

# The International Community and Future Scenarios for Bosnia and Herzegovina

ANĐELKO MILARDOVIĆ

Political Science Research Centre, Zagreb  
Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, Zagreb

This conference paper, presented at Panel 3 "The future role of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina" as part of the international conference "Bosnia & Herzegovina - a Road towards Stabilization, Prosperity and European Integration" organised by the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs and held on November 5-6, 2009 in Budapest, Hungary, deals with possible future scenarios of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the role of key international actors will play in each of these cases.

## 1. Status Quo

This scenario would effectively mean the continuance of internal political conflicts between Sarajevo and Banja Luka, as well as asymmetrical relations between the Croat and Bosniak parts of the Federation. A status quo scenario would see a prolongation of the Dayton political system, without options for its improvement or reconstitution. Such a situation would mean further socioeconomic stagnation and degradation of mutual trust and respect among major political forces in the country and would provide fertile ground for escalation of ethnic strives. With Prud and Butmir negotiations proving unsuccessful, this scenario is highly probable.

## 2. Federalisation

As the Bosnian-Herzegovinian political architecture already features the division into two separate, self-governing entities, the Croat-Bosniak Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (further divided into ten cantons/counties) and the Republic of Srpska, with Brčko District being governed by both entities, further federalisation remains an open political issue. The present political system does not provide stability and unity, nor does it represent a stable basis for economic progress, as the multiple divisions of the Bosnian state create a heavy administrative burden that hampers development initiatives. While the dominant politics of Republic of Srpska show the tendency to further federalisation and relativisation of the common Bosnian state, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is destabilized by a strong unitarist approach of the Bosniak political elite in Sarajevo, which in turn fuels aspirations for further federalisation and creation of a third entity in Croat majority areas.

The current model of Bosnian-Herzegovinian federalism has so far proven not viable, as it is a result of a temporary solution created by the Dayton Peace Treaty which has over time become a permanent state of affairs. There remains a question whether different models of federalism might prove applicable in the Bosnian case.

## 2. a) The Belgian Case

The Belgian example of federalism, based on ethnolinguistic political and administrative communities, itself shows deep internal problems and cannot effectively be transposed to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This model would mean the division of Bosnia into three autonomous entities (Serb, Croat and Bosniak), along ethnic lines.

## 2. b) The Swiss Model

The stability of the Swiss federal system which is based on a long tradition of direct democracy, subdivision into small, self-governing cantons and coalition governments, is highly unlikely to be achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the Swiss model predates the existence of modern nations and nationalism which play a dominant role in Bosnian society and politics. This model would mean the dissolution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of Republic of Srpska and the creation of self-governing cantons on the whole Bosnian territory.

## 3. Modernisation and EU Accession

Political modernisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although from today's standpoint not very likely, should include strengthening of capacities of institutions of the Bosnian central state. While this process is, with limited extent and success, already under way, it is met with significant opposition from the Serb side as Prime Minister of Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik strives to maintain and further increase the autonomous and almost sovereign position of the Serb-dominated entity. Political modernisation is not necessarily synonymous with centralisation and unitarism, as it federalist solutions could also be combined with political reforms that would strengthen the state as a whole and bring Bosnia closer to European political standards. The Croat side shows voices that both support the creation of a third entity (which would further federalize the country), but could also favor the dissolution of entities and the creation of a decentralized state with regions not necessarily based on ethnic divisions which could provide a certain level of autonomy for all three parties. There is no clear way to modernisation (and thus to bringing Bosnia closer to the EU) that would be acceptable to the political elites of all three Bosnian national groups. As nation-formation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is already a vastly finished process it is highly unlikely that a pan-Bosnian national identity and a political culture stemming from it could be created (at least not one that would not be seen by Serbs and Croats as Bosniak nationalism masked as pan-Bosnianism). A civic culture that would accept the multinational character of Bosnia and Herzegovina (this means adopting some elements of Belgian political culture, while seeing the adoption of Swiss solutions as impossible) could provide a stable option for modernization efforts.

## 4. Renewed Armed Conflict

Although the levels of sports violence with ethnic and political backgrounds (Croat-Bosniak conflicts) do show some potential for low-intensity armed struggle in Bosnia and Herzegovina and dubious military and police cooperation arrangements between Banja Luka and Belgrade leave a lot of questions to be answered, a renewed escalation of armed conflict in Bosnia is not very likely. Taking in account that Serbia is economically too exhausted to launch a war campaign and Croatia, being a NATO member and a EU accession candidate, would not engage in armed conflict without consent from Western partners and allies, external factors are not strong enough to transform internal Bosnian contradictions into armed conflict.

## 5. Dissolution of the Bosnian State

Republic of Srpska Prime Minister, Milorad Dodik, uses threats of separation of his entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina for purposes of daily politics, but, without sufficient support from Belgrade (which is not likely to be shown in near future), the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a very likely scenario. Separatist tendencies remain high both among Bosnian Serbs and many Bosnian Croats, yet the political strength to turn such ideas into reality is not present.

## 6. The Role of the United States

The US foreign policy has since the War on Terror and the Invasion of Iraq lost interest in the Balkans region. Despite American military presence in Kosovo, as well as Bosnia and Macedonia, US diplomats have delegated the ongoing political problem-solving to the European Union. The US generally support the modernisation of Bosnia and its Europeanisation and would thus object to dissolution of the Bosnian state. Its military presence should prevent any possibility of renewed military conflict. The US do not show a clear preference for any type of political system in Bosnia.

## 7. The Role of the European Union

The European Union, while officially supporting further modernisation and Bosnia's EU aspirations, does not have political capacity and will to actually fulfil this mission. While the EU Copenhagen criteria do represent a clear framework for political reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, internal disagreements and particularist interests in EU members states do not allow a single position the future of Bosnia which would prove fruitful. The EU, however strongly opposes the dissolution of the Bosnian state and is thus suspicious of further decentralisation and federalisation of the country.

## 8. The Role of Russia

Regarding Bosnia, Russia clearly supports the Serb side, due both to Belgrade's ties with Moscow, as well as to Russian economic interests in privatisation and investment opportunities, especially in the energy sector in the Republic of Srpska. Russia provides support to Milorad Dodik's opposition to centralisation and the abolition of Bosnian federal entities and could even back up the Serb side in the case of dissolution of the Bosnian state, in order to counterbalance the changes in Euro-Atlantic international relations that have been created by the declaration of independence of Kosovo.

## 9. The Role of Turkey

Turkey has interest in the stabilisation of the Bosnian state and has interests in strengthening of the Bosniak position in Bosnian politics. It also sees Bosnia as political and economic ground for furthering Turkish influence on European politics.

## 10. The Role of Arab Countries

Arab countries, especially the oil-wealthy Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have shown great support for the Bosniak cause during the War in Bosnia and are trying to maintain their economic, political and religious influence in the country. They would vehemently oppose the dissolution of the Bosnian state and favor further centralisation and stabilisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Međunarodna zajednica i scenariji budućnosti za Bosnu i Hercegovinu

ANĐELKO MILARDOVIĆ

Centar za politološka istraživanja, Zagreb

Institut za migracije i narodnosti, Zagreb

Ovo izlaganje sa skupa predstavljeno je na Panelu 3 "The future role of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina" na međunarodnom skupu "Bosnia & Herzegovina - a Road towards Stabilization, Prosperity and European Integration" koji je 5. i 6. studenog 2009. organizirao Mađarski institut za međunarodne odnose u Budimpešti. Izlaganje se bavi mogućim scenarijima budućnosti za Bosnu i Hercegovinu te ulogom koju će u njima imati ključni međunarodni akteri.