

The Troubled Balkans

CAN THE VOLATILE REGION FIND PEACE?

Twenty years after Yugoslavia's bloody breakup, the patchwork of nations known as the Western Balkans faces rampant organized crime and corruption, chronically high unemployment and simmering ethnic tension. The region lags far behind its Eastern European neighbors — economically and democratically — and poses a potential trouble spot for the rest of Europe. Still, the picture isn't all bleak. Croatia is about to join the European Union, and several other nations have membership applications pending. By contrast, Bosnia and Kosovo, where savage sectarian fighting occurred in the 1990s — including mass killings of civilians — are struggling to establish themselves as functional, independent states. Meanwhile, Serbia, after years of steady progress, recently elected an ultra-nationalist president, triggering renewed concerns over its future role in the region.



Two young women in Potocari, Bosnia, mourn over one of 613 coffins containing newly identified remains of victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia. In Europe's only genocide since World War II, Serbs slaughtered up to 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys who had sought refuge at a U.N.-protected enclave. The coffins were interred during a mass burial on July 10, 2011, the 16th anniversary of the genocide.

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The Troubled Balkans

BY BRIAN BEARY

THE ISSUES

Balkanize (verb): To divide (a region or territory) into small, often hostile units.

Few, if any, regions of the world have the dubious honor of inspiring a word, let alone a word with such negative connotations.

But the troubled history of the Balkans, a mountainous region in southeastern Europe, cried out for its own word. How else to describe the countless conflicts over the centuries that have fragmented religious and ethnic groups in the region.

Indeed, as Britain's wartime leader Winston Churchill once quipped, "The Balkans produce more history than they can consume."¹

The Western Balkans — a region with 26 million inhabitants encompassing Albania and the seven countries that emerged from the ashes of Yugoslavia — has been perennially plagued by conflict, largely stemming from its polyglot mix of religious and ethnic populations.

Today, after numerous wars in the 1990s, the region is more fragmented and ethnically segregated than ever, even as the patchwork of small new nations tries to forge democracies and stable governments out of the chaos. The site of the continent's only genocide since World War II — in the Bosnian city of Srebrenica — the region continues to suffer from simmering post-war ethnic tensions. Rampant organized crime, political corruption and a dismal economy are also hampering the region's efforts to join the European Union (EU) and the North



AFP/Getty Images/Elvis Barukcic

More than 11,500 empty red chairs, representing the victims — mostly civilians — of the infamous siege of Sarajevo, fill the city's main avenue during a 20th anniversary memorial on April 6, 2012. Beginning in 1992, thousands of Serbian troops, many of them snipers, encircled and blockaded the city for 44 months, shooting at anything that moved. The siege highlighted the impotence of U.N. peacekeepers stationed in the city at the time and led to a more decisive international intervention in Kosovo in 1999.

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Nevertheless, under pressure from the two bodies, the countries have made significant strides in building their democracies and closing the painful chapter of their recent past.

Ethnic and religious tensions have been perhaps the biggest hurdle for the former Yugoslav republics. Kosovo is populated predominantly with Sunni Muslim Albanians. The other six countries are made up mostly of Slavic populations who speak similar languages and are Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics. During mass expulsions in the 1990s — dubbed "ethnic cleans-

ing" — minorities fled their homes for safer locales.² As a result, the Balkan countries today are more ethnically homogenous and segregated than before the wars. Bosnia is perhaps the most extreme case: Its "Bosniaks" — or Muslims — are concentrated in certain areas, while the Serbs and Croats, who make up about a third and a seventh of the population, respectively, live in other areas.

The region's geography explains why it has remained "politically fragmented and economically marginalized," says Davor Kunc, a Croatian expert on European Union (EU) and international affairs who is working at the World Bank on sustainable development issues. "Southeast Europe is easy to get into, so it has been conquered by many powers," he explains. But mountains and non-navigable rivers make it difficult to move around within the region, he says, making it difficult for the various ethnic communities to integrate.

In addition, the region lacks natural resources, except for Kosovo, which has significant mineral and coal deposits. Unemployment has been a chronic problem, with levels as high as 50 percent in places. Organized crime, however, has flourished, especially since the end of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, developing a lucrative trade in drugs, sex trafficking and counterfeit goods.

"We half-jokingly, half-seriously, say that the best regional cooperation is between criminalized groups," says Ivan Vejvoda, a Serbian who is vice president for programs at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Among the

Turbulent Balkans Seek EU Membership

The Western Balkans, made up of Albania and the seven countries that comprised Yugoslavia until 1991, is a region in southeastern Europe that for centuries was conquered by competing outside powers. In the 1990s bloody wars of independence broke out in the ethnically and religiously diverse area, punctuated in Bosnia by Europe's only genocide since World War II. Slovenia is the only country in the region to have joined the European Union (EU); the rest are at various stages in the membership application process.

Western Balkan Nations and Their EU Membership Status



Map by Lewis Agrell

gangs, he says, “There is no ethnic problem between Serbs, Albanians, Croats, Montenegrins, Slovenians, Bulgarians and Romanians. Their interest is profit.”

“Being involved in organized crime is socially acceptable here,” says Igor

Alexandrovski, a corporate lawyer in the Macedonian capital, Skopje. “You see their leaders in restaurants, driving their BMWs and Mercedes. You don’t avoid them on the street. They lend money to people.”

He believes Yugoslavia’s violent, chaotic breakup, coupled with the region’s chronic economic weaknesses, enabled organized crime to gain a foothold. Moreover, the various

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Western Balkans at a Glance

In the 1990s and 2000s, the former Yugoslavia broke into seven tiny countries — Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. Each varies in its ethnic and religious composition. War-torn Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina are predominantly Muslim, while Orthodox Christians predominate in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Croatia and Slovenia are mostly Catholic. Serbia is the most populous, while Montenegro has the smallest population. Slovenia is the most prosperous, with a per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) of nearly \$29,000. Kosovo, despite having energy and minerals, is the poorest.

Socio-Economic Indicators for Former Yugoslav Republics

Country	Population (millions)	Area (1000s of square miles) (relative size)	Major ethnic groups	Major religions	GDP per capita (2011)	Unemployment rate
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.8	19,767 (W. Va.)	48% Bosniak, 37.1% Serb, 14.3% Croat	40% Muslim, 31% Orthodox Christian, 15% Catholic	\$8,133	27.6%
Croatia	4.4	21,851 (W. Va.)	89.6% Croat, 4.5% Serb	87.8% Catholic, others include Orthodox Christian, Muslim and Christian	\$18,192	13.2%
Kosovo	2.2	4,203 (Del.)	92% Albanian, others are mostly Serb	90% Muslim, 6% Orthodox Christian	\$5,823	n/a
Macedonia	2.1	9,928 (Vt.)	64.2% Macedonian, 25.2% Albanian, others include Turks, Roma and Serbs	64.7% Orthodox Christian, 33.3% Muslim, Christians and others	\$10,367	31.2%
Montenegro	0.62	5,333 (Conn.)	43% Montenegrin, 32% Serb, others include Bosniaks and Albanians	74.2% Orthodox Christian, 17.7% Muslim, others include Catholics and atheists	\$10,642	23.7%
Serbia	7.3	29,913 (S.C.)	82.9% Serb, others include Hungarians, Roma, Yugoslavs, Bosniaks and Montenegrins	85% Orthodox Christian, 5.5% Catholic, others include Protestants and Muslims	\$10,642	23.7%
Slovenia	2.1	7,827 (N.J.)	83.1% Slovenian, others include Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks	57.8% Catholic, others include Muslims, Orthodox Christians, others	\$28,642	8.1%

Sources: United Nations Population Division, European Commission, International Monetary Fund, CIA World Factbook, Minority Rights Group

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trade embargoes imposed by the international community on the region in the 1990s — designed to halt the fighting and to punish the perpetrators of gross human rights violations and atrocities — fostered the growth of a thriving black market. Montenegro, with its long Adriatic coast, has emerged as a major conduit for smuggling.³

The Balkans' newest country, Kosovo, declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. About half of the world's countries, including the United States and 22 of the 27 EU member states, have recognized Kosovo's independence. The rest — led by China, Russia and Serbia, which still bitterly resents the secession — have not.⁴

Opponents of Kosovo's independence — which include five EU members (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) — fear that recognizing a non-consensual secession could set a dangerous precedent that might encourage separatism within their own borders. While about 90 percent of Kosovo's inhabitants are Albanian Muslims, a Serb enclave in the north refuses to integrate into the new state. NATO maintains 5,500 troops in Kosovo to maintain security and public order across the country.

Meanwhile, although attracting less international attention than Kosovo, Macedonia has had its own problems gaining international acceptance. Since it became independent in the early 1990s, neighboring Greece has mounted a relentless campaign to prevent the country from calling itself "Macedonia." Greece's largest and second-most populous region is called Macedonia, and Macedonia was a powerful kingdom in ancient Greece, the home of Alexander the Great.

Athens imposed a trade embargo on Macedonia from 2002 to 2005 because it objected to the Macedonian flag — a star with 16 points, a revered icon of Greek culture — ultimately

forcing Macedonia to change its flag to a sun with eight rays. Greece also has successfully stalled Macedonia's bid to join the EU and NATO, using its own membership in the two organizations to block the admission.

Understandably, Greece's resistance creates enormous resentment among Macedonians, who see their neighbors Croatia, Albania and Serbia overtaking them in the race to be admitted to the EU. Macedonia also has its own inter-ethnic tensions between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority — which makes up about 25 percent of the population — although so far a large-scale conflict has been avoided.

All Western Balkan nations want to join the EU, although so far only Slovenia has been admitted (in 2004), and Croatia is scheduled to join next year. Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia are vying to be the next to join, while Bosnia and Kosovo are farthest away from admission. The multi-stage, prolonged process of joining the union is forcing the Balkans to enact major reforms, such as consolidating fledgling democracies and establishing independent judiciaries.

But even before the Balkan nations have been admitted to the EU, the union and NATO together are providing security in Bosnia and Kosovo, after embarrassingly failing to do so in the 1990s. The EU has a peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and a mission to help establish legal institutions in Kosovo. NATO has a peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. All seven Balkan states are either members of NATO or candidates for admission, with the notable exception of Serbia, which still resents NATO's bombing campaigns in Serbia during the Bosnian and Kosovo wars.

Despite the ongoing ethnic tensions and economic challenges, the Balkans are on the right track, says Akan Ismaili, the Kosovar ambassador to the United States. "People outside remember us because of the wars. But if you travel here, you see that peo-

ple's minds have changed a lot since then. Today, we are all about integration into the EU and NATO, whereas 20 years ago the big theme was independence."

He stresses, however, that "this is a different kind of integration than Yugoslavia. It has a democratic foundation so we are not returning to our past."

As the international community wonders if the Balkans can move on from its painful past, here are some of the key questions being asked:

Is another Balkan war likely?

While achieving political goals through war is almost universally decried today, recent history showed war to be an effective political tool in the Balkans, according to David Kanin, a professor of European studies at The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), in Washington.

"As Yugoslavia fell apart in the 1990s, virtually all of the solutions were military ones," he says.⁵

Ajla Delkic, executive director of the U.S.-based Advisory Council for Bosnia and Herzegovina, says it is very likely that Bosnian Muslims and Croats will go to war if the Republika Srpska, the autonomous Serb entity within Bosnia, attempts to secede. "No country will accept giving up its territory, and the U.S. and EU support the territorial integrity of Bosnia as a single, sovereign state," she says.

However, Obrad Kesic, a Serbian-American analyst of Balkan politics who works for TSM Global Consultants in Washington, thinks the probability of an all-out war is low, but that a lower-scale conflict is possible. He cites three flashpoints: the municipality of Mitrovica in northern Kosovo, where there have been skirmishes between NATO troops and Serbs; the city of Mostar in Bosnia, where a tense standoff persists between Croats and Bosniaks; and the majority-Albanian regions of Macedonia, where tensions between

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War Wounds Still Raw in Bosnia

“We have stopped the war but not the conflict.”

“History can repeat itself if we are not aware of it,” U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Texas, told an April conference in Washington assessing how far Bosnia and Herzegovina has come toward reconciliation since its war of independence ended 17 years ago. If you stop paying attention to history, she continued, “things do not necessarily move forward. They can start to roll back.”¹

Her warning was timely, given how the fractured nature of Bosnian society increasingly hampers the country’s economic development and integration into the European Union (EU) and NATO. Johnson’s interest in Bosnia was sparked by her travels there in the 1990s as a member of the delegation led by U.S. President Bill Clinton, when she encouraged women to take part in the peace negotiations.

Political power in Bosnia is concentrated in two ethnically based regional governments: the Bosniak-Croat Federation, made up of Bosnian Muslims and Catholic Croats, and Republika Srpska composed of Orthodox Christian Serbs. This arrangement — enshrined in a peace treaty brokered with U.S. help in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995 — created a weak central government. It also allows only self-identified Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats to become president, a provision the European Court of Human Rights says excludes Jews, Roma and other minorities.²

Bosnia’s capital, Sarajevo, which endured a notorious 44-month siege (1992-1995) that killed more than 11,500 and wounded tens of thousands, today is overwhelmingly populated by Bosniaks. Before the war, it had been more ethnically mixed.

Although this ethnic segregation pattern is repeated across the country, some are fighting it.³ “We challenge this notion that we should identify ourselves in ethnic terms,” says Darko Brkan, a native of Sarajevo who founded the nongovernmental organization Why Not, which advocates for a non-ethnic-based identity. However, Brkan, of mostly Croat ancestry but who calls himself “a Bosnian citizen not a Croat,” concedes that not all his peers feel the same way. “We have extremes,” he says. “There is one part of our youth that is very militant and another part that is very pacifist. When a society has been ravaged by war, you get these extremes. We have stopped the war but not the conflict.”

Bitter disagreements over what happened during the war continue to plague the nation, particularly over the murder by Serbs of 7,000-8,000 Bosniak men and boys in the town of Srebrenica in July 1995. The International Court of Justice in 2007 classified the killings as genocide, but many Serbs strongly refute that assertion.⁴

Obrad Kesic, a Serbian-American analyst of Balkan politics and senior partner with TSM Global Consultants in Washington, D.C., says the incident did not amount to genocide because the victims were mostly Bosniak soldiers fleeing a Serb

ambush. “Bosniaks cling to the genocide claim because it is the last clear-cut case where they can point to themselves as the war’s main victims,” he argues.

Kesic says the dispute over what happened in Srebrenica is a symptom of a larger problem: “Everybody is in denial about each others’ victimhood,” he says.

But Klara Bilgin, a Bulgarian political science professor currently serving as a senior fellow at Rethink Institute, a Washington-based research organization focused on dispute resolution, views events differently. “Serbs have yet to have a moment of catharsis where they accept guilt for their atrocities,” she says. “For this to happen, it will require political leadership.”

Edina Bećirević, co-founder of the Center for Justice and Reconciliation, a nongovernmental organization in Sarajevo, notes that even where there is consensus about an atrocity having occurred, reactions to it vary greatly. Referring to mass rapes and murders of Bosniaks that took place in the town of Visegrad, she says “some of the locals are proud of the crimes committed in their name, while Serbs who helped save Bosnian Muslims have to hide their actions.”⁵

Ajla Delkic, executive director of the Advisory Council for Bosnia and Herzegovina, an advocacy group for Bosnian Americans, cannot forget what happened to her family in their hometown of Prijedor, where Serbs sent Croats, Bosniaks, Roma and Serbs who disagreed with the Serbian leadership’s policies to concentration camps. “My father, uncles and aunt were in camps, and my uncle was brutally murdered,” says Delkic, who came to the United States as a refugee in 1993.

“When Bosnia declared independence, we were immediately attacked by Serb paramilitary forces. This war was an aggression committed against people who believed in a united, multiethnic and democratic Bosnia — it was not a civil war,” she says.

— **Brian Beary**

¹ “Bosnia: 20 years on,” Bosnian Advisory Council conference, April 26, 2012.

² Douglas Davidson, “The Purpose of Constitutional Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” German Marshall Fund of the United States, Aug. 10, 2010, www.gmfus.org/wp-content/files_mf/galleries/ct_publication_attachments/Davidson_Bosnia_ConstitutionalReform_Final0809.pdf. Also see Lenaic Vaudin, d’Imecourt, “Sarajevo receives accession road map,” *Europolitics*, June 28, 2012.

³ Sylvia Poggioli, “Two Decades After Siege, Sarajevo Still A City Divided,” NPR, April 5, 2012, www.npr.org/2012/04/05/150009152/two-decades-after-siege-sarajevo-still-a-city-divided.

⁴ Ivan Vejvoda, “Fifteen Years After Srebrenica, Serbia Comes to Terms With its Past,” German Marshall Fund of the United States, July 16, 2010, <http://blog.gmfus.org/2010/07/fifteen-years-after-srebrenica-serbia-comes-to-terms-with-its-past/>.

⁵ Bećirevic was speaking at an event entitled “Bosnia: 20 years on,” organized by the Bosnian Advisory Council and hosted by the U.S. Congress at Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C., April 26, 2012.

Corruption and Democracy Rankings

Twenty years after Yugoslavia began to break into seven independent nations, the Western Balkans still struggle to institute democracy and combat corruption. Slovenia — the region's only member of the European Union — is the most democratic and the least corrupt. The others are working toward EU membership.

Corruption and Democracy Rankings of Former Yugoslav Republics

Country	Transparency International corruption ranking (among 183 countries, with 1 being the least corrupt)	Freedom House democracy ranking (1 to 7, with 1 being the most democratic)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	91	4.36
Croatia	66	3.61
Kosovo	112	5.18
Macedonia	69	3.89
Montenegro	66	3.82
Serbia	86	3.64
Slovenia	35	1.89

Sources: "Corruption Perceptions Index 2011," Transparency International, 2011, cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/; "Nations in Transit 2012," Freedom House, 2012, www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2012_NIT_Tables.pdf

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the Macedonian and Albanian communities are on the rise.

"If our young people had more economic opportunities, they would have less time to cause such problems," said Macedonian Defense Minister Fatmir Besimi.⁶

"Another war is not likely, but a conflict is possible," says Robert Hand, a policy adviser specializing in the Balkans for the Helsinki Commission, a group of U.S. senators and representatives that monitors the work of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), an intergovernmental organization that promotes regional security. "Kosovo would be leading the list, although I am a little concerned about Bosnia, too."

The local elections in Bosnia scheduled for October will be tense, he predicts, because Srebrenica and Prijedor, two towns in Republika

Srpska where notorious war crimes were committed in the 1990s, may see a shift in political leadership. Populated overwhelmingly by Serbs who "cleansed" these formerly ethnically mixed areas of their Bosniak and Croat populations during the war, some non-Serbs plan to use Bosnia's liberal rules for attaining residency to register to vote there in an effort to replace the Serb-dominated local government.

In Macedonia, Hand says, a 2001 agreement granting Albanians greater cultural and linguistic rights has been criticized for causing the Macedonians and Albanians to drift further apart. Meanwhile, Macedonia is increasingly frustrated over Greece's efforts to thwart Macedonia's EU and NATO membership bids, and there has been backsliding on media freedoms.

"I am seriously concerned about the situation in Macedonia," says Zhikica Pagovski, a master's degree student in

international relations at American University in Washington, whose research focuses on preventive diplomacy in the Balkans. Pagovski says the region is becoming more radicalized due to the economic crisis and the slow progress toward integration into the EU and NATO.

But Croatian EU expert Kunc cites the peaceful resolution of a territorial dispute between Croatia and Slovenia as a sign that the region will not resort to violence. "Slovenia was blocking Croatia's EU membership application because it wanted a sliver of Croatian territorial waters that could give it access to the open sea," he explains. But despite having strong legal arguments in their favor, the Croats chose not to fight the issue out through the courts in order to keep their EU bid on track. Instead, Croatia accepted an ad hoc arbitration process with Slovenia that could eventually force Croatia to cede territory.

Kunc rejects the oft-voiced mantra about the perennially fighting Balkans, saying "conflict tends to happen only when there is a major shift in the world political order," as happened before the 1878 Berlin Congress and during World War I, World War II and at the end of the Cold War in the 1990s.

Kosovo's Ambassador Ismaili is equally confident that the Balkans' worst days are over, in part because of the international attention the region is getting. "The situation today is very different from 1990, when Yugoslavia was being largely ignored," says Ismaili. "Today the EU and U.S. are very present and can prevent the situation from deteriorating."

Pierre Mirel, a director in the European Commission's department that oversees EU expansion, voices a similar sentiment. He is surprised that the specter of war would even be raised. "Clearly, the answer is no," he says. "Kosovo's independence in 2008 was a turning point," he explains, "because for the first time Serbia did not respond with violence, turning instead to the courts."

He insists that despite the tensions in Kosovo, the country must not be partitioned, because “it could give ideas to others to claim independence,” such as Bosnia’s Serbs or Macedonia’s Albanians.

Jelko Kacin, a member of the European Parliament who was Slovenia’s minister for information when Yugoslavia broke up, says, “There is no chance of military conflict in the Balkans.” However, he adds, there might be social turmoil due to the economic crisis. He dismisses speculation that Kosovo might be partitioned, noting that the Serb minority in southern Kosovo has integrated into the political establishment there — a fact that is often overlooked because of the sharp focus on tensions in northern Kosovo.

Will EU membership solve the Balkans’ problems?

All seven Yugoslav successor states are now either EU members or candidates, and opinion polls show that the overwhelming majority of the people of the Balkans favor membership. Not surprisingly, their expectations of what EU membership will mean are extremely high.

“The prospect of both EU and NATO integration has been the driving force for reforms in our region,” says Macedonia’s ambassador to the United States, Zoran Jolevski. It has also made Balkan nations talk to each other about economic cooperation — something they had not done since the wars, he adds.

Slovenia’s ambassador in Washington, Roman Kirn, agrees. “The EU was the inspiration for our change in the early 1990s. Societies need encouragement to change.” Explaining Slovenia’s decision to leave one multinational union, Yugoslavia, only to rapidly join another, the EU, Kirn says: “The EU embraces only democratic states and assures one’s political and cultural identity. In Yugoslavia, securing our language and economic freedoms was much more challenging.”

Macedonian Defense Minister Besimi stresses the EU’s economic benefits. “We can be more stable and secure by joining, which will make it easier for us to attract foreign investors to grow our economy,” he says.⁷

Moreover, says Slovenian European parliament member Kacin, joining the EU creates a positive “domino effect” among other EU candidates. For example, Montenegro’s EU accession talks, which were opened in June 2012, will tackle tough, long-term problems such as organized crime, minority rights and freedom of the media. Such problems are endemic throughout the region, so Montenegro’s Balkan neighbors can learn from the Montenegrin EU admissions process, he adds.

Macedonian lawyer Alexandrovski believes EU membership will help his country make serious inroads into fighting organized crime. “It will give our police and judiciary the tools they need to reform, although this will require personnel changes too,” he says. Kosovo’s ambassador Ismaili says “yes, absolutely,” EU membership will solve the Balkans’ problems. “When every Balkan country is inside the EU, the chapter of war will close.”

Likewise, the European Commission’s Mirel in Brussels is “very optimistic” about what EU membership can achieve. He notes that when Hungary and Romania joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, respectively, longstanding tensions between the two countries, created by demands for greater rights for the more than one million ethnic Hungarians living in Romania, dissipated. Once the two countries became part the EU there was freedom of movement between countries and border controls were eventually abolished, so the positioning of those borders became less politically sensitive.

Nevertheless, says Mirel, “it will take longer to ease tensions in the Balkans because of the wars they fought in the 1990s.”

Moreover, some issues cannot be solved with EU membership, says Croatian Kunc. “The EU is good at institutional reform but is not efficient at tackling political questions,” he says.

Similarly, says the Helsinki Commission’s Hand, there are limits to what EU membership can achieve. “The prospects of membership are so distant for some of these countries that it does not encourage their politicians to make reforms,” he says. For example, “Bosnia is wondering if the EU really wants them.” Many Bosniaks believe the EU secretly wants to block Bosnia’s membership because of its large Muslim population.

But Mirel calls that accusation “very unfair. The same conditions apply to all countries who want to join. There is no intention to make the EU a Christian club.”

Meanwhile, Serbian-American Kesic strongly rejects the view of the EU as a kind of panacea. “The Balkans’ problems do not get solved by the EU. They just get tied to the EU’s bigger problems, such as debt.” He claims Balkan leaders “tell the EU and U.S. what they want to hear, but they are not really committed to principles like civil rights, freedom and democracy.”

He also worries about “the culture of dependence that is emerging among Balkan political elites. They tell their voters that everything is decided in Brussels and Washington, so it is like governing without accountability,” says Kesic. “Thousands of laws from Brussels are just rubberstamped by national parliaments without any substantive transformation. It is a ritual for them.”

Kesic likens Balkans’ strong support for joining the EU to blind passion. “The EU is like a religion. The Balkan peoples are the converts, and converts are always the most fervent believers,” he says. “They think there is no alternative. The EU and U.S. have told them this, and they believe it now.”

THE TROUBLED BALKANS

Should NATO keep troops in the Balkans?

Just as there is solid support for EU membership among the Balkan people, NATO is a welcome and necessary presence for most. NATO peacekeepers first arrived in the Balkans in the 1990s to stop the slaughter in Bosnia and Kosovo.

ka Srpska in two halves] would EUFOR stop them? I am not so sure,” he says. He believes the United States’ dominant position within the NATO force gives the latter more credibility than the EU force has on its own.

Professor Kanin at SAIS agrees, asserting that the United States is more trusted than the EU because European

“NATO’s presence in Kosovo has a reassuring effect on our neighbors like Macedonia, Croatia and Montenegro, because they feel there will be no spillover of conflicts, and this allows them to focus more on economic concerns like attracting investors,” says Kosovo Ambassador Ismaili, who ran his own telecommunications company in Kosovo before being appointed ambassador. “Investment works [based] on risk aversion, and a huge risk is removed by NATO’s presence.”

For now, NATO is needed in Kosovo, but if the Serbian government were to crack down on the organized crime gangs that hold sway in northern Kosovo, that need would disappear, says Slovenian European parliament member Kacin. “Serbia is the key player,” he says. “Once Serbia accepts that a new country has been born in Kosovo, it will create reconciliation in the region.”

Others, such as Mirel at the EU Commission, believe that instead of keeping NATO troops in the region all Balkan countries should join NATO. To date, Slovenia and Croatia have joined NATO — along with Albania — while all of the others, except Serbia, would like to follow suit.

The Serbs are still licking their wounds from the NATO airstrikes of the 1990s and, in particular, from NATO’s decisive role in effectively wrenching Kosovo from Serbia’s grasp.

“If NATO becomes part of a state-building process the way it is in Kosovo, then that is a problem because it is not neutral; it is a political player,” says Serbian-American Kesic. He argues that by enabling Kosovo’s independence, NATO violated U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244, which requires that NATO be neutral on the status of Kosovo.

The same argument holds true in Bosnia, he says, where he complains that NATO has tried to enforce the integration of minority communities into the school system. “This task should have been left up to local officials and

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AFP/Getty Images/Andrej Isakovic

A supporter celebrates the victory of Serbian hard-line nationalist Tomislav Nikolic, who defeated the moderate, pro-European Union (EU) incumbent Boris Tadic on May 20, 2012. Nikolic vowed to pursue his predecessor’s goal of Serbian membership in the EU, but some question whether the new president, who is pro-Russian, will follow through.

Hand, the U.S. Congress’ Helsinki Commission representative, says “it is absolutely essential” to keep NATO troops in northern Kosovo, given the continuing problems there. He even suggests that NATO troops might be redeployed to Bosnia if things take a turn for the worse there.

NATO handed over control of its Bosnian peacekeeping mission to the EU in December 2004, but Hand is not convinced that the 1,200-strong EU force, known as EUFOR Althea, could cope if a major conflict erupted.

“If Republika Srpska tried to take over Brcko [the independently administered locality that splits Republi-

governments have a tendency to pick different sides in Balkan conflicts.⁸ Kanin’s colleague, senior fellow Michael Haltzel at SAIS’ Center for Transatlantic Relations, adds, “There are certain spots that are very dear in Americans’ hearts. West Berlin is one. Bosnia is another. I am not sure that the EU feels the same about it.”⁹

Many Balkan leaders share this perspective. For instance, Slovenian Ambassador Kim contrasts how well Europe recovered after World War II, when the U.S. played a big role in promoting European integration, with how poorly it did after World War I, when the United States largely withdrew after the war.

Chronology

1000 B.C.-1914

Western Balkans is settled by various peoples and ruled by successive empires — Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian — creating an ethnically and religiously diverse region.

1389

Turks defeat Serbs at the Battle of Kosovo, ushering in five centuries of Ottoman domination.

1830

Ottoman Empire goes into decline; Serbia becomes autonomous.

1850

Scholars agree on Serbo-Croat as a common language, part of a Slavic cultural renaissance.

1878

Wars of independence further weaken Ottoman influence; Austria occupies Bosnia.

1914

Serbian nationalist assassinates Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg throne, in Sarajevo, Bosnia, sparking World War I.

1918-1987

Yugoslavia is formed, comprised mostly of south Slavs. During World War II it is partitioned by the Axis powers.

1918

Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is created. It is renamed Yugoslavia in 1929.

1937

Josip Broz ("Tito") becomes head of Yugoslavia's Communist Party.

1941

Germany conquers and partitions Yugoslavia, allowing Croats to form their own pro-Nazi puppet state.

1946

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is established, with Tito as leader.

1948

Yugoslavia splits with other Soviet bloc communist states, pursues independent foreign policy.

1974

New constitution gives more power to Yugoslavia's republics, but Tito retains primary authority.

1980

Tito dies without a strong successor; country starts to disintegrate.

1987

Slobodan Milošević emerges as the leader of Serbia after giving a populist speech in Kosovo, a mostly Albanian province in the Serb republic.

1989-2013

Nationalism rises across Eastern Europe and the Balkans as the Soviet Union collapses. . . . Yugoslavia splinters into seven independent states after war and ethnic cleansing. NATO and the EU intervene to restore peace.

1989

Pro-democracy movements sweep across former Soviet bloc countries.

1990

Nationalists win first multiparty elections in Yugoslavia's republics.

1991

Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia declare independence. Slovenia

secedes with little bloodshed; Croatia fights four-year war of independence.

1992

Bosnia declares independence, but minority Serb and Croat populations form separatist enclaves; war ensues.

July 1995

Bosnian Serb forces kill up to 8,000 Muslim boys and men near Srebrenica — later classified as genocide by the International Court of Justice. NATO intensifies airstrikes against Serbs.

1999

Milošević launches campaign to remove all ethnic Albanians from Kosovo; NATO bombs Serbia.

2004

Slovenia becomes first former Yugoslav republic to join the European Union (EU).

2006

Montenegro secedes from Serbia & Montenegro (a loose union they formed in 2003).

2008

Kosovo declares independence from Serbia, which refuses to recognize it.

2012

Despite EU debt crisis, Western Balkans — including Serbia — continue efforts to join union. . . . War crimes trial of Bosnian Serb leader Ratko Mladic begins in The Hague. (Milošević died in the Hague in 2006 during his trial; Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić's trial is ongoing). Hard-line nationalist Tomislav Nikolic is elected president of Serbia.

2013

Croatia due to join EU.

Ethnic Tensions Threaten Kosovo's Unity

Will the 'youngest country in the world' backslide?

Reporting from Kosovo, Russian journalist Olga Khrustaleva applauded signs that the country was coming back to life more than a decade after violently splitting from Serbia. The capital, Pristina, is “an eclectic mixture of East and West,” she wrote, “where traditional Albanian and Ottoman houses stand next to fancy hotels.” Kosovo today is overwhelmingly populated by ethnic Albanians who converted to Islam during Ottoman Turkish rule.

“One of its main post-conflict attractions is a sculpture of two-meter-high letters spelling out the English word ‘newborn,’” she said. Although initially painted white, it is now covered in colorful graffiti and has “become the symbol of ‘the youngest country in the world,’ as Kosovars call their homeland.”¹ *

However, Pristina's Orthodox Christian Serb minority, which once held political sway, is now miniscule, having fled during the 1999 war to escape reprisals for the part they played in trying to purge Kosovo of its Muslim Albanian majority.

Andrijana Vojnović, a Serb who is executive director of the Djindjic Fund, a nongovernmental organization in the Serbian capital of Belgrade that promotes European values, says, “I am 31 years old and have never been to Kosovo. Neither have most Serbs my age.”

Neighboring Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's independence, which it declared in 2008, and Serbia still claims to have

legal sovereignty over its former province. Most educated and younger Serbs, however, are more interested in human rights, economic development and membership in the European Union than in retaking Kosovo, Vojnovic says. “Personally, I respect their desire for independence,” she says. “It is more the older generation that believes Kosovo belongs to us.”

The roughly 40,000 ethnic Serbs living in Mitrovica, a self-imposed enclave in northern Kosovo, are the most passionately opposed to Kosovo's independence. “War criminals take advantage of the situation, and Serbia continues to finance illegal structures there,” said Jakup Krasniqi, president of the Kosovo parliament, describing the “barricaded life” the Serbs in Kosovo have created for themselves.² In 2011, violent clashes erupted between the Serbs and NATO peacekeepers who tried to remove a roadblock the Serbs had erected to physically separate their enclave from the rest of Kosovo.

Thousands of Serbs live elsewhere in Kosovo, particularly in Serb-majority municipalities throughout southern Kosovo. Unlike the northerners who have refused to vote or field candidates in Kosovo's elections, many southerners do vote and also hold government positions.³ The Kosovo constitution guarantees that the Serb minority will not endure the kinds of discrimination that Kosovo Albanians suffered under Serb rule.

The Kosovo government even allowed Kosovo Serbs to vote in elections in neighboring Serbia in May, and invited election organizers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to set up polling booths to enable the voting to occur.⁴

* South Sudan, which became a country in 2011, is now the world's youngest country.

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police. The military is a crude instrument and should not be used for state building,” he says. ■

BACKGROUND

Historic Hegemony

Except for the Albanians, whose ancestors are believed to have been native to the region the longest, most of the inhabitants of the Western Balkans descended from Slavic tribes who migrated there from the east in around the 6th century A.D.

During the first millennium the Balkans came under two major influences: the Roman Empire and the Constantinople-based Byzantine Empire, with the river Drina as the dividing line between the two. One of the Slavic tribes, the Croats, lived in Latin-controlled territories and consequently converted to Roman Catholicism, while another, the Serbs, lived in Byzantine domains and converted to Orthodox Christianity.¹⁰

The Byzantine Empire was gradually subsumed by the Ottoman Turks, who established an empire that had extended into the Balkans by the 1300s. The Turks introduced Islam to the region. A pivotal moment in Balkan history occurred on June 28, 1389, when the Serbs, who had been expanding

their own empire since the 1200s, were defeated by the Turks at the Battle of Kosovo, ushering in five centuries of Turkish domination.

Meanwhile, the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty was expanding into Croat and Slovene lands. The Hungarians also were a strong presence, often vying with the Austrians for supremacy, especially in Croatia.

Ottoman and Hapsburg rule involved multiple and often-shifting alliances, creating a patchwork of ethnic groups. For example, shortly after 1578, the Austrians persuaded Serb refugees fleeing the Turks to move to Krajina in Croatia to act as a buffer against Ottoman expansion. The Austrians also persuaded some Germans and Hungarians to move to Serbian lands.

With 91 countries now recognizing Kosovo's independence, many say Kosovo's biggest challenge today is more economic than political. The country is one of the poorest in Europe, with an estimated 40 percent of its workforce unemployed.

However, Akan Ismaili, Kosovo's ambassador to the United States, claims the picture is not as bleak as it seems. He jokes that "people in Kosovo tell me — 'I cannot afford to work for 200 euros a month' — because they would stop getting remittances" from the large Kosovar diaspora, which sends money back from countries like the United States, United Kingdom and Germany. "The World Bank does not factor in our informal social networks in its reports. No one here is dying of hunger or because it is too cold in winter," he says.

Even as Kosovo's leaders focus on attracting more foreign investment to help expand the economy, the country's painful past could be resurrected. Referring to atrocities perpetrated in the 1990s, a recent report from Amnesty International noted that "hundreds of crimes under international law remain unresolved," including massacres committed both by Serb forces on villagers in Kosovo, and by the Kosovo Liberation Army on the Serbs.⁵

This being the Balkans, the chances that Kosovo could backslide cannot be excluded, despite its leaders' best intentions.

— **Brian Beary**

¹ Olga Khrustaleva, "Art and Identity in Kosovo," *The Moscow News*, Feb. 28, 2012, <http://themoscownews.com/blogs/20120228/189496475.html>.



AFP/Getty Images/STR

Kosovo Serb civilians shake hands with NATO peacekeepers in northern Kosovo on July 31, 2011. About 90 percent of Kosovo's inhabitants are Albanian Muslims. Serbs living in Mitrovica, a self-imposed Serb enclave in the north, refuse to integrate into the new state. In 2011, violent clashes erupted between Serbs and NATO security forces after the troops tried to remove a Serb roadblock separating the enclave from the rest of Kosovo. The conflict was resolved, but tensions remain high in the region.

² Krasniqi was speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., on June 20, 2012.

³ Stefan Lehne, "Kosovo and Serbia: Toward a Normal Relationship," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2012, www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Kosovo_and_Serbia.pdf.

⁴ From presentation by Ed Joseph, deputy head of the OSCE Mission to Kosovo, at The Johns Hopkins University's School for Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., May 25, 2012.

⁵ "Time for EU Kosovo mission to focus on war crimes," press release, Amnesty International, April 24, 2012.

Under Ottoman rule, many Bosnians converted to Islam, since they were allowed to keep their lands if they converted. Montenegro, with support from Russia, managed to resist Ottoman domination and was ruled by its own prince-bishops.

Both the Hapsburgs and Ottomans fell into decline in the 1800s, having failed to keep up with modernizing trends. The conquered Slavs began to reassert their identity. By 1830 the Serbs, backed by Russia, which sought more power in the region, had succeeded in establishing an autonomous principality. The Ottoman supremacy was further weakened in 1878, when Serbs and Montenegrins successfully revolted, winning full independence. In the ensuing territorial carve-up by Europe's

leading powers, Austria-Hungary was allowed to occupy Bosnia and later annexed it in 1908.

Meanwhile, a Slavic cultural renaissance was taking root, with Serb and Croat scholars, for instance, agreeing in 1850 on a dialect that would form the basis of a common language, called Serbo-Croat.¹¹

In the early 1900s, both the Albanian and the Slavic Balkan nations made a final push to purge their homelands of Turkish influence, causing millions of Muslims, including many Bosniaks, to flee eastward to modern-day Turkey. Albanians, who had converted to Islam during Ottoman rule, began asserting their independence as well. This created conflict with their Orthodox Christian neighbors, the Serbs,

who occupied Kosovo in 1912, massacring some 20,000 Albanians.¹²

A watershed moment in Balkan — and indeed world — history occurred on June 28, 1914, when a Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, who was visiting the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo. Because of the intricate web of military alliances European powers had woven during the preceding decades, the assassination plunged the continent — and eventually the whole world — into World War I (1914-18).

Yugoslavia's Rise

When Europe's borders were redrawn after World War I, a new

Most Balkan Nations Not in EU, NATO

Slovenia in 2004 became the first former Yugoslav country to join the European Union (EU). Croatia is slated to join in July 2013. They, along with Albania, Bulgaria and Greece, are the only Balkan countries that have joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Serbia and Montenegro are strong candidates for EU membership, while Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina face domestic and international political hurdles against joining.

EU and NATO Membership Status

	EU	NATO
Slovenia	Joined, May 2004	Joined, March 2004
Croatia	Due to join in July 2013 after signing treaty to join in November 2011	Joined, April 2009
Montenegro	Candidate since December 2010. Began membership talks in July 2012.	Candidate
Serbia	Candidate since March 2012.	Not interested in joining
Macedonia	Candidate since December 2005; membership stalled due to Greece's refusal to allow the country to call itself "Macedonia" *	Candidate. Was due to join in 2009, but Greece vetoed the application over name dispute.
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Potential candidate. Inter-ethnic divisions have blocked talks.	Candidate
Kosovo	Potential candidate but membership must be approved unanimously, and 5 of 27 EU countries** do not recognize Kosovo as an independent country.	Not yet a candidate

* Macedonia is the name of Greece's largest region.

** The five are Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Spain.

Sources: European Union, europa.eu; North Atlantic Treaty Organization, www.nato.int

country made up predominantly of south Slavic peoples was cobbled together from the ruins of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Initially called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, it was rechristened Yugoslavia in 1929.¹³ A Serbian dynasty, the Karadjordjevićs, became the ruling monarchy, creating tension among non-Serbs.

During World War II (1939-45) Yugoslavia began to fall apart after the Axis powers, Germany and Italy, invaded in April 1941. Croats were allowed to form their own state called the Independent State of Croatia, which

was essentially a Nazi puppet regime run by the fascist Ustase Party, led by nationalist politician Ante Pavelić. Initially, many Croats welcomed their independence but grew discontented after Italy began seizing large swathes of territory. The Ustase government collapsed in 1945, and its supporters, who had massacred many Serbs while in power, suffered massive reprisals.

Elsewhere in wartime Yugoslavia, the Serbs repressed a separatist insurgency mounted by ethnic Albanians in modern-day Kosovo — a region that Albania, Germany, Italy and Serbia were vying to control. In total throughout

Yugoslavia, about a million Yugoslavs were killed during World War II, mostly at the hands of fellow Yugoslavs, with Serbs suffering the most losses.¹⁴

Communist resistance to the Nazis had been led by Josip Broz, a half-Slovenian, half-Croat known as Tito.¹⁵ After the war, as communists were ascending to power across Eastern Europe, the anti-communist Western powers backed Tito to be Yugoslavia's leader because he had split with the communist Soviet Union — the West's arch-rival. Tito's feud with the Soviets had begun in 1947, after he tried to position himself as a pan-Balkan leader, advocating a Balkan federation that would include its neighbor Bulgaria. Tito conceived of such a federation as an alternative to Soviet domination in the Balkans.

But his plan failed and Tito became *persona non grata* among Eastern Europe's other communist leaders, who backed the Soviets. Meanwhile, the Soviets moved quickly to tighten their grip over Eastern Europe, a phenomenon Churchill famously likened to an "Iron Curtain" descending across the continent.

Tito's newly reconstituted Yugoslavia of 1946 comprised the same territory as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia that existed before the war, but it was no longer a monarchy but a communist state — and one that he ruled with an iron fist. To prevent Serbia from becoming overly-dominant, he took steps — such as carving a new republic, Macedonia, out of Serb territory and giving autonomy to the Serb provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, where many ethnic Albanians and Hungarians lived. The six constituent republics and two autonomous provinces of Yugoslavia saw their powers enhanced in 1974 in a decentralizing constitutional revamp.

Although Tito repressed ethnic nationalism, he remained popular as the country urbanized and living standards improved. Citizens were allowed to travel to capitalist countries in the

West, where they could work and bring back consumer goods — a privilege their communist neighbors behind the Iron Curtain did not have.

During the Tito era, each Yugoslav republic tended to specialize in a particular economic activity. Croatia, with its long coastline, relied heavily on tourism; Serbia developed a car manufacturing industry; Bosnia a coal industry; Macedonians specialized in food production and Slovenia produced household consumer goods. The economy, however, was heavily dependent on Western aid and remittances from Yugoslav émigrés. By the early 1980s, it was stagnating, with rising unemployment and debt levels and a growing gap between the richer and poorer regions.¹⁶

During the Cold War, Tito created a diplomatic niche for himself by leading the “nonaligned movement,” which brought together countries that chose not to side with either the United States or the Soviets. By the late 1970s, he was signing cooperation agreements with the European Community (the EU’s forerunner), and Yugoslavia was positioned to become the first Eastern European country to join that organization. But, despite his considerable political skills, Tito failed to provide for a successor. After he died in May 1980, the system he had carefully constructed slowly fell apart.¹⁷

Breakup and Recovery

By the late 1980s, nationalist politicians were ascending to power in Yugoslavia. In the constituent Yugoslav republic of Serbia, Communist Party chief Slobodan Milošević rode a wave of nationalism that began to surge after Serbian academics published a paper arguing that Serbs had been perennial victims throughout history.¹⁸ A defining moment for Milošević was a visit to Kosovo in April 1987, when he told a group of protesting Serbs “no one should dare to beat you.”¹⁹

In the Slovenian republic, authorities in Belgrade arrested nationalist dissidents in 1988, but that only further strengthened Slovenians’ determination to leave Yugoslavia.²⁰

Further afield, the increased political freedom Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev began introducing in the So-

Bosnia’s territory between them. Yugoslavia’s last prime minister, Croatian Ante Marković, tried to keep the country together by pushing through democratic and free-market reforms, but his message of reason over nationalism fell largely on deaf ears.

Western powers wanted to keep



AFP/Getty Images/Robert Atanasovski

Macedonian demonstrators wave banners and national flags during a rally in front of the Greek Liaison Office in Macedonia’s capital, Skopje, on April 9, 2010. Greece has been blocking Macedonia’s application to join the European Union, demanding that the country change its name. Macedonia is the name of Greece’s largest and second-most-populous region and was the name of a powerful kingdom in ancient Greece that was the home of Alexander the Great.

viet Union in 1985 culminated in popular revolutions in 1989 in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was an iconic moment in the seismic political tumult that was demolishing Europe’s communist regimes.

Meanwhile, in Yugoslavia ethnic nationalism was fast replacing communism as the dominant political force. In the Yugoslav republic of Croatia, the party of longtime nationalist Franjo Tudjman won a majority in the republic’s first multiparty elections in 1990.

In Bosnia, Yugoslavia’s most multi-ethnic republic, Bosniaks watched this surge in nationalism with alarm, especially after Milošević and Tudjman made it clear they wanted to carve up

Yugoslavia united, but they were too busy dealing with the fallout from the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, reunification of Germany in 1990 and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 to devote sufficient attention to the Balkans. U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker was reputed to have said about Yugoslavia’s breakup, “we do not have a dog in this fight.”²¹

In June 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence; Macedonia followed suit in September. In December, Germany’s foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, successfully pressured his EU colleagues into recognizing Slovenia and Croatia.²² Bosnia’s secession followed in early 1992, but it was complicated by the Bosnian Serbs, who proclaimed their own independent

enclave — Republika Srpska — around the same time.

Unlike the relatively peaceful dissolution of Europe's other two multi-ethnic communist states — the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia — Yugoslavia's breakup was brutal, bloody and prolonged. Ethnic cleansing became its hallmark. The two bloodiest conflicts were the wars of independence in Bosnia (1992-95) and Croatia (1991-95) against the Serb-dominated state of Yugoslavia. The Serbs expelled hundreds of thousands of non-Serbs from areas they controlled, while Serbs who lived in vulnerable enclaves — notably in Krajina, Croatia — themselves fled to Serb-controlled areas.²³ By 1995, Croatia had consolidated control of its territory and the Serbs' share of Croatia's population had declined from 12.6 percent to 4.5 percent.²⁴

The worst atrocities occurred in Bosnia, where about 100,000 people were killed, with Bosnian Muslims bearing the brunt of the violence.²⁵ In Bosnia, mass rape of women became a weapon of war, torture was widespread, thousands were imprisoned in concentration camps, hundreds of thousands were forcibly expelled from their homes, religious sites were desecrated and whole villages were razed to rubble. In sharp contrast, Slovenia, more homogenous and remote from Serbia, emerged as an independent country relatively unscathed by war, while Macedonia also managed to avoid a major conflict.²⁶

Europe's single worst atrocity since the Nazi era occurred in Bosnia in July 1995, when U.N.-mandated Dutch peacekeepers in the town of Srebrenica became overwhelmed by Bosnian Serb soldiers bent on killing Bosniaks. The Serbs gunned down between 7,000 and 8,000 Bosniak men and boys over five days, as they tried to flee to Bosnian-government-held territories.²⁷

Other dark chapters in the Bosnian war (1992-95) included the infamous siege of Sarajevo, when thousands of Serbian troops surrounded the city

and prevented food or supplies from entering for nearly four years. More than 11,500 people, mostly civilians, were killed, many by sharpshooters. Bosnia's Croat minority also destroyed a world-famous bridge in the religiously mixed city of Mostar.²⁸ Constructed by the Ottoman Turks in 1566, the bridge had become a symbol of Bosnia's religious tolerance and pluralism.²⁹

The Bosnia war set some important post-Cold War precedents, enshrining patterns of behavior that would be repeated in subsequent conflicts, such as an initial failure of the international community to respond, followed by a belated U.S.-led NATO air campaign to stop the war. For instance, when a violent conflict between Albanians and Serbs began to escalate in Kosovo in the late 1990s, NATO intervened in order to prevent Bosnian-style atrocities. NATO bombed Serbia relentlessly for three months in early 1999 after Milošević tried to purge Kosovo of its Albanian population. Eventually the Serb leader withdrew his troops from Kosovo.

Kosovo Albanian refugees quickly returned home, and a NATO force moved in to restore law and order. Kosovo's split from Serbia was further cemented in February 2008, when it declared independence.³⁰

Likewise, Montenegro had seceded from Serbia in 2006. Although it had been a close Serbian ally in the past, by the early 2000s the two had grown apart. Unlike other secessions, Serbia chose to allow Montenegro to go without a battle.

With the wars over, Western Balkan nations focused on integrating into the EU and NATO. The EU confirmed its support for all Western Balkans nations joining the organization at summits in Zagreb, Croatia, in 2000 and Thessaloniki, Greece, in 2003.

However, it also imposed strict conditions on starting membership talks, such as handing over indicted war criminals to a special tribunal in The Hague established by the United Nations in

the early 1990s to punish the perpetrators of Yugoslav war crimes.³¹

In July 2008, Radovan Karadžić, the political leader of the Bosnian Serbs during the Bosnian war, was arrested in Serbia and extradited to The Hague, charged with war crimes committed against Bosnian Muslims and Croats. In May 2011 the Belgrade authorities did the same with the Bosnian Serb military leader, Ratko Mladić.³²

Slovenia was the first former Yugoslav republic to be admitted to the EU, in 2004, while Croatia signed a treaty in November 2011 agreeing to join. It will become the 28th member of the EU in July 2013.

But in northern Kosovo, ethnic tensions flared again in 2011 after Kosovo Albanians tried to enforce a trade boycott against Serbian goods, and Kosovo's Serbs reacted by erecting roadblocks to prevent the free movement of people and goods between northern and southern Kosovo. The flare-up ultimately was resolved, however, when talks between Kosovo and Serbia led to an EU-brokered agreement in February 2012, under which the two sides also reached a compromise on how Kosovo could represent itself in regional forums.³³

Meanwhile, the EU commissioned a feasibility study on a future stabilization and association agreement with Kosovo — the first step toward eventual membership. ■

CURRENT SITUATION

Euro Crisis

In mid-2012, the hottest issue in the Balkans is the worsening economic situation, which has been exacerbated by the ongoing EU debt crisis.³⁴

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Should all EU countries recognize Kosovo's independence?



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EU RAPPORTEUR ON KOSOVO

WRITTEN FOR *CQ GLOBAL RESEARCHER*, AUGUST 2012

Would you want your country's athletes to have to participate in the Olympics under the flag of another country? Would you want your football, basketball or swimming team not to be able to compete in European or world championships? I imagine not. But for Kosovo citizens, that is a day-to-day-reality.

But there are two other, more significant, reasons why the five recalcitrant European Union (EU) member states who do not recognize Kosovo — Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain — should reconsider their position.

First, to complete the European peace project, conceived in response to the horrors of World War II, all the Western Balkans must become part of the EU and fulfill the Union's eligibility requirements on human rights, democracy and a market economy — the so-called Copenhagen criteria. The future of independent Kosovo lies in the EU. But up until now not even a contractual relationship has been possible between the EU and Kosovo because of the five members who still view Kosovo as part of Serbia. The biggest EU civilian mission, EULEX, tasked with strengthening the rule of law in Kosovo, is not allowed to consider Kosovo as an independent state. Thus, the EU Delegation in Kosovo must be called "EU-Office." While these may seem like minor symbolic details, they waste EU citizens' time and money.

Secondly, the International Court of Justice ruled in July 2010 that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 did not violate international law, arguing that due to Slobodan Milošević's oppression and massive violence, Kosovo Albanians had a right to self-determination.

I tell representatives of the five countries that do not recognize Kosovo that nonrecognition is based on fear that their own ethnic minorities might want independence. Such a fear discredits your own democratic governments. None of you has ever massacred or deported your ethnic minorities as the Milošević regime did to its Kosovo Albanian citizens.

Daring leaders are needed — in Serbia and in Kosovo and in the five countries that do not recognize Kosovo. They should end this sad story of nonrecognition so Kosovo can start working at more important things, such as rule of law, social justice, human rights — especially women's and minorities' rights — press freedom, economic development, state building and protection of the environment. If not, then we risk losing not only Kosovo and its citizens but also our own European peace project.



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The norms evolving within Europe since World War II have delegitimized violence. Nobody expects civil wars in Belgium, Scotland, Spain or Northern Ireland anymore. Outside of Europe, however, the Cold War legitimized violence as the Super Powers disregarded international law. Realism favors a simplistic narrative advocating "good vs. evil," nationalism, religious fundamentalism and hard power. Thus, the European Union's (EU) main diplomatic tool — "soft power" — becomes much less important, unlike its dependence on NATO's security framework.

The recognition of Kosovo Albanians' violent secession fundamentally disturbed the international system. The International Court of Justice elegantly evaded answering whether Kosovo is independent or not, even after it was recognized by the powerful Western countries. It simply ruled that international law contains no "prohibition on declarations of independence." Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, as well as five EU members and more than half of the U.N.'s members see unilateral declarations of independence as a dangerous precedent. Palestinians, Kurds, Bosnian Christians, Turkish Cypriots, Macedonian Albanians and Georgia's northern provinces want independence, too.

Without respect for international laws and norms, the Balkans will continue to simmer. Kosovo is in limbo. It is a failed entity run by impotent EU officials. Powerful local clans bridge organized crime and politics. Kosovo cannot join major international organizations. The remaining non-Albanians in Kosovo are oppressed, and ancient Serbian Christian holy sites are in jeopardy. Unconditional U.S. backing for Kosovo has hushed moderate Albanian voices. The Serbian political elite who are offering "all but independence" is reluctantly accepting Russian and Chinese support. The conflict remains frozen, as it is difficult to threaten Serbia. Serbia has remained a functional democracy for 12 years after Slobodan Milošević left office; it is an EU membership candidate and has offered peaceful solutions under different governments.

The EU must counterbalance inconsistent U.S. foreign policy, which foments anti-Western coalitions in the developing world. The EU must apply similar standards to similar situations: Serbia and Cyprus have exactly the same problem, but the EU granted full membership to Cyprus, while excluding their separatists. This approach helped negotiations immensely, even though full settlement has yet to be reached. Kosovo is a much smaller conflict. Serbia offers Kosovo autonomy that amounts to "all but independence." Without unified Western backing, the Albanians would have to moderate their position. The alternative is a frozen conflict and promotion of *realpolitik*, against the EU's best interests.

THE TROUBLED BALKANS

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For example, the crisis threatens to bankrupt Croatia, which already had high debt levels due to its war of independence. Now Croatia faces capital flight, as Italian and Austrian banks that bought Croatian banks pull funds back to their home countries.

With EU leaders engaged in seemingly endless emergency summits to save the EU single currency, the euro, the Western Balkans

That Greece is at the center of the debt crisis is hampering Macedonia's EU hopes, because the massive economic suffering in that country is making the Greeks less inclined to compromise in their name dispute with Macedonia. In June elections, the far right Golden Dawn party made significant advances, securing 18 seats in parliament, further diminishing the likelihood of a rapid resolution of the dispute. Furthermore, if Greece is forced

'MK' (Macedonia) country designation with a 'FYROM' (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) designation.³⁶

Macedonian Ambassador Jolevski, the government's chief negotiator in talks with Greece on the name issue, slams Athens for escalating the dispute, saying it violates an agreement the two sides signed in the 1990s.

Inside Macedonia, things are improving for the Albanian minority, says lawyer Alexandrovski. "You see Albanian-language universities opening up and Albanians getting more jobs in the administration," he notes. Ambassador Jolevski says the government is making progress in increasing the percentage of ethnic Albanians employed as civil servants in the Macedonian administration from 8 percent to 25 percent — which is the Albanians' share of the overall population.

The EU Commission's Mirel says the economic crisis "has not affected the strong support for EU membership among the Balkans' citizens." EU citizens, he says, may be less supportive overall of EU integration and enlargement, but they harbor no specific hostility toward Balkan enlargement as some do toward Turkey joining the union.

"The Western Balkans nations are closer to us geographically, so EU citizens have different ties to them, plus they are smaller countries than Turkey," Mirel says. Moreover, because of their recent wars, the Balkans need the stability membership in the EU provides, he says.



AFP/Getty Images/Elvis Barukcic

Former soldiers from Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia pose in front of the war-ravaged National Library building in Sarajevo on April 14, 2012. Once bitter foes, the veterans have been making sporadic contact through a mediator in an effort to prevent a repeat of the brutal Balkan wars of the 1990s. Meanwhile, on May 16 former Bosnian Serb army chief Ratko Mladić went on trial in The Hague for his role in the massacre of thousands of Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica during the Bosnian conflict.

has dropped down their priority list significantly. "We have less time and money for this region, so we expect more of the countries there," noted Miroslav Lajčák, managing director of the European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic corps. However, "our policy goal of enlarging the union to take in the Western Balkan countries has never been in question," he added.³⁵

out of the eurozone because of its high debt, it could hurt the EU's reputation in the Balkans. Should Greece be forced out of the EU entirely, it would be the first time a member left the union.

In June 2012, Greece ordered its customs agents to start putting stickers over the license plates of cars entering from Macedonia. The purpose of Greece's action was to replace the

Healing Old Wounds

Serbia's relations with the EU are improving. In March, the EU agreed to open membership negotiations with the country blamed for most of the war crimes perpetrated during the 1990s wars — a decision made in part to reward Belgrade for handing over indicted war criminals Mladić and Goran Hadžić to the tribunal in The Hague.

Mladić's trial, which began in May, is spotlighting his role in the massacre of thousands of Bosniak men in Srebrenica. Mladić "ordered the killing of my husband, my son, my two brothers, and my brother-in-law," charges Kada Hotic, who traveled to The Hague from Srebrenica to witness the trial. "Now that I look him in the face, I want revenge."³⁷

At the trial's opening, prosecutors showed video footage depicting Mladić "barking orders, prisoners lining up, bodies piled up and women and children climbing onto buses for deportation," according to *The New York Times*.

While the U.S. and European governments strongly support such trials, Serbian-American analyst Kesic feels that they only reopen old wounds. "The trials foster a sense of victimhood for each nation and make everyone outside of the Balkans afraid of the region," he says. The trials have given the Serbs "a siege mentality now" and made them less willing to compromise on issues such as the return of refugees.

The improvement in EU-Serb relations suffered a setback in May, however, when hard-line nationalist Tomislav Nikolic narrowly defeated the more moderate, pro-EU incumbent, Boris Tadic in the presidential election. The weak Serbian economy, with unemployment at 24 percent, is thought to have been a factor in Nikolic's win.

Some question whether Serbia will continue down the path to EU membership, given that Nikolic is known to be more pro-Russian than Tadic was and is a former ally of Slobodan Milošević, who died in 2006 at the Hague in the midst of his own war crimes trial.³⁸ Indeed, shortly after his election, Nikolic proclaimed that "there was no genocide in Srebrenica," incurring strong condemnation from Western leaders, although he did admit that Serbs had committed "grave war crimes" there.³⁹ Tadic had visited Srebrenica and apologized for the massacre.

Economically, according to Kesic, a perfect storm of factors has conspired to put severe stress on Serbia, including a drop in remittances from emigrants and the drying up of foreign investment — both due to the global financial crisis — and the inability to raise additional revenue by privatizing state assets. After rushing to privatize state-owned companies after independence, Serbia and its neighbors are now renationalizing some entities that turned into costly financial flops.

"With a quarter of our population unemployed, people have become hopeless," Kesic says, in contrast to the optimism they felt in the early 2000s after the wars ended and the EU membership process was commencing.

Montenegro's finance minister, Milorad Katnić, says his government is focused primarily on the economy. "There are huge differences in wealth between the north and south of our country," he laments. "We need better connectivity of infrastructure" between the two halves and more exploitation of the north's resources including coal and hydro-energy.⁴⁰

Macedonia, meanwhile, has seen a rise in radical Islam in some of the country's Muslim population, says American University's Pagovski. After five Macedonians were brutally murdered in April, the government arrested 20 ethnic Albanians for the crime, alleging that the killings were done in the name of Islam to foment fear among the public.⁴¹

Meanwhile, in Bosnia all eyes are turning toward the 2013 census, the first since the 1990s war. The census should chart precisely what population shifts have occurred as a result of the ethnic-cleansing sweeps of the early 1990s. According to Hand at the Helsinki Commission, "it will be interesting to see if the census is used to reinforce ethnic divisions or if Bosnians will use it as an opportunity to stop identifying themselves in ethnic terms."

Darko Brkan, a Bosnian who founded the Sarajevo-based non-governmental organization Why Not — which advocates for a non-ethnic-based identity — has mounted a campaign to persuade Bosnians to write "citizen" on the census form, instead of selecting an ethnic category. He hopes if enough people do this it will help to force Bosnia's political system to become less ethno-centric.

"The only thing the leaders of the three official constituent peoples — Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks — have never disagreed on is supremacy of ethnicity as the basis of our political system," he complains. ■

OUTLOOK

Stable Borders?

For outsiders, the big questions remain whether the Western Balkans could slip back into the kind of bloody conflict the world witnessed in the 1990s.

Croatian Kunc thinks that is unlikely. "Southeast Europe has traditionally been controlled by outside powers that create the basic political framework and security architecture," he says. "In the past, it was the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires, then Paris and London after World War I, followed by Washington and Moscow during the Cold War. Today, it is the EU and U.S. that are playing this role."

Kunc believes that "once this new security architecture is in place, things will settle down." But, he concludes, "the peace will last only as long as the security cap of the current supervisory powers — the EU and U.S. — holds." In other words, should the EU and U.S. dominance in the region come to an end, another shakeup would occur, he believes.

His view is broadly shared by Philip H. Gordon, U.S. assistant secretary of State at the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, who predicted that when the Balkan states join the EU, “borders will become less important. Just as between France and Germany it was once critically important which side of the border you lived on and what your ethnicity was, today in the EU there is nothing at that border.”⁴²

Gordon added that the United States did not want to see any more border changes in the Balkans and firmly opposes secession by the Serbs in Kosovo and Bosnia. “That would open a Pandora’s box that could never be closed,” he said, adding that “there is no way to start redrawing the borders that stops in a stable place.”

But Kestic, the Serbian-American analyst, says it will be very difficult for the Balkans to put the wars behind them, because no clear-cut victor has emerged. He contrasts the situation with “most other conflicts where you have a winner and a loser, like World War II or post-apartheid South Africa, where you can have a reconciliation based on a new reality.”

In their acclaimed book, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, Laura Silber and Allan Little — two journalists based in the Balkans in the 1990s — suggested that the wars would continue to cast a long shadow over the region. The lesson learned from the conflict,

they noted, was that “victory, in the former Yugoslavia, will fall not to the just, but to the strong.”⁴³

But Slovenian parliament member Kacin has a brighter prognosis. He feels Serbia will ultimately choose to become fully integrated into the EU — and eventually into NATO. Kacin says the recent election of nationalist Nikolic as Serbian president makes it critical that Serbians install a strong government capable of leading the country into successful negotiations on EU membership.

The EU Commission’s Mirel agrees that all Balkan states will, at different paces, beat a path to Brussels. Mirel predicts that after Croatia joins in 2013, Montenegro will join next, followed by Serbia and then Macedonia, although he concedes the name dispute between Greece and Macedonia is “very frustrating.” As for the two states farthest from membership, Mirel says Bosnia will join if it can reform its constitutional framework and become “more functional,” and there “is no legal impediment” to Kosovo joining, even though five EU countries still don’t recognize its independence.

The long preoccupation with political issues in the Western Balkans has meant that economic concerns have been neglected, even as the Balkans have slipped further behind the rest of Europe in living standards, including the 10 ex-communist states that

joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. The challenge in the coming decade will be for the Western Balkans to move beyond ethnic and territorial disputes and focus on fostering prosperity.

“I would like to see the region focus more on functional cooperation — things like tourism promotion and educational exchanges,” says American University’s Pagovski, the Macedonian student. “I have traveled to almost all European countries, and yet I have never been to Montenegro, Albania or Croatia. Mine is a typical story for the region.” ■

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About the Author



Brian Beary, a freelance Irish journalist based in Washington, specializes in European Union (EU) affairs and is the U.S. correspondent for the daily newspaper, *Europolitics*. Originally from Dublin, he worked in the European Parliament for Irish MEP Pat “The Cope” Gallagher in 2000 and at the EU Commission’s Eurobarometer unit on public opinion analysis. Beary also writes for the Washington-based European Institute and *The Globalist*. His most recent report for *CQ Global Researcher* was “Future of the EU.” He also authored the 2011 *CQ Press* book, *Separatist Movements, A Global Reference*.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bosniak American Advisory Council for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1634 Eye St., N.W., Washington, DC 20006; 202-347-6742; www.baacbh.org. Advances the interests of Bosnian-Americans to the U.S. public and policymakers.

Center for Justice and Reconciliation, Avde Jabucice 34, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; www.cjr.ba. Established in 2005 by local experts and journalists; works with media outlets to promote peace, reconciliation and transitional justice in Bosnia.

Center for Transatlantic Relations, School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 1717 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., #525, Washington, DC 20036; 202-663-5880; <http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu>. Closely monitors developments in the Western Balkans from a U.S. and EU foreign policy viewpoint.

European Commission, Directorate General for Enlargement, Rue de la Loi 200, 1049 Brussels, Belgium; +32 2 299 9696; www.ec.europa.eu/enlargement. Oversees the Western Balkans' applications to join the EU.

German Marshall Fund of the United States, 1744 R St., N.W., Washington, DC 20009; 202-683-2650; www.gmfus.org. Set up by the German government after World War II to promote transatlantic relations; promotes stability in the Western Balkans.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Wallnerstrasse 6, 1010 Vienna, Austria; +43 1 514 360; www.osce.org. An intergovernmental organization with 56 member countries; promotes regional security and has a strong presence in the Western Balkans.

Post-Conflict Research Centre, Zagrebacka 69, 71000, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; +387 033 810 861; www.p-crc.org. A nongovernmental organization that promotes peace and reconciliation in Bosnia.

U.S. Helsinki Commission, 234 Ford House Office Building, 3rd and D Streets, S.W., Washington, DC 20515; 202-225-1901; www.csce.gov. An independent agency of the U.S. government focused on promoting human rights and democracy. The Western Balkans is a priority.

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CITING CQ GLOBAL RESEARCHER

Sample formats for citing these reports in a bibliography include the ones listed below. Preferred styles and formats vary, so please check with your instructor or professor.

MLA STYLE

Flamini, Roland. "Nuclear Proliferation." *CQ Global Researcher* 1 Apr. 2007: 1-24.

APA STYLE

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CHICAGO STYLE

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Voices From Abroad:

AHMET DAVUTOGLU
Foreign Minister, Turkey

Cultures that bind

"Nobody can think about expelling the population or exiling individuals. The countries of the Balkans region are not only neighbours who live next door to one another: They are families with close social and cultural links. This region is like a soup [that] will be tasty only if one adds salt and all the other ingredients. If any of those ingredients is missing, the soup will be bland; this is the essence of the importance of ownership."

Dnevni Avaz (Bosnia and Herzegovina), August 2011

ZELJKO KOMSIC
Presidency chairman
Bosnia and Herzegovina

The U.S. is aware

"Our current political situation is connected only with the struggle to keep various kinds of power, and it has nothing to do with any kind of rights, or threats to any ethnic group in Bosnia-Herzegovina. One thing is certain, the United States is aware of the chaos that would emerge in the region, and further, in case of the threat for the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and of the risks that come with such a situation."

Nezavisne (Bosnia and Herzegovina), December 2011

PREDRAG SIMIC
Professor of political

science, Belgrade
University, Serbia

An Albanian Benelux

"The idea about a Nordic [-style] community in the Balkans has been in evidence since the fall of the Berlin Wall. What grates on one about this new idea is that this would not be a Balkan Benelux but an Albanian one, as it would exclude Serbia and comprise Albania and neighbouring territories with sizeable Albanian populations."

*Vecernje Novosti (Serbia)
June 2012*

BLAGOJA MARKOVSKI
Retired colonel, Macedonia

A potential arms race

"Changing the military presence from a predominantly U.S. one into a predominantly Russian one — if it happens at all — will not have an impact on the security of countries in the [Balkan] region. The only fear that this move may incite is that the neighboring countries may start the armament race anew, placing themselves at the intersection of the two global super powers, namely, of the United States and Russia."

*Nova Makedonija (Macedonia)
February 2012*

ERNST REICHEL
German Ambassador
Kosovo

Falling dominos

"Should Kosovo's borders

change based on the ethnic criterion, a domino effect in the Western Balkans would be created. When there is a domino effect, this chain process will not end without violence and suffering. Therefore, the international community is united in opposing the ideas to change the borders in the Balkans on an ethnic basis."

*Koha Ditore (Kosovo)
June 2012*

LUCINDA CREIGHTON
Minister of State for
European Affairs, Ireland

The fragile Balkan peace

"The history, the culture and fragmentation of the Balkans reflects the very essence of Europe. It is a rich and vibrant tapestry of culture, language and ethnic diversity, while also providing us with an uncomfortable reminder of how

fragile is the peace and prosperity we take for granted in Western Europe."

Irish Independent, June 2012

NIGEL CASEY
U.K. Ambassador to
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Politicians bear the responsibility

"The primary responsibility for passing the political decisions in this country [Bosnia and Herzegovina] is on its elected politicians, and not on the international community. It is, certainly, time for the domestic leaders to reach an agreement, which is necessary for Bosnia-Herzegovina, so as to move forward on the European integration path and to have the totally normalized relation with the rest of the world."

Dnevni List (Bosnia and Herzegovina), September 2011

