
Is Bosnia-Herzegovina Unsustainable? Implications for the Balkans and European Union

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Abstract: Two U.S.-based political geographers survey the current state of affairs in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), characterized by increasing political tensions between its two constituent entities—the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska (RS). The authors examine ways in which recurrent calls for a referendum on RS’s self-determination/independence (from BiH) have charged the political atmosphere in both entities, delayed the formation of a central government in the aftermath of inter-entity elections in October 2010, and thus precipitated claims of BiH’s unsustainability. In a concluding section, they explore the broader implications of renewed conflict and territorial fragmentation in BiH, which include the mobilization of secessionist movements (and possible ethnic cleansing) in other contested regions in the Balkans and the former USSR and the possibility of renewed EU/NATO military engagement, with the attendant risks involving the EU’s relations with Russia and member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. 1 figure, 2 tables, 38 references. *Journal of Economic Literature*, Classification Numbers: F510, F530, H770, O190. Key words: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, European Union, Russia, Balkans, Dayton Peace Accords, Milorad Dodik, ethnic cleansing, Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks.

More than a decade and a half after the Dayton Peace Accords halted an ugly war over state integrity in southeastern Europe that left over 100,000 people dead, the state created by the Accords—Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH)—remains unfinished, significantly beyond war but not its polarizing legacy. The central government remains weak, the reform process is hindered by divisive ethno-politics, and the specter of territorial fragmentation looms anew. Once again, a leading Bosnian Serb politician from a dominant ethnonationalist party is calling for a referendum of “national self-determination” to decide the future of its “Serbian territories.” In 1991 that politician was Radovan Karadžić, whose Serb Democratic Party (SDS) hastily organized a referendum of the “Serb people of Bosnia-Herzegovina” on November 9–10, 1991, asking whether they wanted BiH to remain within the then-Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Champion, 1991; Dodatne, 2001). Since 2006, that politician has been Milorad Dodik, the Prime Minister (and now President) of Republika Srpska (the ethnically Serbian post-Dayton entity within BiH) and leader of the Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), who has repeatedly called for a “national self-determination” referendum in that territory. Such a referendum, should it be held, would be politically explosive, as was Karadžić’s initiative in late 1991, and call into question the entire 1995 Dayton settlement that put an end to the violence it spawned. In short, the present situation could again descend into armed conflict, having possible effects ranging from those already witnessed in the past (e.g., armed NATO intervention prompting diplomatic tensions with Russia) to those unpredictable or seemingly implausible from our current vantage point (e.g., mobilization of

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Bosniak sympathizers among Muslim immigrant communities within Europe and diplomatic tensions with members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference).

This paper explores the implications of the now increasingly strained relations within BiH for the country's future as well as broader European security. An initial section provides historical background on the past conflict and the resulting two-entity state structure put in place by the Dayton Accords. A subsequent section reviews Prime Minister Dodik's use of referendum rhetoric to enhance his party's political power in RS, political developments in the other BiH entity (Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina), in part a response to Dodik's escalating rhetoric, the failure to date of the two entities to form a new BiH central government following intra-entity elections in October 2010, and efforts by RS leadership to portray such a failure as evidence of the unsustainability of the two-entity state. A concluding section outlines a range of possible implications of renewed violence in BiH, which include the energizing of secessionist/irredentist forces in other hotspots in the Balkans and former USSR and the need again for an international effort to separate the combatants and devise a new framework for regional security.

HISTORICO-GEOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

The 1991 referendum or plebiscite organized by Karadžić was an unofficial but large-scale pseudo-event orchestrated by the SDS Party and heavily sponsored by the Milošević-controlled media. When it concluded, Belgrade television announced that more than a million Bosnian Serbs had voted, including those living in Serbia, with one official claiming nearly 400,000 voted "yes" and only 20 "no" (Champion, 1991).² The referendum was a political performance that produced what its organizers wanted, namely a Serbian nation from Bosnia voting overwhelmingly to remain within a rump Yugoslavia dominated by Serbia and its strongman leader Slobodan Milošević. The result was trumpeted as legitimating the creation of a separate Serb Assembly and ethnoterritorial entity within BiH. In November 1991, that entity did not exist, for there were no agreed "Serbian territories" in BiH. Four subsequent years of violent displacement and war, however, largely destroyed Bosnia's long-standing multiethnic settlement geography, segregating its territory into what the leading nationalist parties, armies, and militias saw as Serb, Croat, and Muslim (Bosniak) ethnoterritories. Territories subjected to ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs in BiH became ground for the parastate declared by the SDS on January 9, 1992, initially the *Republika srpskog naroda Bosne i Hercegovine* (Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia Herzegovina) but later simply called Republika Srpska. As far as the SDS and their supporters were concerned, Bosnia-Herzegovina was no more.

The December 1995 Dayton General Framework Agreement (GFA) affirmed ethnoterritorialism by internally dividing the country into two autonomous administrative entities—the Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (RS).³ They were joined by a weak central government that could make decisions only with the support and cooperation of representatives from both entities. The new Dayton state of BiH that replaced the 1992 Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina had internationally recognized sovereignty and territorial integrity, but the polity's historic and geographic multicultural "common life" (*zajednicki zivot*) was largely destroyed.

²Non-Serbs who showed up to participate could do so, but on a separately colored ballot. Few did.

³For details, see Holbrooke (1998), Burg and Shoup (1999), Toal and Dahlman (2001), Chollet (2005), and Hoare (2007).



Fig. 1. General location map of Bosnia-Herzegovina, showing the IEBL and major settlements.

The Dayton General Framework Agreement (GFA) was the outcome of painful compromises by all parties concerned. The supporters of a unified Bosnian state were forced to accept the country's internal division into ethnic mini-states, with a carefully named "inter-entity boundary line" (IEBL) dividing the entities (Fig. 1).⁴ Bosnian Serb ethnonationalists were thus deprived of their goal of seceding from Bosnia and uniting with neighboring Serbia and Montenegro. Nonetheless, the affirmation and legitimation of Republika Srpska, an entity created by means of widespread and flagrant human rights abuses, was their major achievement. Approximately 48 percent of the pre-war population of the territories that became Republika

⁴The term "border" was carefully avoided.

Srpska was non-Serb;⁵ the post-war population was estimated as nearly 100 percent Serb. Karadžić's "Serbian territories" had been created, and upon them a political entity, dominated by the SDS. Although the entity remained within Bosnia-Herzegovina under the Accords, its National Assembly, in the manner of many Soviet autonomous regions in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union,⁶ could serve as the basis for a future independence bid from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Further, as a result of the wartime population displacements and limited post-war returns, this bid could be justified on seemingly democratic grounds as simply "an expression of the national self-determination rights of the people of Republika Srpska."

Despite the weakness of its central government and the legacy of the war, BiH made considerable progress toward reconciliation and Euro-Atlantic integration during the first postwar decade (e.g., Ó Tuathail et al., 2006). Under pressure from the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the civilian office put in place to enforce the implementation of the Dayton GFA, officials in both entities agreed to a number of reforms that strengthened the central government and cooperation between them. Progress was made on refugee returns and defense reform, although police reform proved a sticky issue, as did certain constitutional changes needed to facilitate the country's continued progress toward greater EU integration (e.g., Ó Tuathail, 2005). The latter goal was embraced by virtually all BiH politicians. In April 2006, a major push by the international community and a cross-ethnic coalition to reform the constitutional structure of BiH failed by two votes (Hayes and Crosby, 2006). In the wake of the failure of this so-called "April package," the Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, whose SNSD (Party of Independent Social Democrats) was striving to displace the SDS as the largest party in RS, began to speculate on an alternative option, namely a "national self-determination" referendum in Republika Srpska.

Milorad Dodik was an unlikely successor to Radovan Karadžić. In the years preceding the Bosnian War, he was a young moderate social democratic politician from a small municipality north of Banja Luka. As a member of the League of Reformist Forces, Dodik spoke out against the "regionalization" policy of the SDS that was a prelude to the planned break-up of Bosnia by the SDS and its allies. Nevertheless, in the heat of the crisis over whether Bosnia should organize an independence referendum, Dodik cast his lot in with the SDS, supported the establishment of what became the secessionist Republika Srpska, and took a seat in the "National Assembly of Republika Srpska" in Pale. With a narrow Sarajevo-centered SDS clique at the center of the secessionist statelet, Dodik was on the political margins.⁷ He spent much of the war making money, mostly from cigarette smuggling according to press reports (Patriota, 2002). Dodik's wartime political positioning became the basis for a post-war career as an anti-SDS but pro-RS "moderate Serb" politician.

In the wake of the Dayton GFA, officials from the U.S. Embassy began a search for "moderate Serbs" with whom the United States could potentially cooperate to make the Peace Accords work. Milorad Dodik and Mladen Ivanić were two figures identified. Following two years of stalemated SDS rule, international officials encouraged then-RS President Biljana Plavšić to form a new non-SDS coalition government. After an attempt with Ivanić failed

⁵These figures are estimates, because it is difficult to calculate the exact pre-war population of the territories that became the RS because the IEBL bisected the existing municipalities and straddled some settlements. There has been no census in Bosnia since 1991. Crude estimates place BiH's total population (mid-2010) at 3.8 million (PRB, 2010, p. 9).

⁶Abkhazia had the status of an autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, whereas both Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia had the status of Autonomous Regions. This administrative status provided them with a bounded territorial polity and a legislative body, both of which became the basis for making higher status claims (see Beissinger, 2002).

⁷His official biography during this period cites him as a founding member of the Independent Members of Parliament Caucus, the only opposition group to the SDS in the RS Assembly (SNSD, 2010).

(because he would not include the Bosniak SDA party in the government) Dodik, whose RS oppositional group had since become the SNSD, was elected RS Prime Minister on January 11, 1998 in a coalition that included the SDA. In return for a more cooperative attitude toward the implementation of the Dayton Accords, Dodik's government was provided with \$5 million in emergency funding and promised a further \$45 million in project aid (e.g., Reuters, 1998). Dodik's government did indeed adopt a more conciliatory posture, and his cooperation helped pull the RS back from the brink of economic collapse and failure.⁸

Dodik's government lasted three years and fell after the SNSD captured little more than 10 percent of the vote in the RS November 2000 parliamentary elections. Turned out of office despite his success in rehabilitating the RS in the international community, Dodik devoted considerable energy to modernizing his party and turning it into an effective political force. SNSD improved its vote totals in the 2002 elections and was widely considered the most professional RS party. Dodik returned to power in February 2006 after the collapse of an SDS coalition government, becoming RS Prime Minister for a second time at the head of a new coalition. Dodik supported the aforementioned April package, but it was brought down by a concerted campaign by Haris Silajdžić, a former Bosnian Foreign and Prime Minister who used the issue to call for the abolition of Republika Srpska (Silajdžić, 2006). Dodik's popularity in the RS surged as he responded to this rhetoric with a threat of his own—an RS referendum on independence. The Silajdžić-Dodik rhetorical duel generated a heated reaction that polarized BIH once again along wartime lines. Because of this, and a series of other factors, the most significant of which was the waning power of the U.N. Office of the High Representative (OHR) in BIH since 2006,⁹ Milorad Dodik utilized the idea of an RS referendum to dominate political discourse in the entity and further consolidate his party's political and personal power. In October 2006, SNSD became the largest party in Republika Srpska, displacing the SDS for the first time. Dodik served as Prime Minister for a full four years thereafter, the first in RS to ever do so. And in October 2010, Dodik was elected President of Republika Srpska, avoiding a runoff vote by winning over 51 percent of votes cast.

REFERENDUM RHETORIC, INTRA-ENTITY POLITICAL DYNAMICS, AND THE ABSENCE OF A CENTRAL BIH GOVERNMENT

Table 1 summarizes the different occasions we have been able to identify where Dodik publicly pronounced the need for a referendum in Republika Srpska. Ambiguity and bluster are part of the performative structure of Dodik's referendum discourse (Maksić, 2009; Toal, 2011). With the international community failing to deter Dodik's demagogic performances, he has polarized political discourse and left little doubt in the minds of Bosnia's inhabitants about his sentiments. Speaking in August 2010 before the Bosnian elections to the Serbian newspaper *Večernje Novosti*, Dodik observed that Bosnia-Herzegovina has no future. "Bosnia is a burden for us," he stated, asserting that "We Serbs do not live in Bosnia, we live in the Serb Republic." He continued, noting "a multiethnic society can be implemented somewhere else, but in Bosnia it is impossible. Bosnia is a divided country in people's minds [and] ... a big mistake of the West" (Vujanović, 2010).

⁸It should be emphasized that Dodik's tenure during this period required personal courage, for SDS politicians and other extreme nationalists vilified him as a foreign stooge. Richard Holbrooke (1999, p. 364) observed soon thereafter that if more leaders like Dodik had "appeared, and survived, then the original Dayton design could work."

⁹The OHR is the international body charged with implementation of the Dayton Accords. It is empowered with the authority to supersede local authority and impose laws and policies to overcome local resistance to Dayton provisions as well as to exercise powers of removal, blockage, and levying fines (see Ó Tuathail, 2006, p. 54).

Table 1. Announced Proposals to Hold a Referendum, 2003–2010

Date	Reason for and subject of referendum
November 20, 2003	On defense reform
March 30, 2004	On preserving RS name
November 12, 2006	On police reform
March 9, 2008	On separation in the event of any attempt to “violently change the borders” of BiH and dissolve the RS
September 13, 2009	On NATO membership
October 18, 2009	On constitutional solutions in BiH (in case of imposition)
December 10, 2009	On expected OHR decision to extend mandates of foreign judges
January 10, 2010	On support for the Dayton Agreement

Source: Compiled by authors from review of BiH mass media from 2003

One method for measuring the resonance of Dodik’s RS referendum rhetoric in public opinion in the neighboring FBiH is a content analysis of the Bosnian-Serbo-Croatian key words *referendum* (referendum), *otcjepljenje* (secession/separation), *samostalnost* (independence, autonomy, sovereignty), and *nezavisnost* (independence) published (in article paragraphs alongside clear references to Republika Srpska) in the Bosnian daily newspaper *Dnevni Avaz* (Daily Voice) over the period 2006–2010.¹⁰ When the focus is narrowed strictly to the word *referendum* (alongside citations of Republika Srpska), significant eruptions of concern/debate in FBiH over the idea of an RS referendum can be identified. The first occurred after the failure of the April package and at the time of the Montenegro referendum on independence from the union of Serbia and Montenegro (May–June 2006). Dodik’s suggestion that a national self-determination referendum in the RS might be appropriate received an enormous reaction and coverage (ca. 130 instances in June 2006). The second surge in citations coincided with the lead-up to the September 2006 statewide elections (ca. 80 instances of the “referendum” keyword during September 2006), before receding dramatically. A third eruption was evident in February 2008 (over 20 keyword citations), as debate within Bosnia was intensified by linkage to Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence. The issue of an RS referendum reached its fourth and largest peak in intensity in January–March 2010, after the RS Assembly adopted a new constitutional law in January 2010 on the holding of referenda.¹¹ In the wake of the controversy generated by that legislation, Dodik suggested in March

¹⁰We summarize the results here only in a highly generalized manner. For a complete presentation of the methodology underlying the content analysis and its primary results, see Maksic (2009) and Toal (2011). *Dnevni Avaz*, headquartered in Sarajevo, holds nearly two-thirds of the newspaper market in FBiH. As the closest thing to a popular Bosnian national newspaper, it is a useful (although partial) resource in the study of Bosnia-wide political discourse. It tends to report extensively on RS nationalist rhetoric, which generates high levels of interest among its mostly Bosniak readership. Most major political statements and ongoing debates over the future of BiH are likely to be recorded in its pages.

¹¹We identified approximately 70, 140, and 120 citations of the keyword “referendum” in January, February, and March, respectively. The RS referendum law outlines the legal rules governing the holding of a referendum. According to the law, a referendum on issues can be recommended by the RS President, the government, at least 30 deputies, or at least 3,000 voters. The referendum text would be determined by a special resolution of the RS National Assembly. The results of a referendum are non-binding (see Blic Online, 2010).

Table 2. Results of Entity-Level Parliamentary Elections, 2002–2010 (percent of total votes cast)

Party	2002	2006	2010
Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina			
Social Democratic Party of BiH (SDP BiH) ^a	15.6	15.4	26.1
Party of Democratic Action (SDA) ^b	32.4	25.5	19.4
Alliance for a Better Future of BiH (SBB BiH) ^b	N/A	N/A	12.2
Croatian Democratic Union of BiH (HDZ BiH) ^c	15.9	8.0	11.0
Party for BiH (SzBiH) ^b	16.2	23.0	7.2
Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990) ^c	N/A	6.1	4.9
Democratic People's Alliance of BiH (DNZ BiH) ^b	2.3	3.6	4.6
Republika Srpska			
Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) ^d	23.4	46.9	43.3
Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) ^d	33.7	19.4	22.2
Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) ^d	10.4	5.1	6.4
SDP BiH ^a	N/A	2.1	3.0
SDA ^b	7.2	3.7	2.6

^aSupport is multi-ethnic.

^bSupport is predominantly from Bosniaks.

^cSupport is predominantly from Croats.

^dSupport is predominantly from Serbs.

Source: Compiled by authors from website of the Central Elections Commission of Bosnia-Herzegovina (www.izbori.ba), accessed March 10, 2010.

2010 that it was time to discuss Bosnia's dissolution, as it was (in a key phrase for him) an "unsustainable" (*neodrziva*) country.

Dodik's rhetorical gamesmanship brought him and his SNSD party considerable reward in RS. In contrast to 2002 elections, in which SNSD garnered 23.4 percent of the vote in elections to the RS National Assembly, the party doubled its share of votes in 2006 (to 46.9 percent) and decisively defeated its rivals (Table 2). SNSD's dominance persisted into the 2010 contest, returning to power in the 2010 elections (43.3 percent) despite modest gains by the opposition.

In FBiH, the 2010 elections were most notable for the victory of the moderate Social Democratic Party (SDP), a self-proclaimed multi-ethnic party (Table 2). Although its members are predominantly Bosniak, the SDP also includes non-Bosniaks who favor Bosnian multiculturalism rather than ethnic particularism. In 2010, the SDP received more votes (26.1 percent) than the Party of Democratic Action (SDA),¹² which had been the leading Bosniak party since the early 1990s. In contrast, the 2010 elections marked a sharp decline of the uncompromising Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina (SBiH) of Haris Silajdžić (from 23.0 percent in 2006 to 7.25 in 2010). In 2006, Silajdžić was elected to the position of Bosniak Member

¹²While SDA's official agenda embraces the multiethnic Bosnian state, it is widely perceived as the nationalist Bosniak party, whose voters are almost exclusively Bosniaks.

of the BiH Presidency, campaigning under the slogan “100% BiH,” which rightly or wrongly many Serbs in the RS viewed as a threatening vision of Bosnia without Serbs.¹³

The SDP victory in 2010 suggests a shift among the Bosniak electorate toward a more conciliatory politics, although it ultimately may mean little in terms of overcoming Bosnia’s divisive ethnic politics and separate-entity electorates. In his 2010 campaign speeches, Dodik sought to discredit parties that challenged the dominance of ethnopolitics and ethnoterritorial separation in the game of Bosnian politics. Speaking about the SDP, nominally a fellow “social democrat” party in BiH, Dodik dubbed it “the biggest deceit” because of its “fake multi-ethnicity,” while referring to prominent non-Bosniak members of the party as a “speculative Croat” and a “caricature” Serb (Panjeta, 2010). In the aftermath of the elections, Dodik stated that SNSD would not cooperate with SDP (Dodik, 2010).¹⁴

Five months after the elections, however, BiH is still without a government. The principal winners, SNSD and SDP, have been unable to agree on the basic principle for forming the government. While Dodik has advocated its quick formation, SDP insists the parties must first agree on a program of reforms. The parties also have conflicting visions on how to divide political offices. A major sticking point is the position of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of BiH, which is the collective head of the BiH government. This post is pursued by the SDP as well as by two lesser FBiH parties, the Croation Democratic Union of BiH (HDZ BiH) and the Croation Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990). While SDP leaders argue that the winning party (i.e., SDP) should receive the position, Croat nationalist leaders cite the principle of rotation to argue that it is the “turn” of a Croat to chair the council. In this quest, HDZ and HDZ 1990 have received the support of Dodik, who has portrayed the case as another example of Bosniak majoritarian aspirations.¹⁵

Dodik has also contributed to the growing drift between Bosniak and Croat leaders by openly supporting the idea of a “third entity,” to be created by splitting the FBiH in two parts. According to this plan, Croat nationalist parties would get a long-sought-after Croat-majority entity, completing the process of dividing Bosnia into three ethno-territorial units, or more accurately, three fiefdoms controlled by the respective dominant ethnopolitics. However, all Bosniak leaders reject dividing FBiH while keeping the borders of RS intact. RS political leaders, as one might expect, refuse to countenance “giving up” any territory (e.g., the formerly Croat majority region of Posavina [Sava River Basin] along the northeastern border of RS) to form the Croatian third entity they support. This being Bosnia, any Croatian third entity would not be free of non-Croats nor would it necessarily incorporate even the majority of Bosnia’s Croats.¹⁶

¹³As already noted, Silajdžić’s agenda of radical reforms aimed at strengthening the state served to legitimize Dodik’s nationalist rhetoric and reinforce his popularity among RS voters.

¹⁴He later softened his position, acknowledging SDP as a legitimate winner in FBiH and an indispensable party for forming a government at the BiH level.

¹⁵The clash reveals much about contemporary BiH. A modern multi-ethnic party is seeking to push a reformist agenda, which would make the country more functional and compliant with European democratic norms. Opposing it are parties that insist on Yugoslav-era policies that are nominally consociational and tolerant—e.g., the ethnic rotation of the chairmanship post among “constituent nations”—but are actually premised on a division of the spoils of political power on an ethnopolitics basis. The SDP leader Zlatko Lagumdžija is trying not to play this old game (actually a Communist/post-Communist hybrid), insisting for example on speaking of “citizens” instead of Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats, but the Dayton-mandated rules of politics in BiH means it cannot move forward without cutting a deal with nationalist parties. Thus BiH’s ethnoterritorial division and consociational structures guarantee the hegemony of ethnopolitics.

¹⁶For the history of this idea, see Toal and Dahlman (2011).

The absence of the central government has not substantially impeded the functioning of institutions at the entity level. While the deadlock at the BiH state level continues, the dominant SNSD formed the RS government shortly after the October 2010 elections. The current stalemate at the state level and apparent stability within the RS seems to support Dodik's thesis that the RS would function better without BiH. BiH's state-level institutions appear to be dysfunctional, whereas the RS seems to have its act together. This popular self-serving contrast in Serb nationalist political discourse of a functional RS and a dysfunctional BiH is, of course, highly misleading but a warrant for the more radical follow-on claim that the RS is sustainable whereas the BiH is not. But the RS and BiH are not equivalents; one is a sub-unit of the other. To dub the current BiH state "dysfunctional" is not necessarily to call the idea of Bosnia-Herzegovina into question so much as it is to call the current BiH Dayton-mandated ethnoterritorial division into question. Any time RS politicians dub BiH "unsustainable" they are, in effect, questioning the BiH created at Dayton and with it the agreement on recognition of the RS. There is a willful blindness to their position that is dangerous to peace and, indeed, the future of the RS.

IMPLICATIONS OF BOSNIA'S PARTITION

Presently, the persistent discord at the BiH level serves to reinforce Dodik's depiction of Bosnia as an unsustainable country. With this, calls for the country's partition as a solution to the impasse have returned. In Banja Luka in March 2010 Dodik reasoned that because BiH was not a sustainable country it was time for discussion of a "peaceful divorce" (*razdruzivanje*).¹⁷ Only foreigners were trying to maintain the illusion of BiH's functioning (*Dnevni Avaz*, March 23, 2010).

Dodik has taken measures that would make partition a more feasible scenario. During the autumn 2010 election campaign, his government ordered a plan to be developed for the demarcation of the IEBL that separates Bosnia's two entities. The move sent a classic double message. The official reason for this (unnecessary) move was attributed to property issues and census demarcation that ought to be clarified. The symbolic meaning was the reinforcement of its significance and its possible preparation to serve as a future international border rather than a sub-administrative division within BiH. A picture of Dodik before a large wall map of the RS, which appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, was suggestive in this regard (Champion, 2010). He renewed the demarcation calls in December 2010, stating that the RS would assert its borders unilaterally if FBiH refused to go along. Any acts of perceived overt demarcation would certainly provoke a crisis in Bosnia. It would also constitute a violation of the Dayton Peace Accords, which stipulate that any adjustment to the line must occur with the agreement of both entities.

The idea of Bosnia's partition has also received endorsement from several international observers. The Cato Institute's Ted Galen Carpenter (2011) agrees with Dodik that the creation of Bosnia was a "mistake." Citing the impotence of the central government, the weakness of economic development, and the persistent ethnic tensions, Carpenter argues that the US and the EU should withdraw their objections to a partition of the country. In recycling the categories of ethnic extremists and ignoring the agency of ethnic entrepreneurship in both inciting the Bosnian War and perpetuating its divisive ethno-politics, Carpenter concludes that Bosnians simply cannot get along and that partition could, somehow, diffuse this "political time bomb" (*ibid.*). Similarly, former U.S. ambassador to Serbia William Montgomery

¹⁷Word translated widely as both "divorce" and "partition," though the latter construction is probably too strong.

saw the solution to Bosnia's discord in giving the three ethnic groups a right not to accept a joint BiH state. In an opinion editorial in *The New York Times*, Montgomery endorsed Dodik's rhetoric and advocated granting Republika Srpska a right to hold a referendum on independence (Montgomery, 2010).

Any partition in BiH is likely to reverberate in an even stronger manner than the independence of Kosovo.¹⁸ Because it would be seen as the manifest success of a policy of ethnic cleansing, it would re-open a Pandora's box of uneasy and unsettled territorial situations in the Balkans and beyond in Moldova, Ukraine, and the Caucasus (both Russia's North Caucasus region and in the three independent Transcaucasian countries). The predominantly Bosniak population in the Sandžak region of Serbia along the border with Montenegro would most likely mobilize to demand secession. In August 2010, Džemail Suljević, chairman of the Committee for the Reestablishment of the Sandžak National Council (NVS), commented on lessons his group was learning from watching Dodik by stating that the RS was "created as a result of bloodshed and genocide." Denouncing Dodik's threats, he wondered "How is it possible that the RS exists? And what about Sandžak? How can a state exist within the state and here we are not even allowed to have autonomy?" The Serbs "have ... a republic in BiH, and we want one too" (interview in *Dnevni Avaz*, August 16, 2010). The situation within Sandžak is complicated by intra-Bosniak rivalries. In 2009, as part of its outreach effort to the European Union, Serbia created the National Bosniak Council as a means of providing Serbia's approximately 420,000 Bosniaks with some voice on issues related to education, language, and media. An election campaign to the Council exposed some significant divisions among Bosniaks, with Sandžak Mufti Muamer Zukorlic beating more establishment government-affiliated Bosniak leaders. Zukorlic, who has strong ties to Bosnia, has repeatedly warned that simmering tensions in Sandžak could easily erupt into violence (Teodorovic and Arnautovic, 2010).

Sandžak would only be the start. The ethnic geography of former Yugoslavia remains concentrated but also mixed in many other places, with cartographic fantasies of new territorial orders abundant. Thus, any partition of BiH may inspire separatist forces among Albanians in the Serbian Preševo Valley and western Macedonia, among Hungarians in the Vojvodina region of Serbia, as well as exacerbating the *de facto* soft partition within Kosovo and, beyond, in Moldova. The prospect of any RS secession has also broader international implications, drawing Euro-Atlantic institutions into renewed tension with the Russian Federation. If Republika Srpska moves toward a referendum, would factions within Russia support this? Do some see an opportunity for a Russian-orchestrated league of partially recognized *de facto* states, a grouping that would combine Transnistria, Abkhazia, Karabakh, (South) Ossetia, and (Republika) Srpska (TAKOS) (King, 2008)? The notion seems fanciful, but it is a scenario that concerns some and excites others.

One scenario that has long concerned Euro-Atlantic security authorities is Bosnia as a base for radical Islamic terrorism in Europe (Innes, 2005). NATO officials and Bosnia's own SIPA (State Investigation and Protection Agency) have monitored this closely. In June 2010, a terrorist bomb killed a policeman in Bugojngo: five were later indicted, included a local Bosniak influenced by radical Islamic ideas (Alic, 2011). Should Bosnia see renewed violence, this issue could become a great deal more complicated, especially if renewed fighting is seen as a "new war against Muslims." Demonstrations expressing solidarity with combatants are likely. Repression of such protests could lead to acts of reactive violence in a vicious circle of excessive police force and destructive urban terrorism (as witnessed in Belgrade in February

¹⁸For related information on Kosovo's independence, see King (2008).

2008 after Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence was recognized by the United States and other states). Conceivably there could be an inflow of new volunteers from neighboring states and some of the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Violent discord in Bosnia, in short, could be a renewed magnet for "clash of civilizations" warriors positing an eternal struggle between a Christian Europe and Turkish/Muslim/Islamic East. Lines of polarization in BiH could play in political tensions within the European Union over Islam and Muslim immigrant communities in negative ways.

Any move toward the partition of BiH carries the risk of renewed warfare. The protection of the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity is a core commitment of all Bosniak and multi-ethnic parties in the country. Most Bosniaks perceive the 1992–1995 war as a struggle for the preservation of Bosnia as a single polity, an objective that was affirmed in the Dayton Peace Accords. RS referendum scenarios are read as provocative invitations to rekindle the war. In the aftermath of the October 2010 elections, SDP BiH leader Zlatko Lagumdžija indicated that any attempt by Dodik to violate the Dayton Accords and partition BiH would be resisted "by all available means, including force" (Sajinović, 2010). Earlier then-President of Croatia Stjepan Mesić had stated that his country would intervene to prevent any possible attempt by Serb nationalists to break up Bosnia. Mesić told journalists in January 2010 that he would order Croatian army troops to cut off the corridor in northern Bosnia that connects the two parts of RS (Fig. 1) should Dodik decide to hold a referendum on the entity's independence (Croatian Radio and Television, 2010).

Any referendum on the RS's status could lead to violence even if political leaders counsel restraint and preach "non-violence." As 1992–1995 war demonstrated, it only takes the determined use of violence by a small group to ignite flames of war. Paramilitary organizations, often run by war veterans, exist in BiH today in the form of "security companies" and "hunting clubs." Hardliners in both the FBiH and RS may engage in individual acts of violence, which, given the environment of heightened ethnic solidarity, can quickly escalate. Furthermore, radical Islamic groups in the FBiH may react to RS secession by organizing paramilitary groups and insurgent activities. The 1992–1995 war veterans and other nationalist Bosniaks may also respond in a militant manner. On the RS side, there could be mass mobilization in defense of the self-declared state, while Serb right-wing nationalists might attack Bosniak returnees to the RS. Violence against Bosniaks in the deeply symbolic municipality of Srebrenica¹⁹ would quickly polarize all sides. It is highly unlikely that the current Bosnian Army, which has a unified command structure but distinctive ethnically organized brigades, would have the capacity to keep the peace and resist polarization.

These considerations do not necessarily suggest that the war will inevitably result if the RS pursues secession. However, the threat of violence is not only real, but likely. As Chivvis (2010, p. 104) notes, "were Dodik to hold a referendum on independence, the ingredients for a return to violence would all be there." Certainly, the state of heightened emotions and the availability of weaponry is a potentially deadly combination in the Balkans. Because pursuing a referendum is a politically risky move that would jeopardize his accumulated wealth and political power, it would seem irrational for Dodik to seriously pursue it. Few observers, however, calculated that he would advance this far with his referendum rhetoric and so openly dismiss the viability of BiH. Any referendum adventure would lead to many uncertainties for the RS, which includes not only the issue of international recognition but also its ability to survive a war that the secession could trigger. If Dodik were to let hubris get the better of him,

¹⁹For details on the massacre at Srebrenica in 1995, see *inter alia* Honeg and Both (1996), Rohde (1997), and Ó Tuathail (1999).

he could end up becoming not the historic figure that establishes RS as a permanent category in international affairs but its last leader.

The Bosnian stalemate is also a major test for the European Union and its new European External Action Service (inaugurated January 1, 2010). Catherine Ashton, the head of EEAS, described BiH in early 2010 as “the most unstable corner of Europe” (Traynor, 2010). In a visit to Sarajevo in February 2010 she stated that the EU, and its international partners, will never accept the break-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Dnevni Avaz*, February 18, 2010). The EU has invested considerable resources into state-building in Bosnia, and since the end of the war a diplomat from one of the EU countries has headed the OHR. Until 2006, the OHR had readily used its executive Bonn Powers to strengthen the central government. In the absence of a compromise among Bosnia’s leaders, the OHR’s interventionism has pushed through a number of significant political and economic reforms (e.g., Ó Tuathail, 2005). While this approach managed to set the foundations for stronger economic growth, improve the freedom of movement, and facilitate many refugee returns, many argue that it came at the price of reducing the Bosnian politicians’ incentives to reach political compromise (e.g., see Bellioni, 2009). But when the policy of interventionism wound down with the departure of Paddy Ashdown in 2006,²⁰ the result was not a new era of self-propelled compromise but of backsliding on reforms and divisive referendum discourse.

All major parties in BiH have declared support for the country’s path toward EU accession. Nonetheless, they have shown little willingness to sacrifice narrow national aspirations in order to conduct the reforms necessary to bring the country closer to the EU. Namely, BiH must overcome the dysfunction of the central government to make progress toward EU membership. An immediate task is the issue of state and defense property, the settling of which could clear the way for the long-promised closure of the OHR. However, Dodik and the leading FBiH politicians are far apart on how to divide the ownership of property between the central government and the entities. Although the government can continue to function without an immediate solution, the issue has turned into a symbolic battle. The RS parliament has unilaterally passed a resolution claiming that property located on the territory of the RS is owned by the entity. In contrast, the FBiH leaders have been firmly in favor of registering the property as belonging to the central government, portraying the RS position as an attempt to give the entities elements of sovereignty. The OHR voided the unilateral law by the RS Assembly, but Dodik and the Assembly have been openly defiant of this move.

If BiH leaders manage to find a compromise on the issue of state property in the near future, the OHR will likely close and the EU Special Representative (EUSR) assume greater powers. The EUSR’s declared mission is to coordinate the transition of Bosnia from the peace implementation stage toward European integration. While the EUSR does not have executive powers with which to enforce decisions, the EU member states are likely to empower the post with various tools (incentives and sanctions) such as the distribution of funds and visa bans.

Furthermore, additional breakthroughs, such as the reform of public administration and the passage of a law on a census, could lead BiH to EU candidate status within the term of the government that is currently being negotiated. However, major progress is unlikely to be achieved without concerted EU pressure. An initiative by Germany’s President Angela Merkel to break the deadlock in early 2011 came to nothing (*Dnevni Avaz*, January 19, 2011). This leaves a few key international officials²¹ to confront Bosnia’s crisis of “sustainability.” Their

²⁰The former British Liberal Democrat Party leader Paddy Ashdown was High Representative in Bosnia from May 2002 to January 2006 (Ó Tuathail, 2006).

²¹Namely, Valentin Inzko (current High Representative and EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina), Miroslav Lajčák (Managing Director for Russia, Eastern Neighbourhood, and Western Balkans at

task requires careful balancing. On the one hand, continued inaction and *laissez faire* attitudes can lead to reversal of years of remarkable gains and hasten the drift toward renewed conflict near the EU's southern borders. On the other, active muscular interventionism has internal risks and may also create problems for the EU's relations with Russia, which has traditionally supported the RS position. The new EU strategy for BiH is being drawn up jointly by Štefan Füle (Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Commissioner) and Catherine Ashton, and reportedly includes proposals for reinforcing the EU's presence in the country and a set of specific measures aiming at encouraging needed constitutional reforms. The toolbox of policies under discussion includes a mix of "carrots and sticks." There is reported discussion of a travel ban and asset freeze for politicians and officials held directly responsible for political deadlock (Sopinska, 2011). Ashton has indicated that BiH is high on her list of priorities (Traynor, 2010), and that the EU would accelerate its efforts to prepare the country's government for integration in the EU. However, this goal remains distant, as Ashton's most immediate task is to encourage politicians to first form that government. The current state crisis in Libya has undoubtedly distracted her and Euro-Atlantic institutions more broadly from this task.

CONCLUDING NOTE

Since 2006, Milorad Dodik's suggestion of a RS independence referendum has reopened war wounds that had been slowly healing in the first post-war decade. His portrayal of Bosnia as an unsustainable country has inspired the emergence of various partition and war scenarios, which threaten to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If there is a positive aspect of the current stalemate, however, it is that BiH is back on the critical list of problems before the Euro-Atlantic powers. The present impasse highlights how easily Dayton structures can be tweaked to produce dysfunctionality, and the persistence of long-standing obstacles that prevent Bosnia from becoming a more viable state. The battle for Bosnia continues.

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the European External Action Service, and a former High Representative), and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton (Lajčák's boss).

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