



## Latest Tweet

Please wait while our tweets load.

[If you can't wait - check out what we've been twittering.](#)



[+](#) Share | [f](#) [my](#) [g](#) [t](#)

### [Publications](#)

[Policy Pamphlets & Reports](#)

[Strategic Briefings](#)

[Backgrounders](#)

[Letters](#)

[Conversations](#)

[Editorials](#)

### [Policy & Research Areas](#)

#### [Regions](#)

[Britain](#)

[Greater Europe & Eurasia](#)

[European Union](#)

[European Neighbourhood](#)

[Russia & Eurasia](#)

[The Americas](#)

[North America](#)

[Latin America](#)

[Middle East & Africa](#)

[Middle East](#)

[Africa](#)

[Asia Pacific](#)

[East Asia](#)

[South Asia](#)

[South East Asia & Australia](#)

#### [Themes](#)

[Democracy & Development](#)

[Environment & Economy](#)

[Global Security & Terrorism](#)

[Transatlantic Relations & Defence](#)

### [Events](#)

[Future Events](#)

[Past Events](#)  
[Campaigns & Projects](#)  
[Affiliated Projects](#)  
[Worldview](#)  
[Global Power Europe](#)  
[YPFP London](#)  
[Greater Surbiton](#)  
[APPG](#)  
[Media Centre](#)  
[Online Shop](#)  
[Recommended Reading](#)

## Email List

Sign up here and keep up to date by joining the HJS mailing list

Email

Sign up

[HOME](#) > [Policy & Research Areas](#) > [Regions](#) > [Greater Europe & Eurasia](#) > [European Neighbourhood](#)

# Bosnia: Weighing the options

By Marko Attila Hoare, 30th September 2009

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**1. The existing constitutional arrangement for Bosnia-Herzegovina, established by the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, is leading inexorably toward the full and outright partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the long-run, as the country's Serb entity - Republika Srpska - slowly but surely establishes itself as a *de facto* independent state.**

**2. The outright partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina would result in an independent Republika Srpska as a bridgehead of Russian influence in the Balkans and as an obstacle to the latter's Euro-Atlantic integration, and result also in a rump Bosnian Muslim 'independent' state in which conservative Islamic and anti-Western influences would predominate.**

**3. The outright partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina would also destabilise the wider South East European region and deflect Croatia and above all Serbia from their reformist paths.**

**4. Elements in the international community committed to Bosnia-Herzegovina's unity must act now if they wish to avoid these disasters, for maintaining the status quo will eventually bring them about.**

---

These days, even the most ardent Bosnian patriot or foreign friend of Bosnia-Herzegovina finds it difficult to be optimistic about the country's future. In its current constitutional form, Bosnia is a state that does not and cannot work. No conceivable solution appears very good, while even bad solutions appear unachievable. Yet the *status quo* appears worst of all. I have been defending Bosnia-Herzegovina for seventeen years – ever since I campaigned on its behalf when the war broke out there in 1992. In this article, however, I shall weigh up Bosnia-Herzegovina's different options and prospects as cold-bloodedly as possible.

The Dayton Peace Accords of 1995 established a Bosnia-Herzegovina that was more partitioned than united. For every year that it exists, the constitutional arrangement for Bosnia established by Dayton brings Bosnia another step closer to full and complete partition. Every year, Republika Srpska further consolidates itself as a *de facto* independent state; the Office of the High Representative declines in power and authority; the international community's will and ability to coerce the Republika Srpska are that much weaker; the already dim prospect of Bosniaks and Croats returning to Republika Srpska recedes further; and the share of the Bosnian population that can remember the unified, multinational country that existed before 1992 becomes smaller. Despite apparent steps toward reintegration taken while the Office of the High Representative was headed by the energetic and determined Paddy Ashdown, subsequent high representatives have lacked either the will or the international support to continue down Ashdown's path, with the result that Bosnia has further unravelled in recent years. However monstrous the injustice that Bosnian partition would represent, with every

year that passes, the injustice is further forgotten by the world and full partition – like death – draws nearer. We need only look at the other injustices that have become *realities on the ground*: the three-way partition of Macedonia in 1912-13; the dispossession of the Armenian population of Anatolia; the dispossession of the Palestinian population of present-day Israel – these are realities on the ground. The partition of Bosnia is steadily becoming as irreversible as the partition of Macedonia.

Consequently, the best strategy for Bosnian Serb nationalists who want to achieve an independent Republika Srpska is simply to continue the existing constitutional arrangement while quietly chipping away at Bosnia from within. Ironically, however, the present arrangement may serve the interests of the Bosnian Serb political classes at the present time *better* than a full partition. A unified, homogenous Serb nation embracing the Serb populations on both sides of the River Drina is a myth; the dominant historical thrust of Bosnian Serb nationalism is toward an independent Bosnian Serb state rather than toward annexation to Serbia. Thus, for the Bosnian Serb political classes, the existing arrangement, whereby the Republika Srpska increasingly enjoys complete *de facto* independence, may be preferable to a full partition that would threaten them with being swallowed up by Serbia. One day, the Serb population of the Republika Srpska may cease to support annexation to Serbia, as the Greek population of Cyprus has ceased to support *enosis* with Greece. Until then – and until international conditions are fully favourable to the disappearance of Bosnia – Republika Srpska's leadership might sensibly desire to stay put.

Conversely, the best hope for supporters of a unified Bosnia may be for Milorad Dodik's increasingly arrogant regime to continue and escalate its present policy of rocking the boat, inciting Serb-nationalist passion and baiting the Bosniaks and the international community. Eventually, we may hope, Dodik might become sufficiently stupid actually to attempt unilateral secession prematurely, or some other such outrage that would provide Bosnia and the world with a legitimate pretext to overturn the Dayton order and reintegrate Republika Srpska with the rest of the country. This is not a wholly dim prospect, as recent antics on the part of the leaderships of both

Serbia and the Republika Srpska highlight the continued Serb-nationalist propensity to self-destructive nationalist confrontation. Earlier this month, Dodik issued a [gratuitously offensive denial](#) of the Tuzla massacre of 1995. This followed hot on the heels of Serbian president Boris Tadic's recent [act of provocation](#) against Bosnia, when he visited the Bosnian Serb entity without Bosnia's permission, to open a new school named 'Serbia' in Pale, the former Bosnian Serb rebel capital outside of Sarajevo.

At this point, we should be clear about what partition would mean. Partition might be appealing for those Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats who would be able to unite with Serbia and Croatia respectively, exchanging their citizenship of a dysfunctional state for citizenship of states that function. But for the Bosniaks, partition would cement their confinement to what is effectively a ghetto comprising the two territorial enclaves around the Sarajevo-Zenica-Tuzla triangle and Bihac respectively. The EU's recent extension of visa-free travel to Serbia, following on from Croatia, thereby in practice to Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats but not to Bosnia and the Bosniaks, is evidence that this is indeed a ghetto. An 'independent' Bosniak entity comprising these enclaves would be non-viable, while its embittered and demoralised population would fall under the influence of the most reactionary form of conservative Islamic politics. Bosniaks would be fully justified in choosing war before accepting such a grim fate.

A territorially fairer form of partition – which one or two of my own Bosniak correspondents have suggested to me – would envisage both Republika Srpska and the Bosnian Croats giving up territory to the Bosniaks in exchange for the right to secede, resulting in a separate Bosniak entity comprising somewhat less than half of Bosnia, with roughly a third going to the Serbs and a fifth to the Croats. This would represent a great injustice to the Serb and Croat inhabitants of the transferred areas, who would suddenly find themselves ethnic minorities in a Bosniak national state. The Republika Srpska, at least, would find such a solution unacceptable, so it would have to be imposed unilaterally – involving, in effect, a new war and ethnic cleansing. This is not something that twenty-first century Europe can sanction.

Any form of outright partition, furthermore, would destabilise Bosnia's neighbours: Serbia, Croatia and those further afield. Serbia and Croatia have slowly and painfully democratised over the past decade, turning their back on aggression and expansionism. In Serbia, in particular, the struggle between pro-European reformists and aggressive nationalists is far from over. The acquisition of new irredentas would mark a huge setback for this process: the newly expanded states would be unstable as they struggled to integrate the new populations; their party systems would be further fragmented; the expansionist nationalists would be vindicated and revived. Serbia, in particular, would be encouraged by such an annexation to pursue further expansionist goals – possibly against fragile Macedonia or even NATO-member Croatia. Ultimately, what Serbia needs to prosper is to be kept firmly within its existing legal state borders. The reason why Bulgaria and Romania entered the EU before Serbia is that they were fortunate enough to have lost World War II and to have been confined to their own borders, with no prospect of further territorial expansion. Serbia, which came out of World War II ambiguously – neither wholly as victor nor as vanquished – and which appeared to have some prospects for territorial expansion in the 1990s, has paid a heavy price. The last thing Serbia needs is to be tempted off the wagon.

The redrawing of international borders and partition of a sovereign state would encourage those elements in the Balkans that wish to partition Kosovo and Macedonia as well. Partitioning Bosnia outright could open a Pandora's box, with unforeseeable consequences. Yet as we have seen, the *status quo* – the Dayton system – represents not an alternative to outright partition, but *de facto* partition with the likelihood of full *de jure* partition at some point in the future, when circumstances are more favourable to the Bosnian Serb nationalists. In the meantime, the Bosniaks have the worst of both worlds. Not only have they been squeezed into a ghetto and forced to inhabit a dysfunctional state, but their energies must be expended in permanent political conflict with Serb and Croat politicians who do not want the state to cease being dysfunctional. The Bosnian Croats, meanwhile, suffer as the minority party within the Bosnian Federation, permanently squeezed by the embittered Bosniak majority. The Republika Srpska leadership, by

contrast, should feel wholly satisfied with the existing order, which grants it all the cards except one: the right to secede formally one day without complications. Republika Srpska's lack of the right to secede comprises the only strong card in the hands of supporters of Bosnian unity, though the card is unlikely to remain strong indefinitely.

The Western alliance should have cause to regret the rise of Republika Srpska, which may be relied upon to undermine its interests in South East Europe. In May, Dodik [unilaterally withdrew](#) Bosnian Serb soldiers from Bosnia's participation in NATO exercises in Georgia, which he then boycotted, in a move attributed to pro-Russian sentiment. Nebojsa Radmanovic, the Bosnian Serb member of the Bosnian presidency, recently [stated](#) that most Bosnian Serbs oppose NATO membership, and mooted the possibility of a referendum on NATO membership in Republika Srpska. A *de jure* or *de facto* independent Republika Srpska will obstruct the Balkans' Euro-Atlantic integration and serve as a bridgehead for Russian influence in the region.

Supporters of a unified Bosnia-Herzegovina, both inside the country and internationally, must act now if Bosnia-Herzegovina is to be saved. Highlighting the fact that the Dayton system is leading inexorably toward the outright partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, they must campaign for an end to this system and the restoration of a unified, functioning Bosnian state, through the reintegration of Republika Srpska with the rest of the country. This should not involve the entity's outright abolition; rather, it should involve the transfer of all meaningful power to the central government in Sarajevo, leaving *Republika Srpska* a *de facto* administrative entity. Justification for such a move may be found in numerous places: Dodik's repeated calls for Bosnia-Herzegovina's dissolution; his continued denial of the Srebrenica genocide, in disregard of the verdict of the international courts; the Serb failure to arrest Ratko Mladic as the Dayton Accords required; the Republika Srpska's failure to permit the return of Bosniak and Croat refugees. This is not a good option, but it is the least bad of the possible options.

If they do not wish to or are unable to campaign on this platform, Bosnia-Herzegovina's supporters might as well give up and accept that at some point in the future, Bosnia-Herzegovina is likely to disappear from the map of Europe.

*Marko Attila Hoare is European Neighbourhood Section Director for the Henry Jackson Society*

© 2013 The Henry Jackson Society, Project for Democratic Geopolitics. All rights reserved.

[Web Design](#) by Byte Art