

## **THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

*Predrag Vukovic*

*Research Assistant, Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs*

The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), initiated on 21 November 1995 and signed in Paris on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1995 by the governments of Bosnia, Croatia and rump-Yugoslavia brought the three and a half year Bosnian war to an end. Fifteen years have passed and Bosnia is still experiencing the same problems of ethnic division which most likely will be reflected in the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in October 2010.

The constitutional structures created for Bosnia and Herzegovina at Dayton can be described as a 'consociational democracy'. The chief characteristics are that: each group is guaranteed representation in all bodies of government and each group has the right to exercise veto power on most important issues. The major problem with this model as embodied in the DPA is that the country's institutions are in a state of political deadlock (as each ethnic group is safeguarding its views and perceived interests). Politicians are elected based on their ethnic appeals and there is no incentive for there to be cross-ethnic appeals. The second problem of Dayton is that the entire institutional system is based on ethnicity and this is precisely what divides the Bosnian peoples. The DPA recognizes the three ethnic groups, Serbs, Muslims and Croats as constituent peoples, making political representation dependent upon ethnic belonging. Therefore there is a discrimination against individuals who do not define themselves ethnically, or even if they do, might not be able to exercise a variety of rights because they live in an area where they constitute the minority.

The idea for a centralized state that is advocated by the Bosnian Muslims is seen in the eyes of the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, the two other major ethnic communities, as an attempt for domination of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Bosnian Muslims; a domination which the Serbs and the Croats believe will lead to the loss of their rights in the country. There is hope that the pull factor of European integration does make a difference. However this has not been a smooth path and there are major problems which still stand in the way. According to the current High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Valentin Inzko, "in the last four years Bosnia has been in a political stalemate...not a single new reform has been adopted that would give the state increased competences needed for active participation in the EU accession process".

The EU must first realize that Bosnia is unlike the other accession countries. Its recent war still has political, social and economic effects. Its political system stems from a wartime compromise between hostile factions. This compromise stopped the war but did not build an effective state. If the EU approaches Bosnia like any other accession country, it will fail. National sovereignty remains supremely important and the great misunderstanding that the EU has in regard to Bosnia is that the pull of EU integration somehow

would make borders obsolete; in Bosnia this is not the case. Bosnia's Serbs, Croats and Muslims all want to take the road to Brussels, but too many would prefer to be alone at the wheel. The true test for Bosnia will not come in adopting the legislation for EU membership, but rather the revision of its Dayton constitution. This is of utmost importance because the question that is raised is the following, 'How can Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs and Croats in Bosnia be asked to vote in a possible future referendum with regard to eventual membership in the EU, if at present they are not allowed to vote regarding the survival of the state of Bosnia or its institutional organization?'

As it stands today the debate about the future of the country has once again raised the same core questions that were raised at the Dayton Agreement in November 1995. Bosnia finds itself in an extremely difficult position, not only because of the ravages from the war of 1992-95 but also because it consists of three major ethnic groups which together do not form a 'Bosnian Nation'. With the parliamentary and presidential elections in October 2010 these problems will not go away but they will resurface to an even greater extent as each ethnic group safeguards its interests and what it has already been gained through the DPA itself.

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