

CONCLUSIONS

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This year's debate was one of the most fruitful ever seen at the Regional Stability in South East Europe workshop. It truly reflected the sense of having reached a watershed moment in the development of the Western Balkans, with opinions and perceptions quite polarized.

The "movement of history" having catastrophically collided with the reality of ethnic exclusiveness and the depredations of individuals without scruples in the early 1990s, is being supplanted by the dynamics of the international security environment. Dynamics from which the Western Balkans cannot be totally isolated. On the one hand, the very real results brought about by the international peacekeeping (and peace enforcement) presence seem to be taking hold in some regions, while in others, they are not. Kosovo stands as a glaring example. The results of discussions show that the reduced (and still withering) presence of the peacekeepers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, although it may still be conducive to ethnic clashes, doesn't seem to be affecting stability on the ground for the current moment, whereas the situation in Kosovo, where nearly twice as many soldiers are present, shows signs of collapse.

Comparatively speaking, three features may explain the differences. For Bosnia-Herzegovina, nearly a decade has elapsed since the Dayton Accords. That is a decade of relative peace, following a half-decade of murderous strife. The active engagement of the United States and the (belated) harmonization of EU policy for Bosnia, including the prosecution of war criminals on all sides may also account for the difference. In contrast, only five years have elapsed since the Kosovo air war, which followed some 6 months of ethnic cleansing. Perhaps it is simply too soon for the international community to expect change in Kosovo.

Another important feature is the national status of both regions. Bosnia-Herzegovina, although still under the adroit tutelage of the UN, the OSCE and NATO, is a sovereign country, whose sovereignty is limited while the international community, in cooperation with able and willing local leaders, is rebuilding the tools and mechanism of normal statecraft. Kosovo enjoys no such prospects for the moment. It is administered by the UN, as such, it pleases neither Serb nationalists who imagine the birth of their nation as emanating from the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, nor the Kosovo Albanians, who think that their physical security can be ensured through the secession of the once autonomous Yugoslav province and its emergence as a national State, separate from Serbia, and logically, separate from Albania as well (one would presume). Sovereign status confers a sense of belonging to Bosnia while it is denied to Kosovars. This difference could also account for the relative stability enjoyed on the one side, and the continuing tensions on the other side.

Finally, a third feature, very much associated with the second one described above, has to do with Euro-Atlantic integration. As Croatia's candidacy to the EU is all but a foregone conclusion, that of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia-Montenegro, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should also come in due course. As such, Croatia can be credited for its leadership by example, even if much work remains to be done. The burden of success thus falls much more heavily on the "ownership" of integration processes. In other words, it is the communities themselves, and not the international actors, who must lead the way to Europe and Atlantic structures. But this is a promise more easily achieved with a sovereign status. Kosovo, with an unresolved status, cannot be a candidate as of yet, because status is associated with stability and acceptance of political, strategic and ethnic realities.

Concerning integration in Euro-Atlantic structures, the reader will have been struck by the comments of scholars and analysts from the region. While a decade ago, common wisdom would have said that only national sovereignty and ethnic heterogeneity could bring peace, now common wis-

dom indicates that the dissolution of national sovereignty into the multicultural and multiethnic pool of Europe is the key to success. That unto itself is not only a hopeful development in the political discourse of the region, it is also a negative proof that xenophobia may not have been the most crucial ingredient that triggered the Balkan wars of the 1990s. The recent Kosovo clashes will make it all the more difficult for that community, however it chooses to define itself in the future, to argue for integration. But if xenophobia is not to blame, then there is a need for the international community to better understand the dynamics of the Kosovo clashes, and to remove, as was done in BiH, the resistant elements or *agents provocateurs*. This approach, while it goes against the “general will” and even sometimes against the democratic will of citizens, has succeeded in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Perhaps it can be applied in Kosovo as well, and if Kosovars are growing tired of UNMIK, then they should get used to the idea of having the international community’s nose in their “business” all the more often and in depth. There seems at present no other way to lead Kosovo to a status of its own, acceptable to all sides, that would lead to the sort of tolerance-based stability enabling integration.

The continuing travails of the region cannot be divorced from the strategic environment characterized by the war on terror. The United States is not necessarily forgetting its commitments to the Balkans, but emergencies elsewhere in the Middle East, seen as more pressing, are straining the military establishment, and so resources need to be pulled out of the region to be applied elsewhere. Hungary, for example, has a double interest. The Balkans being in its very back yard, it has a special responsibility to monitor and actively participate in the stabilization process of the region for national, European and Euro-Atlantic reasons.

The other responsibility concerns a possible “debt of gratitude” to the United States for NATO enlargement, repaid in the form of participation in the war on terror, which is adding stress to limited capacities and resources. Canada is seen to be reconciling the need to participate in its traditional peacekeeper role with a new, more coercive role in Afghanistan, by enter-

taining the thought of in-depth rather than in-breadth global participation. There too, the pressures of the international environment may transfer into large commitments away from the Balkans.

It is hoped that the EU will be able to welcome the transfer of duties from NATO in the Balkans in such a way as to avoid an “authority gap” that would be filled by criminal elements that would roll back the progress made. In this view, the initiative of the OSCE and the UN OHR seem to indicate that there is not only a willingness, but also a capability to enforce the Dayton Accord commitments, and also improve on the progress already made. The peacebuilding and nation-building example of the Balkans could, in time, provide an effective model of conflict resolution for Iraq and Afghanistan, and here too the link between the Balkans and events that otherwise would seem remote is made all the more clearer.

This workshop has left the impression that the region is indeed at a crossroads, but that the initiative rests more and more with the Balkans themselves. There is a belief that peace is nearly self-sustaining, and that European values (and living standards) are providing a strong centre of attraction that could provide some inter-ethnic glue. This prospect eludes Kosovo so far. More study, more debate is needed on that topic. Perhaps upcoming workshops could concentrate on the intimate details underlying the failure of Kosovo to escape the cycle of violence.

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