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The Atlantic Initiative (AI) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, established in Sarajevo in 2009 by a group of academics and journalists concerned about the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly the slow pace of its accession to NATO and the European Union.

We believe that Bosnia's integration into NATO and the EU is of crucial importance for the country, but are equally convinced that lively and informed public debate before and during this process is sine qua non for its successful completion. In that spirit, we wish to initiate, encourage and enable this debate through a wide range of activities on various platforms in order to reach and involve multiple audiences.

The journal "Democracy and Security in Southeastern Europe" is only one of our projects under this stated aim, carried out in partnership with the governments of the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Norway. We are thankful for the encouragement from several non-governmental organizations in the region and particularly grateful for the support of the NATO HQ Sarajevo, the Bosnian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bosnian Ministry of Defense and the George Marshall Alumni Association in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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EDITORIAL



Nerzuk Ćurak

Demonstrations, the Demons of Nationalism, and the International Community:

THOUGHTS ON A YET UNEXPLORED POSSIBILITY

Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina – with its impossible, irrational, unmanageable, and schizophrenic political, legal, economic, and cultural structure – is presented to the world as an unsustainable country, a country with special needs. Its special needs stem from the fact that it is a country of the international community's design; and if the international community wants this Dayton BiH to function as a state, it must radicalize international policy instruments. Without this, BiH is approaching an ultimate agony, a condition for which the possible remedies may be anarchic and may include violence, and which could lead BiH and the region down the wrong path again, to another triumph of nationalism.

If a strong, subtly threatening intervention on the part of the international community has ever been needed, it is now, when, on a wave of popular dissatisfaction, kleptocratic ethnocapitalism is being rejected in favor of the basic right to autonomous personhood instead of to an abstract national identity. High Representative Valentin Inzko, aware of this, used the meeting of European Parliament members in Dublin in late June to send the message that strong support for changes in BiH is a necessity, because “success can be achieved only through a creative and stronger political engagement,”¹ including redefining the international community's approach in the country.

After a long period in which the policy of the international community has been stripped down to the unimaginative mantra that ‘Bosnian politicians must solve the country's problems on their own,’ Inzko's statement represents a

sea change – with the international community’s man in BiH returning the ball to the international community’s court, asking, de facto, for a new strategy that will return his marginalized Office to its practical and intended purpose. Inzko’s speech in Dublin was perfectly synchronized with analysis by our contributors, Bodo Weber and Kurt Bassuener, in which they offered constructive recommendations for renewed involvement by the international community in the Dayton state. Whether there will be such a renewal is the million-dollar question; but what must be perceived within the process of awakening that is taking place in Bosnian civil society is the creation of a (terribly small) space in which it is possible to isolate the primal scream of an nonhierarchical and decentralized citizenry from hijack by ethno-territorialized nationalism.

The international community would be wise to fill this tiny space, operating with the explicit attitude that, although it did not initiate the process of civil uprising, it stands fully behind it and behind possible future nonviolent rebellions. And this is the message that both Inzko and Peter Sorensen, the EU’s representative in BiH, should send to local political elites, so that cross-entity and trans-entity civil activism is strengthened.

Why is this important? Because although demonstrations in front of the Parliament of BiH have been generated by justified anger at politicians’ indifference toward the important request for the normative and social recognition of newborns via personal identification numbers, life in the dual Dayton state has taught us to be cautious – for there is no such request that Bosnia’s kleptocratic nationalist politicians will not translate into the most base ethnic question, using that time-tested recipe of Balkan understanding, asking “which constituent group is behind these demonstrations!” If no one group is, this may be the beginning of the end for these politicians, because if utterly ordinary human issues start being raised in the public square, the multiplication and dissemination of this message will demystify and euthanize these wretched officials and their political products (such as nationalized territorial entities), pushing them into the sewage pipe of history.

With typical nerve, Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik and his automaton epigones have hurried to label the civil uprising in Sarajevo as belonging to the (Bosniak) Social Democratic Party (SDP), which, if it were true, would actually be a great badge of honor for the SDP. The RS leader has always approached civil society actions in this way, with the aim to stop debate between civil society and political parties so that the political system remains the exclusive domain of no one but the political parties themselves, and to maintain a state design that is permanently nationalistic and territorially-anchored. If civil society enters the zone of the political, it will ask human questions and make human requests, dramatically loosening the anchors of abstract nationalisms. In the end, it could actually lead to changes in our ineffective political system – a human request of the purest kind.

By accusing the SDP of inciting unrest, Dodik is trying and, unfortunately, very much succeeding in sending the message to his electorate that no civil uprising can emerge from a unified Sarajevo – every such action is reduced by Dodik to a Bosniak prank. If I cautiously enter the field of post-modern biopolitics, it is not hard to recognize some ‘beautiful losers’ among the key civil activists who have participated in rallies outside the BiH Parliament; those who, due both to their name and their creative actions, are on the other side of ‘bosniakship.’ This adds to my sense that Dodik’s spin doctors are ready, from now to eternity, to interpret any uprising in Sarajevo – even those in which not a single Bosniak participates – as a Bosniak attack against Republika Srpska, in order to maintain a favorable position for the RS in BiH by banking on victimhood, neglectful of the real possibility that such irrational insistence on mono-ethnic preferential status will lead all of us, from the Bosna to the Sava and from the Una to the Drina, into a deep abyss. Of course, to follow the lead of the terrific Srđan Puhalo, Bosnian Serb parties could, in line with Puhalo’s thesis, request that this black abyss be named “the black abyss of Republika Srpska.”²

The strength of the rhetoric used by figures like Dodik to block the formation of any unity between Banja Luka and Sarajevo built outside of political parties and based in the ‘antipolitical activism’ of civil society is reflected in the request of protesters from Banja Luka that the public restrain from linking their uprising to the one taking place

in Sarajevo, so that it can remain expressly Serbian. This is a characteristic of closed, totalitarian societies and is not good for anybody, not even for the highly centralized and autonomous Republika Srpska. (Due to the strong influence of the RS president's discourse on political processes in BiH, this issue of our journal deals with the political rhetoric of Milorad Dodik systematically through the texts of renowned international and local academicians and on the premise of strict academic methodology.)

Clearly, we are facing a political system in BiH led by actors who do not want to allow Sarajevo to tap its anti-nationalistic creativity. The power of this nationalistic resistance must not be underestimated, because to do so could cost this proud development of democratic political culture dearly. Considering this, the international community, through its many echelons (the OHR, EUSR, EUFOR, NATO, the OSCE, etc.), cannot stop at merely declarative support to this civil uprising, but must recognize the opportunity to embrace this uprising of citizens as its most radical investment in an effort to leave the Dayton political system behind. For, if we stop fooling ourselves with the 5+2 conditions, this departure is the only necessary condition for withdrawal of the international community from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

NOTES:

- ¹ Valentin Inzko, "Rethinking the International Community's Approach," Conference of the Parliamentary Committees of EU Member States: Maintaining Momentum in the EU's Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy, Dublin, June 25, 2013. Available at: <http://www.parleu2013.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Valentin-INZKO-EN.pdf>
- ² Srđan Puhalo, "Kako preživjeti Sarajevo ili uputstva za srpske poslanike u Parlamentu Bosne i Hercegovine," Frontal Blogs, <http://www.frontal.ba/blogovi/blog/59971/kako-prezivjeti-sarajevo-ili-uputstva-za-srpske-poslanike-u-parlamentu-bosne-i-hercegovine> (accessed June 30, 2013). See number 6.

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