

## **Bosnian Standards or the European Criteria? A Credibility of Brussels in a Crisis**

**Bedrudin Brljavac**  
*Lund University, Sweden*  
*bedrudin07@yahoo.com*

**Abstract:** There is a wealth of literature and academic writings in which the European Union member states are criticized for not speaking “with a single voice” with regards to its common foreign policies. Similarly, in this paper I analysed the European Union approach towards Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of Europeanization process of BiH. We came to conclusion that the EU is deeply divided and incoherent in terms of its Europeanizing policies in Bosnia thus further deepening political impasse in the country. This is a serious credibility gap for the EU since it could not assert and prove itself as an attractive and powerful actor that is capable of resolving cumbersome Bosnian enigma.

**Keywords:** The Bosnian Standards; European Union; European Criteria; International Community; Credibility Crisis.

*Without integrating the Western Balkans, Europe will struggle to manage its out-of-area expansion and its global commitments as problems from the region will keep its focus on local issues (Antonio Milososki)*

### **1. Bosnia and the European Union Relations**

A recent statements delivered by Milorad Dodik, the populist leader of the most popular Bosnian Serbs party - the Union of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), in relation to appointment of Peter Sørensen as a new Head of EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, that he has set measures and conditions in order to establish good cooperation with the European Union provide indicative picture of unclear and complex relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter, Bosnia or BiH) and the European Union. Such statements explicitly demonstrate deepness and seriousness in which Bosnian political sphere is confronted with

since the very end of the war in Bosnia 1992-1995. That is, it is clearest indication of the post-war arrogance and irresponsible political rhetoric of ethno-nationalist political elites. Most importantly, such political statements made by the Bosnian politicians clearly display more than anything else seriousness of the credibility crisis that the European Union member states are facing in Bosnia.

BiH and the European Union have been in tight economic and political relations more than a decade. That is, in the aftermath of the war in Bosnia which ended in December 1995 the European Union has intensified its strategic activities towards the western Balkans region in whole, including Bosnia. Thus, in 1999 the EU has initiated Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) establishing more concrete and tangible political and economic links with the regional countries. Later in June 2000 in the Feira European Council, the member states agreed that all the SAP countries, including Bosnia, are potential candidates for future EU membership. Following a difficult and slow reform process Bosnian government signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA) with the EU in June 2008, which was the first pre-accession tool towards the country's EU membership. Since then little progress has been done due to harsh ethno-nationalist rhetoric. Also, the EU is not faultless for the long-lasting status quo in Bosnia.

## **2. What is a Europeanization Process?**

Since Bosnia and Herzegovina has been more than a decade passing through deep and thorough European Union-related reform process, in the literature of the European integration better known as Europeanization process, the European Union is expected to develop more clear-cut and coherent strategy toward this EU aspirant country. In fact, Europeanization process is not only about adopting and implementing EU policies, rules, norms and values into the domestic economic, legal and political context it is equally important that the EU has set clear standards, measures and rules which are to be adopted by aspirants on the membership. In other words, Europeanization process as a comprehensive reform and transformation oriented process is a two-way street between the European Union and the countries that aspire for the EU membership. That's why, it is of paramount importance that the roles and responsibilities both of the European Union and the EU aspirant, in this case Bosnia, are clearly defined and stressed.

The concept of Europeanization has become very popular within the study of European integration. There have been a variety of definitions made in relation to

Europeanization. However, most of them interpret this process as reform process in domestic political and economic system affected by policies decided at the European level. That is, we can define Europeanization as some form of domestic change that is caused by European decision-making. Similarly, Radaelli defines Europeanization as a “processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourses, identities, political structures and public policies.” Therefore, it is crucial that the EU find the way and develop solid methods how to diffuse and transmit its rules, policies, values and a European paradigm as an overall concept.

### **3. From American to Brussels Era**

Today, it is the EU rather than other bigger world players from international community such as USA, Russia, and China, more heavily involved in the political and economic affairs in the western Balkans and in Bosnia and Herzegovina particularly. During the Yugoslavian crisis in the early 1990s the EU had played very weak and incoherent role due to a serious lack of commitment and political will of its member states to pool more sovereignty in order to build stronger and more coherent security and defence policy at the European level. Although, at the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis the Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jacques Poos, then head of the EC Presidency, declared that the organization would intervene in the Yugoslavian crisis because it was “the hour of Europe, not the hour of the United States” the opposite proved true since it was a diplomatic fiasco for Europe and a diplomatic and military domination of the USA. For instance, the USA was the initiator of Dayton Agreement that ended the Bosnian war.

However, after the war the EU developed more strategic and tangible approach towards the Western Balkans countries. There has been an understanding that instability and possible conflicts in the region pose direct and serious threat to the EU. As a response, the EU developed more pro-active and comprehensive security and defence policy at the European level. Among other things, in December 2004, the EU launched a peacekeeping military operation in BiH, replacing NATO’s SFOR mission. In addition, the EU sent its Police Mission to Bosnia in January 2003 to replace the UN’s International Police Task Force (IPTF) as part of the

broader rule of law strategy in BiH and in the region. On the other hand, the US put diplomatic and military priority and deployed most of its troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Following initiation and later signing of SAA the western Balkan countries the region shifted from the US-dominated Dayton era into the the EU-dominated Brussels era. However, the Brussels era has not passed without challenges.

#### **4. Credibility Crisis of the EU in Bosnia**

Following the US shift in its foreign policy of prioritizing other regions more than Bosnia such development has left significant diplomatic space for other global powers such as the EU to assert its influence in this highly problematic country. Although the Union developed new institutional relations with the regional countries through newly initiated SAA it has faced a lot of challenges, and especially in Bosnia. The SAA include provisions and measures for future EU membership of the western Balkan countries. In fact, SAA is similar to the Europe Agreements that the EU signed with the Central and Eastern European countries in the 1990s and to the Association Agreement with Turkey. However, since a long-lasting political malaise in Bosnia it is obvious that the “EU's carrot” in the form of SAA has not worked with the local country's officials. That's why, the EU leaders duty is to make the bloc's values, norms, and standards more attractive and more concrete both for Bosnian politicians and its citizens.

Furthermore, the “EU sticks” have not been effective in interactions with the Bosnian political elites. Even the EU financial aid directed for the country has not been enough measure that would motivate domestic politician to implement necessary measures that Brussels had set beforehand. For instance, the EU provides targeted assistance to candidates and potential candidates countries through IPA (Instrument for pre-accession assistance) which supersedes the five previously existing pre-accession instruments, Phare, ISPA, SAPARD, Turkey instrument, and CARDS. Thus, the European Commission has allocated 440 million Euro of support to BiH in its transition from a potential candidate country to a candidate country for the period 2007-2011 under the IPA. BiH as a potential candidate is currently eligible for assistance to transition and institution building and cross-border cooperation. However, the EU has in some instances cut its financial assistance to BiH due to slow reform process. Still, in this way the EU has further pushed the country behind other regional countries on the road to Brussels.

## **5. European Union divided in Bosnia**

Very often the EU leaders seem very divided and deliver oppressing messages when the European integration reforms in Bosnia are concerned. Probably the best demonstration and proof to this fact has been diverse views and opinions of the EU officials regarding the future design and content of the Bosnian constitutional framework. In fact, the Bosnian authorities are expected to implement the European democratic values and effective bureaucratic standards that are based on the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria, respectively. However, although the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria propose what are the standards and measures that have to be implemented by the Bosnian politicians the EU member states have not demonstrated a common and principled position on the necessary constitutional changes. As a result, the EU member states are as divided as the local politicians are over the design and shape of the future Bosnian constitution. This has resulted in a huge EU credibility crisis in Bosnia.

Even though the EU leaders have often stressed that BiH cannot realize its EU aspirations if it does not reform its constitutional framework most of them have not explicitly stated what are these constitutional reforms expected from the Bosnians. This happened to a large degree due to diverse national interests of the EU member states on foreign policy questions and due to vagueness of the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria that are open to political manipulation. Better to say, since the EU has not stressed clearly the measures required the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria can be understood in thousand of different ways as is the case with the Bosnian elites. As a result, Bosnian Muslims want to enter Brussels as a country with strong and powerful central state. Bosnian Croats are in support of highly decentralized country. Bosnian Serb leaders see Bosnia in the EU as a weak central state with strong entities. Obviously, the EU should set the standard to solve the Bosnian impasse.

## **6. Concluding Notes**

It is natural thing that the European Union expects Bosnian government to implement necessary economic, political, legal and administrative reforms as a part of the country's Europeanization process through which it has been going through since late 1990s. However, Bosnia is for a long time in a serious impasse situation

due to opposing views of the three ethnic groups on the future design of the country. Also, the EU is equally responsible for current status quo since its member states are not united in terms of standards and measures expected from Bosnians. As a result, BiH politicians successfully manipulate with reluctance and ambiguous opinions of EU leaders. This is a serious credibility gap for the EU since it could not assert and present itself as an attractive and powerful actor that is capable of solving Bosnian intrigue. Thus, if the EU wish to become significant and credible global actor it should first solve problems at its backyard!