

MONITORING

RE-COMPOSITION OF THE BALKANS

by

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Networking of the “Western Balkans” is taking place under the watchful eye of the EU. Supported by U.S. and opposed by Russia, Brussels is slowly, one by one, closing the open issues in the region

Sarajevo – Little Brussels

Brussels had long searched for a defined approach to Southeast European countries until it finally came up with a strategy which can and has to bring the “Western Balkans” region to the EU. Certainly the most important fact is that the EU accession is open to all countries in the region before which the “fourth Yugoslavia” (Western Balkans) will be created as “economic, political, multiethnic and multicultural community, the stability and safety factor in the soft underbelly of Europe,” under the full protectorate of Brussels.

NETWORKING: After the failure of referendum in Ireland, huge problems with new members Bulgaria and Romania and increasing differences of opinion regarding internal organization of the “European 27”, the issue of European Union enlargement to cover “Western Balkans” is treated in Brussels like – a second-rater.

The “fatigue with enlargement” is evident, while in public discussions Euro-technocrats state “citizens’ concern” and “EU’s absorption capacity”. The surveys indeed show that the percentage of those supporting the EU enlargement in countries like Germany, France and Great Britain, dropped from 60 percents to only one third in just two years. However, attentive analysts know that for the last couple of years a strategy is being implemented from the EU’s seat towards the countries of the so-called “Western Balkans” (countries created on the territory of former Yugoslavia, except for Slovenia) on their re-networking into a loose community.

ROUNDING UP: If establishing Kant’s “perpetual peace” is the essence standing behind the concept of European Union, then it has to prove itself capable to establish peace, primarily on its own territory – which the “Western Balkans” is surely a part of. This means to replace the “American Peace” (*Pax Americana*) established with the U.S. interventions in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, with the “European Peace” (*Pax Europaea*). “EU shows interest to round up its area while the U.S. wishes to round up the NATO area,” says Professor of Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb, **Branko Caratan**. In this context, it is perhaps understandable why Montenegro was recently accepted into *Adriatic Charter* as it is almost certain that our country will become member of North Atlantic Treaty in spring next year.

Such scenario obviously cannot be altered even by opposition on the part of Russia about which Russian Minister for Emergency Situations and “Putin’s man of utmost trust”, **Sergej Sojgu**, informed officials in Podgorica at the end of September.

THESSALONIKI AGENDA: Re-composition of the “Western Balkans” is to a great extent underway. To us living in this region it seems slow and hesitant but things are progressing step by step, i.e. in accordance with the agenda adopted at the EU summit held in Thessaloniki in June 2003.

It seems that this is finally understood in Podgorica too. “Europe is firmly resolved to close all issues which have been burdening the Balkans during the last two decades, and to assist us in settling scores with myths, great-state illusions and nationalisms,” says Montenegrin Chief of Diplomacy, **Milan Rocen**, and adds that Europe has decided to shelve all those problems because they put European stability at risk and call into question the joint European future.

Apprehension of **Radovan Karadzic** in the downtown Belgrade (with whom the former American envoy for the Balkans **Richard Holbrook** arranged a deal on withdrawal in 1995) and replacing the unyielding nationalist **Vojislav Kostunica** with cooperative socialist **Ivica Dacic** is precisely the product of this new European strategy towards the region and a clear sign that the “American era” has ended.

KOSOVO, FOLLOWED BY BIH: European Union is currently trying with all its power to close the issue of Kosovo’s status and at the same time establish institutions of this, the youngest European state. Presently, it is the most important issue on the “Western Balkans” for Brussels and everyone disagreeing with it on this matter risks to be marked as anti-European.

It is already made known that for EU accession, Serbia will be conditioned by recognizing Kosovo’s independence, after which there will be firmer action on creating functional BiH state, and combating organized crime and corruption in all countries of the region.

It is known in Brussels that as long as there is a possibility of dissolution of BiH not one regional initiative can succeed. In other words, the destiny of the “Western Balkans” will be determined in BiH!

Brussels has invested too much time, resources and money to simply allow **Milorad Dodik** to, by creating parastate in BiH, or, to put it more precisely, his feud, put its implementation at risk.

Thus, the reason for growing nervousness on the part of heads of Republic of Srpska is understandable as well as that of all those within the international community who have been supporting the survival of “time bomb” in the foundation of BiH state.

NEW FLAGS: Though opposing networking countries in the region in some new community, the official Zagreb is in practice cooperative in implementation of the entire project. Until recently the State Secretary within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia, **Hidajet-Hido Biscevic**, heads the *Regional Cooperation Council* headquartered in Sarajevo. As it seems, Brussels could have not found a better solution for the function than this one: the former journalist is a career diplomat, excellent connoisseur of

international relations and situation in the Southeast of Europe. Even Serbia, which is always sceptical of all initiatives not initiated from Belgrade, did not oppose his appointment.

Certainly indicative is the selection of location in which Biscevic will seat: Sarajevo is already called “little Brussels” in diplomatic back-corridors talks. “It is a positive signal for BiH and the entire region,” says Biscevic.

Through this umbrella regional initiative, European Commission will approve between 400 and 600 million euro for projects on the “Western Balkans” until 2011.

This amount will be sufficient to strongly support and route the region in the direction EU wishes it to go the necessary prerequisites of which have been already created.

Some new flags are being unfolded on the weary and neglected “Western Balkans.”

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Brussels gave the key contribution to establishing numerous regional organizations: CEFTA (Free Trade Agreement); Energy Community Agreement (which is often compared with European Steel and Coal Community which was the backbone of creating the present EU); Investment Committee; Transport Community Agreement; Parliamentary Cooperation Secretariat; Centre for Security Cooperation; Centre for Combating Trans-border Crime; Anti-Corruption Initiative; Environmental Protection Centre; Network of Associations of Local Authorities; Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative; etc.

Countries of the region have also created organizations which support coordination and development of telecommunication infrastructure and all kinds of electronic doing business (Electronic South East Europe and Broadband South East Europe), while Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in strengthening and development of human resources was signed last year.

Regional School for Public Administration starts operating the following year in Danilovgrad.