



# Missed Opportunities Frustrate Me

Valery Perry, an analyst and Western Balkans expert based in Sarajevo, told Dnevni Avaz daily that the EU is not pushing hard enough for the approved and already determined reforms in BiH

**Y**ou have participated recently at the Congressional hearing in Washington on corruption in BiH. What was the main conclusion of that event? Can we expect any concrete measures - as some sort of American intervention in that regard in Bosnia? Will US Congress follow up, and how the US Administration will participate?

I think the recent hearing offered an excellent opportunity to not only discuss the key issue of corruption, but to remind politicians in Washington about what is happening in BiH today. Considering the violent conflicts raging throughout the world right now - Syria and Iraq in particular - Bosnia is not a hot topic for discussion among foreign policy circles in DC. It was good to get it back on the radar screen, and the fact that the hearing was very well attended show that there is still strong interest in Bosnia. There are still a lot of critical lessons about post-war peace implementation that Bosnia can offer other parts of the world. The hearing was just a first step in what will hopefully be a more coordinated effort to support reforms aimed at reducing corruption. Now that we have their attention the longer-term policy development and advocacy can begin.

In Washington you said - the political corruption is main problem in Bosnia. Why Bosnia still does not have, let's say, it's "Bosnian Sanader" (like in Croatia), although everybody talks about corruption, investigative journalist have documented so many cases - yet "big fish" still looks like they are untouchable?

We often hear that Bosnia needs its own "de-Sanaderization" campaign, and an effort to get the so-called "big fish" to demonstrate that a certain political class is not in fact immune from the law and prosecution. However, it took some time in Croatia for the political environment to be prepared to tackle the issue in that way, and their approach and timing was certainly not un-related to their own domestic politics. In BiH the situation is complicated by the reality of having three main ruling groups aligned with the three main constituent groups. Just selecting "one" to target would result in claims of unfair treatment and would immediately be ethnified and manipulated. I think most citizens would agree that getting some big fish from among all of the main ruling groups is the way to go. However to do that a few strong and independent prosecutors need to put together air-

tight cases and then move them forward. It is reasonable to ask why prosecutors have not yet taken those steps. Is this US and EU newest approach in BiH - "sit and wait" rather than - "stand and act" - meant to activate domestic politicians, NGO sector and citizens, and to wake them up - to take their ownership of the political process? Or, this is a sign of a weakness of the international community in BiH?

## A New Opportunity

Unfortunately, a lot of governments and organizations simply want "stability" in BiH, not the substantive change that is needed for the country to function like a normal country. When considering the other threats facing Europe right now - the refugee crisis, relations with Turkey, possible Brexit, rising right-wing extremism, etc. - one again sees that there can be a real temptation to simply ignore Bosnia and hope things stay quiet and stagnant. However stagnation (and regression) is certainly not progress, and the absence of visible problems certainly does not indicate broad citizen satisfaction with their socio-economic prospects. It is perplexing to see how unwilling the European

Union has been to use its considerable leverage to promote change. It's clear that politicians are satisfied with the status quo, and reluctant to make reforms that could change the political calculus. But why doesn't the EU then work to build a constituency of reform, not among the party leaders, but citizens? For example, there is a real and existing constituency for agriculture reform that exists throughout the entire country. This has been demonstrated by polls and by the establishment of various farmers' and agricultural unions interested in a cohesive agricultural strategy. The EU would seemingly have an interest in supporting these voices in their own advocacy for reform, challenging the political leadership to explain why they DON'T support agricultural reforms that would strengthen the market. That would not only put wind in the sails of the farmers and activists, but could help to generate more debate about real policy issues prior to the 2016 and 2018 elections. It would also demonstrate that the EU and its partners understand the country's political dynamics and recognize the need to work from the bottom-up, not the top-down.

## A Hostage

**Is Bosnia victim of preoccupation with Serbia and priority given to it (by the US and EU) - since Serbia has to be ripped out from Russian bear's clutches?**

There has been a long-held perspective among many policymakers that "the road to peace in Bosnia is through Belgrade." Or through Zagreb. However, progress in BiH needs to come from BiH, and certainly shouldn't be derailed due to well-known or newly emerging agendas from the neighbors. Other than statements and bombast, it's difficult to see how much real change and improvement Belgrade has delivered to people living in BiH - and particularly to people living in the RS.

**Your colleague Kurt Bassuener recently said that the US and EU were to long "kissing the frogs in order to make them princes". Yet, no such metamorphoses has happened in Bosnia, unlike - let's say producing new Aleksandar Vucic in Serbia; why is so in BiH? Were Bosnian frogs too scabby? What is the point here?**

Kurt has also often said "hope is not a policy." We now have more than two decades of evidence that BiH's political system lacks the mechanisms needed to make it operate in an accountable way. External incentives have never been sufficient to get BiH's frogs to change their preferred way of hopping. It is frustrating to see that there are so



*"The failure of the April Package in 2006 was a loss"*

few new young faces engaging in politics, and it shows that the party system in BiH enjoys an entrenched monopoly which it maintains through fear and patronage. It would be fantastic to see more new faces running for municipal office this autumn; a wave of independent candidates challenging the status quo could at minimum send a signal that there are other options available. Also, I would question the premise that Vucic is somehow "new" - the protests in Belgrade demonstrate that a lot of people feel that he and his administration have been abusing their power.

## Corruption Tsar

**If America and EU really like to help fight corruption in Bosnia - why Washington does not send corruption czar or some kind of Elliot Ness (leader of a famous team of law enforcement agents fighting mafia in Chicago in 1930-ies)? That kind of person would probably be more useful than High Representative with hands tied (by PIC and Russia), assuming that the Bonn Powers are obviously never going to be used again?**

Well, Elliot Ness was fighting within his own system; he wasn't imported from Canada. But he certainly was brave enough to put together a strategy and push it through in spite of the odds. Another interesting example is in Ukraine, where they brought in former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to tackle corruption, believing in that case that only an outsider would have the independence to be able to take on this deep rooted issue.

There are interesting initiatives underway today; they just aren't getting the attention they deserve, from anyone. "Nasa Stranka" is seeking to build more transparency into how public enterprises are managed in Sarajevo canton; everyone and anyone who is against reforms that would create more good governance and transparency should have to explain this publicly. It's also

reasonable to wonder why public prosecutors at any level are not in fact moving more quickly themselves on this issue; most people would say that they are not sufficiently independent. Supporting those who are and who are ready to be more aggressive would be preferable to bringing in an outside corruption tsar. The new domestic and international worries about the threat of extremism and foreign terrorist fighters will reveal which countries have legal and judicial systems that function and can prevent, deter and prosecute such offences, and those that do not. The same loopholes that allow for corruption and abuse of office can be exploited by extremists willing to use violence in pursuit of their reprehensible aims. Some years ago there was significant pressure to get rid of the international judges and prosecutors in BiH who were working on corruption cases; I think many people would agree that this was a premature decision.

**You are in Bosnia since 1999, working in Sarajevo and elsewhere in the region, can you summarize where BiH has advanced positively in that period, and what were cardinal mistakes that set country back instead of pushing her forward to EU and NATO?**

The most frustrating thing for me as a long-term outsider in BiH is reflecting on the missed opportunities. For so many years there were signs of progress; things were getting better and there was a sense of momentum. Defense reform, the value added tax system, property return - all of these were substantial achievements with little international precedent. However since 2006 the light at the end of the tunnel seems to have receded. More of my local friends - even those with good jobs - want to leave because they don't see a future for their kids; that worries me. The missed opportunities could be the basis of a book, but a few come to mind. The Election Law that was adopted in 2001 was one such opportunity. That was a chance to develop an election system that promoted moderate candidates

rather than extreme candidates. That could have been done within the constitutional framework, and very likely could have made it easier for moderates to attract votes and move up through the ranks. I think the failure of the April Package in 2006 (by just 2 votes, remember) was a loss; stronger cohesion among the international community at the time and more aggressive public outreach on why those reforms were important could have helped to switch two of those no-votes. Allowing education reform to basically stop after a few years of progress was a mistake; "interim solutions" have become permanent over the past decade. The failure to use the Sejdic-Finci decision as an opportunity to remedy the inherent human rights violations in the constitution was regrettable, as it would have provided the chance to ensure that people are not punished simply for wanting to be a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On a related note I think the recent census (which has now turned into a predictable fiasco) was a missed opportunity; a strong, BiH-wide campaign to encourage people to declare as "other" could have been framed as a signal of opposition against a post-war system grounded in "constituency" that has failed to deliver to 99% of the people.

## Future of Bosnia

**Montenegro will soon become member of NATO, while Bosnia, although, some 15 years ago it was hard to imagine - falls short behind this country: Why NATO and US can not push forward to condone BiH - especially when it comes to registering of military property - since it is obvious the country is blocked by Milorad Dodik and RS? Croatia was given discount to enter NATO - without even fulfilling all conditions? Would it be, after all - some kind a moral obligation toward Bosnia?**

That's a big question and one that could be the subject of another interview. It doesn't surprise me that Milorad Dodik is against NATO. What I don't understand is why Dragan Covic doesn't more aggressively push his political ally on this issue. What is Covic gaining by allowing Dodik to be a spoiler on this element of Euro-Atlantic integration?

**We also heard at the US Congress hearing on corruption in BiH some voices on "Dayton Two" new conference organization; is it really possible to organize that conference - and what it would be all about?**

There is no serious interest in a Dayton 2 - and there should not be. Any Dayton 2 negotiated by (likely all male) political

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## U.S. brokers accord, now must enforce it

"I trust that one day, people will look back on Dayton and say: This is the place where the fundamental choices were made. This is where the parties chose peace over war, dialogue over destruction, reason over revenge. And this is where each of us accepted the challenge to make those choices meaningful and to make them endure."  
from the remarks of Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Nov. 21, 1995, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base

**BOSNIA PEACE TALKS: DETAILS INSIDE**

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**Access Dayton**  
<http://www.access.dayton.com>  
Read summaries of the negotiations and the complete text of the agreement.



**20,000 GIs to join Bosnia force**  
By Bob Deans  
COX NEWS SERVICE

Bosnian, Croat and Serb leaders agreed Sunday to lay down their arms after 3 1/2 years of setting the stage for President Clinton to deploy thousands of U.S. peacekeepers within weeks. The settlement, reached under heavy U.S. pressure, splits Bosnia roughly in half between Serbs and non-Serbs in an effort to end 11 months of ethnic cleansing, mass killings, rapes and other atrocities — the worst of Europe's bloody conflict in 50 years.

The accord also imposes a grave burden upon the United States and its NATO allies. They have pledged to spend billions of dollars to help rebuild the war-torn region and to send 60,000 troops — a third of them American — to help police a fragile peace.

"The people of Bosnia find a chance to turn from a horror of war to the promise of peace," President Clinton said in a White House address announcing the agreement. "We must be there to make it work."

The accord was a major breakthrough.

**The first stop:** (From left) Slobodan Milosevic, Alija Izetbegovic, Franjo Tudjman and Warren Christopher set their pens to plans of peace. President Clinton wants the next U.S. role to be that of peacekeeper, via 20,000 troops to police the agreement.

*"I don't think any time or media space should be wasted on discussion of a Dayton 2"*

elites without broader public consultation would end up with a worse constitution than the one the country has today. BiH needs constitutional changes, but changes that have been negotiated by citizens to address specific needs. Citizens across the country broadly agree that there is need for a state agricultural policy; why not start by seeking a constitutional reform that would establish a Ministry of Agriculture? Similarly, citizens are consistently dissatisfied with the health care system, and recognize the problems of mobility. Why not tackle that? And then election reform aimed at creating more moderate platforms and more accountability? Until there is sufficient grassroots will for a more substantial constitutional makeover, incremental reforms could both result in real improvements while also demonstrating it's possible for changes to come from the bottom up. **But there is a US Congress resolution that require this "Dayton Two" conference to be presented at upcoming NATO summit in Warsaw next month; Can you explain how obligatory or binding is this US Congress resolution when it comes to Bosnia/Balkans? It looks like domestic public seems to have a great kind of unrealistic expectations from it again?**

I'm not aware of a congressional resolution, but I understand that Congressman Turner from Ohio (home of Dayton) is interested in keeping this issue on the table through his role as President of the NATO Parliamentary

Assembly. However the reasons for this have more to do with his own constituency - the people of Dayton - than with the citizens of BiH. I don't think any time or media space should be wasted on discussion of a Dayton 2. Instead more space should be given to how to give regular people more of a voice in constitutional reform.

**How do you see Bosnia ten years from now?**

It's a cliché to say that BiH has so much potential - but it does. I'd like to see more tourists coming in, more expats and artists and writers using this beautiful country as their homebase. I'd like to see innovative university graduate programs attracting students from the region to study politics and international relations in this post-war city. I'd like to see fewer bright people trying to leave, and more people deciding they want to come back. However, for any such improvement to happen there is a need for substantial constructive change. The country has been muddling through in this frozen conflict for too long now, and recent backsliding is not healthy for this or the future generation. A real coalition for change involving pressure from the bottom-up and the top-down is the only way to press for changes needed to improve the political and economic situation and stop the brain drain. A serious discussion on anti-corruption efforts could be a significant part of building a system that is more accountable, and in which citizens are at the center of policy discussions, and not just party agendas.