

## **Keeping Bosnia Whole: Why the World Cares—Five Reasons International Officials Aim for United State**

by Laura Kay Rozen, special to The Christian Science Monitor

Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina—The international officials charged with keeping Bosnia together as a multi-ethnic state liken their task to building a house of cards—one they can only hope will get stronger with time. In the meantime, they say, only one thing will continue to be the cement holding the country together: international will.

Although last weekend's elections bolstered the power of nationalists who would split the country apart, the mediators charged with implementing the Dayton peace accords—the blueprint for peace—are now gearing up to overcome the obstacles to a united Bosnia.

But why all the effort? The cost of ethnic partition and secession, they say, would be too high for the West, as well as for the Balkans.

Specifically, there are five reasons driving the international community's efforts:

### **Bosnian Serb Independence Won't Work**

Contrary to the nationalist aims of the Bosnian Serbs, independence of their entity, so-called Republika Srpska, is not viable, analysts say. "There is simply no real future for that little jagged piece of territory if it is not integrated into [Bosnia]," said U.S. Balkans envoy, Assistant Secretary of State John Kornblum. "It is not a place that can secede and survive."

The dividing line between the Bosnian Serb area and Muslim-Croat Federation agreed to at the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, last November was never meant to be an international border. It is a zig-zagging and impractical line that would impede economic and political development for both sides, as well as be militarily indefensible.

"The boundaries between the Serb and Muslim-Croat parts of Bosnia are meant to be fluid," explains Ambassador Michael Steiner, deputy to UN mediator Carl Bildt. "Besides, the Republika Srpska has nowhere to secede into. [Serbian President Slobodan] Milosevic is not going to risk international ostracization and sanctions to support a secessionist Bosnian Serb state."

### **A Muslim State in Europe**

U.S. and European officials are particularly concerned that a Muslim ministate—what would remain if Bosnia's Croats and Serbs secede—would be manipulated by radical Islamic countries. "Europe would have a very serious problem. Radical forces are just waiting for this to happen. You would have a Gaza Strip situation here," said Steiner, referring to the area the Israelis charge is a terrorist hotbed.

"At the [Muslim-led Party for Democratic Action] SDA rally at Kosovo stadium last week, there were 70,000 people. At the left and right of the crowd, there were the radicals, shouting in Farsi," explains Steiner. "The radical fringe of SDA is still a minority. But if things go the wrong way, they will be hardened. These radical forces will become dominant." It's not what the SDA wants, he says, "but they will be used."

[Authors' note: This argument represents a prejudiced point of view that automatically associates countries with Islamic majorities with radical Islamic terrorism. Nevertheless, the reporter is correctly reporting it as a concern that was voiced.]

### **Regional Example.**

Diplomats say that international sanction of Serb secession would send a message to other ethnic groups in the region that aggression and genocide are acceptable ways to achieve their territorial and national goals.

“Look, 200,000 people were killed in this war, 3 million people were forced from their homes, many by ethnic cleansing, men and women were raped, tortured, starved, and slaughtered in Europe’s first death camps since World War II. For them to let the Bosnian Serbs who sanctioned this behavior get their own state is morally despicable,” says a UN official.

U.S. Envoy Richard Holbrooke also makes a moral case for why Serb secession cannot be tolerated. “No one objected to the ‘Velvet Divorce’ of Czechoslovakia. It was done in a democratic way. . . . But what happened here is aggression. Because of the nature of the process that unfolded here, it would not have been appropriate to sanction secession or partition.”

Analysts say that many areas in the Balkans share conditions that led to ethnic conflict in Bosnia. The Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, the Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, the Muslims in Sandzak share the problems of ethnic minorities in undemocratic states that offer minorities few rights and security, and have equally devastated economies. These minorities and their governments are watching Bosnia closely.

### **Refugees.**

Secession would mean refugees would never be able to return to their homes which are now held by other ethnic groups, and would therefore remain a source of political and economic tension. Steiner points out that over half of Bosnia’s pre-war population—3 million people—has been displaced by the war, and are now living as refugees abroad or in refugee housing in other parts of Bosnia. The majority of refugees in Europe are Muslims who were ethnically cleansed from areas now controlled by Serbs.

Bosnian refugees are creating economic and social burdens in Croatia and Europe. Germany in particular—which has taken in more refugees than any other Western European country—has an interest in sending its 300,000 Bosnian refugees home. “I don’t think we will ever get stabilization without allowing those refugees who want to go back,” says Steiner.

### **NATO Credibility**

Analysts here are concerned that the failure to follow the multiethnic vision of the Dayton accord would devastate the organizations that have been sent here to implement the peace. NATO and U.S. leadership in the Bosnia peace effort would have failed to bring a permanent solution to Europe’s worst conflict since World War II.

A breakdown of the multiethnic government would likely require a long-term engagement of NATO forces in Bosnia and would place these forces in a more dangerous situation.

Officials say that international will to end a new Bosnian war after the huge effort to implement Dayton would be exhausted. They also say that renewed fighting would seriously damage the credibility of the NATO alliance, whose first active engagement was to send 60,000 forces to enforce the Bosnia peace.