

Ten Years of Dayton and Beyond

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This is the opening text of a series of papers published by the Association Bosnia and Herzegovina 2005, which is organizing the “International Conference for Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ten Years of Dayton and Beyond” in Geneva, 20-21 October 2005 (<http://www.bosnia2005.org>).

While worldwide public attention has long shifted away from Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is still a considerable amount of “unfinished business” – both on the part of the international community and the local authorities. True to our conviction – that a democratic and pluralistic Bosnia and Herzegovina is only achievable if its civil society becomes even more active – we support a process that was established in 2003 and will culminate in an international event in October 2005 in Geneva.

Ten years after the Dayton-Paris peace accords brought an end to the war, and after ten years of heavy international involvement to help Bosnia and Herzegovina back on its own feet, progress is tangible and in many ways irreversible. The Geneva conference will thus build on solid achievements, but will mainly focus on the future and on those ‘internally-driven’ reform steps that are still needed to get the country moving towards Brussels.

We welcome the many academic, political and cultural events that will be held to commemorate the General Framework Agreement on Peace. The Geneva Conference aims to fit into this series of important events with a particular emphasis on urgent issues, which will be addressed at a more practical level, based on the preparatory work achieved by country- and issue-focused task forces that have begun their activities a few months ago. Most of the planned conferences are concentrating on achievements and failures; lessons learned and missed opportunities in the last ten years. We decided to focus on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because while we cannot change the past, we can help to shape the future of this country.

The Association Bosnia and Herzegovina 2005 has from the outset focused on three premises:

1. “Samoodgovornost” (or, as the internationals call it, “ownership”) by the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina
2. A process-driven and long-term initiative that will continue even after official commemorations have ended
3. A concern for the immediate impact of the Conference combined with the long-term goal of providing sustainable assistance for the country’s membership in the EU.

To achieve this, academic stocktaking alone will not do. We need to work on a European vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A vision that is concrete, achievable and bold at the same time. The country cannot be seen in isolation, and the regional context – economic, political, but also in terms of reconciliation – is of crucial importance. The “common good” of all citizens must be brought to the forefront. Yes, we all belong to a “collective” – be it linguistic, cultural, religious or otherwise. But we are at the same time as modern Europeans diverse citizens and individuals who share the same values and standards, as well as practical needs and aspirations. This “unity in variety” has been the guiding force in the process of European integration. If it works for Europe, why, then, should it not work for Bosnia and Herzegovina as well? Many in other parts of Europe fail to understand why ten years after the end of that terrible war, politics still seems to be too much oriented towards the past: what matters foremost for the “ordinary citizen” here and elsewhere are not failures of the past, but better and non-

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segregated schools, decent wages and pensions, a health-care system for all citizens, and – above all – more jobs.

There is much talk about a “new constitution” or even a new Dayton, and despite its great success to end a war there is a growing recognition that the overly complicated Dayton constitution and the structure of government it imposed on the country is losing its practical value as an efficient, and fiscally sustainable framework to manage the lives of four million people. However, the best and most perfect “new” proposal, which must be locally driven and owned by Bosnia and Herzegovina, will remain just words on paper unless there is a genuine will to make this community truly function.

At the same time, it is a truism by now and need not to be argued that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs a functional set of public institutions – lean and efficient government in the service of its citizens. This is a long-term effort, which cannot be drawn up over night in closed-door negotiations and over territorial squabbling. To build a truly European Bosnia and Herzegovina one needs to start from the bottom rather the top by defining what the needs and the will of the citizens are. Nobody starts building a house with the roof. Only after the civic concept of what Bosnian citizens want and need shall we move on to develop a legal and constitutional framework. The answer to the country’s challenge is not: let’s write a new constitution. The real challenge is to generate sufficient civic and political will to define the needs for a successful transition from IC-run “Dayton-Bosnia” to a Bosnian-run “Brussels-Bosnia.”

Clearly, this should not be regarded as a simplistic “exit strategy” for the international community. Quite the opposite. We advocate as the centrepiece of our initiative a vigorous regional, cross-border, trans-national, European and international partnership with a robust and realistic “EU-entry strategy” for Bosnia and Herzegovina – and the rest of the region.

If we agree that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs more “samoodgovornost,” then we need to ask ourselves how this can be achieved? Clearly, the international community needs to find a new role. The OHR has already begun the transition from an imposer to a facilitator, and with the High Representative being the EU Special Representative, from a Dayton-institution to a Brussels-institution. At the same time this trend puts an ever-greater burden on Bosnia and Herzegovina, and this is to be welcomed. But this increased role and responsibility also means greater commitment on the part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a more serious approach by politicians to dialogue and compromise; a search for common solutions; more trust and responsibility vis-à-vis the other, the erstwhile “enemy”, and last, but not least a full dedication of politicians to those who elect them, the citizenry. In short, what is urgently needed is the political will and unwavering determination to make this country work – both in a literal and in a symbolic sense. This can be done successfully only if there is a genuine will among Bosnia and Herzegovina’s citizens to take responsibility for their own future, and if they stop blaming other communities – including the international community – for all failures.

The Association wants to contribute to this daunting task that is still facing Bosnia and Herzegovina. But in the end it will be all the citizens of this country who will make or break the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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<p>In the coming weeks members of the Association will present in this column their ideas, their visions for Bosnia and Herzegovina, what they have achieved so far in their preparatory work for the Geneva Conference on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In doing so we also want to stimulate a public discussion true to the spirit of “samoodgovornost”. As we are a group of individuals working and acting in our own name, and not in the name of the countries from where we are, nor the organizations or the institutions where we are working with which we are working, we would thus like to invite you – the readers – to respond and share with us your thoughts.</p>

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