

# Sideshow Stefan and Mendacious Seven



## It's hard to imagine how much more tone-deaf European Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele could be

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A week and a half after protests which took place throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina against the BiH political elites across the board, especially concentrated in the Federation, he came to Sarajevo to... again meet with those same discredited elites. It was farcical and self-abasing in its last (unsuccessful) iteration in January. It is even more disgraceful and silly now.

Perhaps the only conceivable logic is that the terrified political class - not just in the Federation - might now be more flexible on coming to accord on implementing the Sejdic-Finci ruling. There have been no indications that this is the case - or that the issue generated any thought at all among the political class since protests began in Tuzla on February 5.

But would a deal actually be positive in the current circumstances? For if a deal were reached now (leaving aside the content of such a deal, which by all indications would be negative), there would be the attendant congratulatory statements from Fuele, EUSR Sorensen, et al for the party leaders' political bravery, willingness to compromise, etc. Nothing could further distance the EU from the population of BiH today than a smiley photo-op with these crooks and deadbeats: the Mendacious Seven. One wonders why, with such a despicable concen-

tration in one place, there wasn't a massive demonstration in front of the EU Delegation. Maybe next time...

A clearer reflection of the EU's bureaucratic autism - and the Commission's in particular - could scarcely be devised. At a time when the EU should be taking the opportunity to build its constituency among a disgruntled populace angry at the very political elite that has humiliated the EU for years, the Enlargement Commissioner throws in his lot with the politicians. Who advises these people? This ought to be a force multiplier for a new EU approach. Instead, the EU seems intent to make it a wedge - choosing their traditional political interlocutors over the people disgusted with them.

In his pre-meeting op-ed, Fuele claims to have received the message from the street and the popular plenums, which are still formulating their demands. Their common denominator is a demand for political - and legal - accountability. The people did not come out demanding Sejdic-Finci solutions; while important and not to be sidestepped, this is a boutique issue for your average Bosnian. Unlike in Ukraine, the EU itself was not a rallying point in Bosnia because it had

so long discredited itself. Begging political leaders to be cooperative yet one more time demonstrates neither vision nor insight, but rather cluelessness and cowardice. It does nothing to recharge the EU's popular credibility.

That remains possible, for there is a vast potential constituency for change in Bosnia, along with massive potential EU leverage, should it choose to employ it creatively. It would have been useful for Commissioner Fuele to have actually met some of the demonstrators or participants in the popular plenums. He could have used the occasion to spell-out in Euros and cents just how and how much specific political leaders have done them harm. The lack of a state Ministry of Agriculture, which the EU once strongly advocated, has cost BiH farmers - especially Serb farmers in the Krajina - dearly. This should be laid at Dodik's doorstep. And so on; no established political party or figure would remain unscathed. This would have shown that the EU cares more about satisfying BiH's citizens than its corrupt political class. The vulnerability of the country's political elites should be seen as an opportunity for the EU to finally get traction on its long-stalled reform agenda. Instead, it seems the Union is content to stick to business as usual.