

## PROPOSAL FOR A NEW POLICY APPROACH

# Revolution Is Not Required, but a Strategic Reassessment Is

**A new report of the Democratization Policy Council, House of Cards: the EU's "reinforced presence" in Bosnia and Herzegovina, compiled by Kurt Bassuener and Bodo Weber, reads that the fundamental problems in BiH are in fact not difficult to identify - or fix**

The arrival of a "reinforced EU presence" under the unified leadership of EU Special Representative Peter Sorensen in September 2011 gave the EU the undisputed lead international role in BiH. London and Washington de-emphasized their misgivings with the EU approach in the hope of a fresh start. Yet the political situation has reached an all-time low. BiH currently seems ungovernable - and the international community seems at a complete loss as to what to do about it, other than call upon Bosnian politicians to behave and for citizens to hold them to account.

## Stuck in the Morass of BiH Politics

The international community's primary problem in BiH is not one of conflicting philosophies, but rather a lack of political will to deal with reality. Unwillingness of bureaucrats to tell their political masters the truth - that their chosen policy has failed and cannot succeed - is to blame. As a result, bureaucratic instrumentalism and finger-pointing predominate. Political resistance to the "European path" on the ground has been met with lowered benchmarks or their abandonment altogether. This policy leaves domestic political elites with the strong impression that far from entailing adoption of non-negotiable standards, EU integration is an a la carte process in which the EU itself is often the supplicant - an open invitation to undermine existing rules and regulations, rather than work on adopting new ones.

The EU is and will remain an actor stuck in the morass of BiH politics. Yet it refuses to even recognize itself as a political actor, unable to admit the limitations of its approach in BiH. The EU eschews applying the potential leverage in its existing "toolbox" to drive democratization and reform. Until this potential is developed and employed, the "reinforced" EUSR/Head of Delegation will be as unsuccessful as his last three double-hatted predecessors.



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Now is the time to develop a real, integrated strategy toward making BiH a self-sustaining state.

## Where to Go from Here?

Though the situation looks increasingly insoluble, the fundamental problems in BiH are in fact not difficult to identify - or fix. A wholesale revolution in the international policy is not required, but a necessary strategic reassessment is. This would have to start with the EU demonstrating the political will to adopt a new approach toward BiH which accepts the ground realities that make BiH a highly specific enlargement case. In order to succeed in BiH, the EU together with the PIC Steering Board must base its EU integration policy on strict application of conditionality; neutralize the ability of politicians to leverage fear and re-establish respect for the basic Dayton rules; confront political elites and actors who block or undermine reforms and build a popular constituency for this approach with citizens.

BiH's citizens have never before had such a pronounced sense of how poorly served they are by their entire political elite. Therefore, with the EU in the lead, international actors need to engage citizens as partners - and force multipliers - in their effort to catalyze the transformation of BiH into a country which can serve its citizens and ultimately join the EU and NATO. This would constitute an effective alliance between the EU and other Western actors with BiH citizens against the inert and recalcitrant political elite.

This new policy approach for BiH would be focused around four key areas, all of which require a major philosophical reset for the major foreign actors in BiH, but not major institutional change.

Division of labor between EU institutions and Dayton instruments: reaffirm a strategic and collaborative relationship between the EU and other powers on the PIC Steering Board, particularly the US and Turkey; define the terms of a synergetic division of labor that will maintain the EU and its integration policy in the leading role, while retaining the Dayton institutions with full operational capacity until they are no longer needed.

A new approach to using the EU's integration structures and tools: apply strict conditionality. Put the SAA into force and suspend it until BiH meets the condition; end the reductionist concentration on conditionality for SAA and membership application in favor of a wider, overall package of reform requirements for BiH, including constitutional reform.

## A More Prudent Financial Assistance Policy

The EU should curtail macro-financial assistance to BiH until strict conditions are fully met. In addition, it should ensure (in cooperation with other Western actors) that the IMF applies stricter conditionality in its financial assistance to BiH. Building a popular constituency for a functional BiH: clearly define the EU's new integrated approach with the PIC SB, and how this can finally lead to BiH's membership in the EU, so that political elites cannot spin their way out of it before the public; identify lost opportunities and the direct damage inflicted by BiH's political class by their unwillingness to meet EU requirements. Identify those political actors who have undermined or blocked reforms, publicly assign responsibility to them and specify real-time costs of not meeting EU requirements on specific sectors of the population and the economy.