protests in February 2014 have shown the fragility of peace and stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as in the Western Balkans. These protests have again confirmed that the Dayton Constitution is not able to meet the needs of the Bosnian state almost 20 years after the end of the Bosnian war. The main goal of the Dayton Accords was to put an end to the Bosnian War, and this was done at the expense of the rational functionality of the Bosnian state. The state structure, which is based on two different entities and ten cantons, each with its own government and ministers, has created a very complex bureaucracy. However, the lack of consensus among ethnic groups in Bosnia, as well as in the international community, has prevented changes in the Dayton Constitution thus far.

The international community should increase its commitment to Bosnia-Herzegovina to make the Bosnian state functional. Previous failures to introduce necessary reforms do not justify the argument that the international community should stop meddling into Bosnian affairs. The international community has created in Bosnia-Herzegovina a "de facto protectorate" which cannot function without external help. The international community-which created the Dayton regime-now has the responsibility to make the Bosnian state functional. The relative success of Dayton up to 2006 clearly shows the importance of international leadership. The reduced international commitment to Bosnia-Herzegovina since 2006 is one of the important factors behind the deterioration of political conditions in the country.

The initial reactions from EU officials to events in Bosnia emphasise socio-economic measures rather than constitutional reforms. Even though the EU again urged local political leadership to carry out the necessary reforms, there is no clear signal that the EU will play a decisive role in this process. The new EU strategy should focus more on the improvement of the Bosnian economy and the fight against corruption. The EU's policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina should not ignore the local actors and should take local state of affairs into consideration. However, the EU should

also assume more responsibility to carry out the constitutional reforms and should not leave the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the mercy of local politicians.

Finally, the recent events in Bosnia-Herzegovina have illustrated once again the inefficiency of the EU policy towards the Western Balkans and that the EU must develop and follow a more decisive enlargement policy supported by innovative economic initiatives towards the whole region. This comprehensive policy should also include Turkey's EU membership. As a large Muslim Balkan country, Turkey's integration with the EU can make an important contribution to lasting peace and stability in the region.

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