

WHAT CHANCELLOR MERKEL SHOULD TELL BOSNIA'S POLITICIANS AND PEOPLE (II)

Merkel's Messages Must Be Direct, Blunt, and Delivered Publicly

Chancellor Merkel has the opportunity next week to demonstrate visionary, rational and responsible German leadership in the region

She has done this before, in Belgrade in August 2011, bluntly and publicly forcing Serbian President Boris Tadic to confront the Kosovo question, thereby laying the groundwork for a (now EU-managed and stalled) Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue. Doing so meant seizing the policy from the German Foreign Office and taking effective leadership of the EU and wider West on an important open issue. Circumstances require the same forceful leadership in Sarajevo this week. To have a transformative impact, Chancellor Merkel's messages must be direct, blunt, and delivered publicly. First, she must put an end to the freefall in BiH, enabled by the EU's flight from responsibility. This would entail her making clear that no further border changes in the region will be tolerated, and that any attempts to rekindle interethnic conflict would be met by a withering and forceful Western response. This would not only disarm Milorad Dodik's consistent efforts to press for de facto (and ultimately de jure) RS independence, but would send a message to all others in the region who have recently fanned interethnic tensions - not least Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski.

Furthermore, Merkel should state that it is clear that despite repeated efforts and having given them the benefit of the doubt, it is now abundantly clear that BiH's political leaders simply do not want to join the EU (or NATO), as it would undercut the very foundations of their power. If they choose to keep the country languishing under the Dayton system, then that will be their choice. But the days of refraining from enforcing the rules, in the hope that BiH's politicians will evolve, are now over. Dayton is an evolutionary dead-end that requires external power to function at all, so BiH requires a new strong High Representative and credible EUFOR deterrent. So long as BiH's political elites refuse to adopt new, better rules which actually serve the country's citizens and their futures, Germany and the EU and wider West must remain committed to enforcing the bad old

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rules - if need be, indefinitely. Together, these statements would defuse the BiH political elite's potent ability to leverage fear. The second component to Chancellor Merkel's messaging would actually play well on the home front. That is: BiH politicians can continue to be irresponsible and mortgage their country's - and their citizens' - future for their own political survival - but not at Western taxpayers' expense. The failure of Bosnia's politicians to meet the first concrete requirement of the EU initiative demonstrates yet again their unwillingness to reform and sense of entitlement to Western taxpayers' hard-earned funds. While the EU and international financial institutions remain willing to assist BiH's people in a long-delayed transition to an economy that rewards initiative and hard work, they will no longer fund political irresponsibility and mal-governance. When salaries and pensions cease to be paid, BiH citizens should blame their politicians - not Germany, the EU, or the West. From now on, funds will only be delivered upon implementation of reforms. But until then, the EU and other Western actors will endeavor to inform BiH's people about the stakes and mobilize them on behalf of a system and policies that can work - against the political elites who refuse to do so. Such strong and unambiguous messages would change the political incentive structure in BiH. They would also entail a complete departure from the EU's normal operating procedures and from Germany's reluctance to assume the responsibility of leadership. The likelihood of Chancellor Merkel making such statements on Thursday is exceedingly low. But to squander this opportunity to deliver these messages - and change the course of EU policy - would amount to her placing her personal brand on a failed policy. That policy may buy some time, but it is only digging the hole deeper for BiH - and Europe.

