

A WARNING FOR BOSNIA



An insightful report just released by the U.S.-based Democratization Policy Council and the Sarajevo-based Atlantic Initiative issues a stern warning about renewed ethnic violence in Bosnia. The authors, who are seasoned Balkan analysts, are not predicting imminent violence, but their warnings need to be heeded by international actors who assume that the current status quo can last indefinitely.

The authors reserve their strongest criticism for the role of international agencies in their unwillingness to effectively employ Dayton enforcement mechanisms such as OHR and EUFOR. The “soft power” approach has enabled local political leaders to pursue their agendas unrestrained and there is no collective political will to resist. The Peace Implementation Council Steering Board is divided between members believing EU membership prospects will be sufficient to prevent further deterioration and capitals such as Washington and London who are increasingly frustrated. International disunity itself stimulates radical Bosnian agendas.

The report pinpoints a number of factors that encourage extremism and conflict, including inflammatory political rhetoric and hate speech, dysfunctional state institutions, and the impact of the global economic crisis. Political discourse in Bosnia has deteriorated sharply since the October 2010 elections with more politicians questioning the

existence of the Bosnian state itself and using the 1992-1995 war as their main reference point. In such a climate, popular fears appear to be rising.

Confrontational relations between political leaders and the deteriorating performance of governing institutions at every level have also contributed to the malaise. In the most glaring example of ineptitude and division, a new state government has yet to be assembled a year after general elections. Political leaders have been unwilling to compromise on policies that serve the public good and the basic needs of citizens are unmet. This raises anger with the state and a sense of growing insecurity.

The global economic downturn has also hit Bosnia hard. The onset of the recession and reduction in remittances exacerbates budgetary shortfalls, especially at the entity level. The lack of a state-level government compounds the damage by impeding sovereign borrowing. Bosnia is also bedeviled by a patronage network that infects the political system and drains the economy to a point of potential insolvency. Economic deterioration and rising social tensions can ultimately lead to violent social unrest that can assume ethnic dimensions.

The authors also describe the potential triggers for large-scale violence, whether these are generated deliberately or spontaneously.

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Football hooliganism and juvenile delinquency imbibed with nationalist indoctrination in the midst of a faltering economy can trigger mass conflict. Hooligan and criminal groups can be manipulated for political goals, as they are relatively easy to mobilize.

Minority returnees remain a vulnerable social group, as relations with the ethnic majority in their neighborhood remains strained. The increasingly heated political environment has added to their feeling of insecurity, especially in the RS entity. Given the current political context, some incidents of violence clearly have the potential to escalate into wider interethnic clashes.

Allegations about an increased terrorist threat in Bosnia, based on the absurd claim of growing numbers of Wahhabis, are not aimed at deterring such a threat but at branding Bosniaks as terrorists and delegitimizing their political aims. In response, the official Islamic Community is denying any security threat posed by a few dangerous individuals and calling all such references “Islamophobic.” Such positions foster polarization and mutual prejudice. Radical groups may thereby jump on opportunities created by the political elites to pursue their own agendas. These opportunities are growing while effective deterrents remain weak where the state is failing, corruption is widespread, borders are porous, and there is an abundance of readily available arms and ammunition.

The report also casts doubts on the effectiveness of law enforcement. The police are subjected to increasing political pressure to submit to ethnic political loyalties. Police capacity to uphold public order and security in the event of violent inter-ethnic incidents is in question and indeed the force would likely split along ethnic lines in the event of large-scale conflict. The professionalization of the military has also been stunted by politics and it could become embroiled in civil conflict, together with veterans’ organizations and private security firms.

The abundance of weapons remaining from the war, and the relative ease with which they can be obtained, is especially dangerous. Many of these arms, mostly AK-47 assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, handguns, and hand grenades, were stashed illegally out of a fear of renewed conflict. Apparently, every third citizen owns arms and every fifth citizen possesses an illegal firearm.

Despite all these negative trends, EUFOR has shrunk from 7,000 troops at its launch in December 2004 to an

estimated 1,300 today. The downsizing of the force has left it without forward bases outside Sarajevo. It lacks helicopter lift for operational purposes and unilateral withdrawals by several countries means the force is incapable of fulfilling its obligations. In sum, EUFOR has lost the ability to provide a credible deterrent and may fail to maintain or restore security.

The authors also issue a set of recommendations based on the calculation that the costs of catastrophic failure through organized violence outweigh the costs of effective prevention and deterrence. They argue that senior political engagement from the major Western powers is necessary to enforce the Dayton accords and prevent the country from falling apart. To achieve this goal, EUFOR’s strength, posture, mobility, and deployments need to be reinforced. Additional troops need to be brought in from EU and non-EU members and EU/NATO member PIC countries not presently participating in EUFOR should make significant contributions.

According to the authors, the restoration of credible deterrence would not only prevent a return to violent conflict, but would create the potential for progress on the political and social fronts by stripping the entrenched political elites of their ability to leverage fear. This would create space for citizens and politicians who want the country to function consensually.

Despite its many insights, the report is bound to be dismissed as being exaggerated and provocative by some EU members, particularly Germany, France, and Italy. They may even view it as a smokescreen for maintaining the U.S. presence. Several EU capitals refuse to admit that the Union’s soft power approach has become extremely wobbly and that weakening the OHR without a credible EU counterpart could eventually culminate in state fracture rather than propelling Bosnia toward EU membership.

The problem over Bosnia is both practical and psychological. Given that the EU is perceived as a weak, divided, bureaucratized, and slow responding factor, there are fears that if the OHR is replaced completely by an EU delegation the American presence would largely disappear. As a consequence, any effective response to internal violence would be seriously undermined. This perception itself can encourage political manipulators to test international reaction by stirring division and provoking conflict.

LITHUANIA'S OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP



During 2011 Lithuania is chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the world's largest regional security organization. It is the first time a small Baltic country was trusted with such a responsible and demanding position.

There has been much criticism questioning Lithuania's readiness to organize the work of the OSCE. Critics argued that the country's lack of experience made it unable to fully handle such a responsibility. Others argued that the fulfillment of commitment requires high spending, which would become a burden to Vilnius's already tight budget. And finally, most of the doubts focused around the possible gains and losses: in the event that Lithuania should fail in its OSCE commitments it would adversely affect its prestige and credibility in the eyes of the international community.

The political decision to bid for the OSCE Chairmanship was made by the State's Defense Council, led by the country's President, in 2004. After Vilnius's intentions were officially announced, it took two years of intense negotiations with OSCE members to reach the final decision. In 2007 during the annual OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Madrid, Lithuania was afforded the right to hold the Chairmanship for the year 2011. Despite the fact that Chairmanship could prove a difficult challenge, the government perceived it as an opportunity to strengthen Lithuania's regional and international role and be viewed as an active participant in international politics. The Chairmanship was also seen as a chance to prepare Lithuania for assuming the EU Presidency in 2013, and as a possibility for strengthening the country's chances to

obtain non-permanent membership at the UN Security Council in 2014-2015.

It is widely recognized that the Organization is facing a crisis. During the last decade, the OSCE suffered a dramatic decline in its international role, and is fixated on ineffective political discourse instead of seeking and acquiring key institutional reforms to revitalize its role. The lack of political will by OSCE member states is one of the major factors affecting the Organization's work. Some OSCE participants no longer view it as the right setting to address key national and regional security problems. Instead, they seek support from other regional entities, including the EU, the Council of Europe, and NATO. Decisions on issues that get referred to the OSCE often struggle for support, as in most cases solutions favored by one member country do not reflect the interests of another. OSCE decisions are made through consensus where every member has an equal vote with a unilateral blocking right that impedes progress.

These OSCE constraints directly affect the Chairmanship's work. The Chairing country, in addition to its other responsibilities, serves as a mediator in the complex decision-making processes and in the settlement of unresolved conflicts. Addressing such situations is often time-consuming, requiring diverse expertise and experiences in similar previous cases, and timely and effective negotiating skills. The decision-making process within the OSCE often has no timely and tangible outcomes, and progress is often impossible without the direct involvement of bigger member states, which in turn look to their own interests.

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The most recent patterns show that the right to hold the Chairmanship is also used as a mechanism to encourage democratic change. The Ministerial Council's decision to appoint Kazakhstan, Lithuania's predecessor, was highly criticized by human rights proponents. However, the decision by OSCE members to entrust Kazakhstan with the Chairmanship was intended to foster democratic reform in the country and to bring a new impetus to the OSCE's role in Central Asia. Although Kazakhstan's democratic progress has stuttered, Astana fulfilled the OSCE's international duties. It played a major role in handling the crisis in Kyrgyzstan, where Kazakhstan's regional knowledge and expertise proved indispensable. Astana also hosted the first OSCE Summit in eleven years that concluded with the adoption of the Astana Commemorative Declaration.

The OSCE approach will be tested again when Ukraine assumes the OSCE Chairmanship in 2013. Ukraine is currently criticized for a deteriorating in democratic governance and human rights practices. There are strong doubts that the OSCE can be effectively used as a tool to reform the Chair country, especially when the Organization itself is in dire need of reform.

As with all the chairing countries, Lithuania brought its own agenda to the OSCE. It was useful timing for Lithuania to take over after the OSCE Summit in Astana in December 2010 where member states issued the Astana Commemorative Declaration reaffirming their commitments to all OSCE norms, principles, and commitments. Even though the Summit failed to approve a more binding action plan for the Organization, Lithuania took the opportunity to use the Declaration as a major guideline for stating its primary goals for the Chairmanship.

The beginning of the Chairmanship also coincided with political instability in Belarus and the Lukashenka government's decision to suspend the OSCE mandated office in Minsk. Later on, post-election instability in Albania and movements that took place in North Africa also required an OSCE response. Lithuania managed to react quickly to the situation in Belarus. It initiated talks with Minsk and although it did not succeed in convincing the government in Minsk to extend the period of the OSCE resident mission, it obtained an agreement enabling monitors from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to attend and observe trials of protestors arrested during unrest following the December 2010 presidential election.



Lithuania's priorities are based on the OSCE's three dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental, and the human dimension. Particular attention has been paid to transport and energy security, resolution of protracted conflicts, promotion of sub-regional cooperation, strengthening the OSCE role in Afghanistan, tolerance education, and freedom of the media.

Energy security is one of the most sensitive issues that also relates directly to Lithuania's national interests. The country is heavily dependent on its single largest energy supplier, Russia, and is currently developing new projects to diversify its energy sources. Lithuania's ambitions to obtain energy independence are also challenged by Russia's and Belarus's intentions to build two nuclear power plants close to Lithuania's border. In this context, OSCE is widely seen as a suitable setting to promote timely dialogue on questions of energy security.

The resolution of protracted conflicts has been the priority of several Chairs. Lithuanian Foreign Minister and OSCE Chair-in-Office, Audronius Azubalis, has tried to inject new impetus into the process. In an effort to resolve the Transnistrian conflict, Vilnius has emphasized the resumption of official negotiations in the "5+2" format that had been suspended in 2006. The "5+2" format includes Russia, Ukraine, OSCE, EU, U.S., Moldova, and the Transnistrian authorities in Tiraspol. With significant support from Germany, the Chair has been able to host several meetings. Most recently, during the meeting on September 22 in Moscow, the conflicting parties agreed to resume official "5+2" negotiations.

In Georgia, the OSCE Chair supports confidence building through the Geneva process that regulates the crisis after the August 2008 war. In addition, the Chair seeks to restore the OSCE presence in the country.

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During his visit to Tbilisi on September 13, Azubalis stated that moves are underway to create a working group in Vienna that could partially replace the previous OSCE mission in Georgia. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Vilnius supports the work of the Minsk Group (11 mediating countries, headed by the Co-Chairmanship of France, Russia, and the U.S.), and believes that it is a useful format for further negotiations.

The OSCE Chair is also giving a priority to pursuing security and stability in neighboring regions. It is actively following the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East and works toward a strengthened OSCE engagement in Afghanistan. The Chair recognized the democratic aspirations of Egypt and Tunisia and has expressed OSCE willingness to share its experiences in building democratic institutions and creating participatory societies. Possible areas of assistance and cooperation were discussed during visits by OSCE delegations to the region.

Tackling instability in Afghanistan and the threat it poses to the OSCE region, especially to Central Asian member states, is one of the top priority areas for OSCE engagement. At the Astana Summit, participants reaffirmed their commitments to promoting stability, independence, and democracy in Afghanistan. However, Lithuania's expertise and engagement in the country is limited to the Provincial Reconstruction Mission it currently leads in one of the Afghan provinces. Lithuania has also addressed the growing drug trafficking issue and fosters cross-border cooperation between Afghanistan and neighboring Central Asian OSCE member states.

In the human rights dimension, the Chair has given priority to freedom of the media and the safety of journalists.



It brought attention to the fact that harassment and violent attacks against journalists remains a serious challenge across the OSCE region. In addition to its attempts to raise awareness of the issue, the Chair organized a conference on the safety of journalists in Vilnius in June 2011.

Although conferences and meetings are useful venues for addressing pressing issues, they do not yield timely results. The Chair's responsibility is to serve as a mediator in search of workable solutions. However, the key challenge the Organization faces is the unwillingness of OSCE states to make compromises in resolving long-standing disputes within the OSCE area. The Lithuanian Chair will serve as yet another example that the Organization needs internal reforms in order to transform itself into a more effective mechanism for generating security. The final evaluation of the Lithuanian Chairmanship will be conducted at the Ministerial Council meeting in Vilnius in the first week of December.

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Previous Events

CSIS Conference

TRANS-ATLANTICISM IN TRANSITION: A FOCUS ON CENTRAL EUROPE

Washington D.C., October 14, 2011

The Lavrentis Lavrentiadis Chair organized a conference marking the launch of the annual publication *Central-East European Policy Review 2011*. The conference over-viewed the latest political developments in Central Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on the transatlantic partnership and the region's role in the broader NATO and EU projects. The event was moderated by Janusz Bugajski and Heather Conley.

CSIS Conference

TWENTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Washington D.C., September 15, 2011

The Lavrentis Lavrentiadis Chair hosted a conference to commemorate twenty year anniversary of independence in the South Caucasus region. The conference reviewed developments and achievements in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, drew attention to the remaining challenges and highlighted the U.S. foreign policy priorities in the region. The event was moderated by Janusz Bugajski and Ariel Cohen.

CSIS Roundtable Discussion

SERBIA'S POLITICAL FUTURE

Washington D.C., July 11, 2011

The Lavrentis Lavrentiadis Chair for organized an informal roundtable discussion on Serbia's political future and its implications for the wider Balkan region and for EU and U.S. engagement. The discussion featured Dusan Janjic, Director of the Belgrade-based Forum for Ethnic Relations, moderated by Janusz Bugajski.

To access other previous events, please follow the link <http://csis.org/node/22209/event>

Publications

The Central-East European Policy Review 2011

CSIS, October 2011

The Lavrentis Lavrentiadis Chair released in October the Central-East European Policy Review. It addresses EU and NATO developments, transatlantic relations, regional cooperation, economic trends, and the political evolution of each Central European state. It also offers policy recommendations by ten distinguished authors.

Publication can be accessed by following the link <http://csis.org/publication/central-east-european-policy-review-2011>



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