

# Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal  
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

## Perceptions of Serbia's Elite in Relation to the Dayton Agreement

Sonja Biserko

### Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been the central focus of the Serbian national project, not merely during the 1990s, but throughout the twentieth century. Serbia's aspirations in BiH since the 1990s' wars have remained consistent, and include the phased assimilation of Republika Srpska (RS). A section of the Serbian elite takes the firm position that "there is today no more essential and difficult task for the Serbian people as a whole than the preservation of Republika Srpska within the principles of the Dayton Agreement." In that respect, the political leadership of RS, and Milorad Dodik in particular, is viewed as "first-rate ...." because that policy has at the same time "become a question of the defence of the truth".

The war in Bosnia is treated by Serbian strategists exclusively as a fight for freedom on the part of the Serbian people; considerable energy, therefore, is invested in the fabrication of events which have the function of relativising responsibility for the war. Academic Dobrica Cosic, along with many others, is undoubtedly amongst the most active in promoting this approach and, whenever the opportunity arises, declares: "The fight for the truth about the past, for the truth about the Bosnian war, resistance to focusing on Markale and Srebrenica, and arriving at the truth about it which has been hidden by major world powers and Islamic factors. I think that RS is the last defence of Serbian truth, Serbian democracy and the Serbian right to survive."

Milorad Dodik clearly has not formulated his policy without the support of Belgrade; as Cosic confirms, "there is no stronger politician, no stronger or more respected person than Dodik in the defence of RS. I would say that he maintains and highlights our national honour. He is a man engaged in the active struggle against reactionary, anti-democratic forces, forces which are leading once again to conflict, and destroying the peace. He leads this struggle superbly, skilfully, and in a principled manner, and it is necessary to assist and support him in every respect, civil, intellectual, and political."

### War aims in Bosnia and Herzegovina

After its recognition by the international community on 6 April 1992, Bosnia and

Herzegovina was exposed to the most horrific political extermination of its Muslim population. The Serbs, within a very brief period of months, from April to August (1992) seized 70 percent of the territory of BiH. This has been confirmed in numerous court trials at the Hague tribunal, in relation to Foca, Prijedor, Sarajevo, and so on. Many atrocities are yet to be investigated, particularly those which took place along the river Drina. In that initial surge by Serb forces, Sarajevo, in the space of a few days, came under complete siege. The blockade of Sarajevo had already begun much earlier, in 1991. The army had become entrenched in positions around Sarajevo by the autumn of 1991, which also demonstrates that the military aggression against Bosnia was planned well ahead. The Serb population was prepared and armed. Radovan Karadzic, already in October 1991, in preparing a plebiscite of the Serb people in BiH, declared: "you must assume power energetically and fully" and "I say to you, whatever becomes of Bosnia, in Serb areas and villages, not one Muslim foundation will be left unburied (...) The first foundation which is buried will fly in the air. The world will understand us when we say that we will not allow the demographic picture to be disturbed, either naturally or artificially. There is no chance of this, our territories are our territories, and even if we are hungry we will occupy them, for here it is a fight for life and death, a fight for living space." He then referred to difficulties with the international community, saying, "There will be foreign observers, everything will be observed, there will be criminal deeds other than purely ethnically-based ones because "we no longer need the old state structures for union which will cost us a million victims every 20 years, and the reconstruction of the state every 20 years in the name of our victims. There is no question about it. What is ours is ours".

The wide-ranging preparations for aggression are evidenced by the speed with which the territory was seized, and the precision with which objects of historic and cultural value were targeted. The destruction of Bosnia's cultural and historic heritage was deliberate and planned, with the aim, amongst other things, of destroying Bosnia's multiculturalism. Sarajevo had a specific place in the assault of BiH. Karadzic stressed that "...Sarajevo integrates Eastern Herzegovina and Romanija for us. Romanija has its marketplace in Sarajevo. Serbian Sarajevo is of inestimable importance". He went on to stress: We can never abandon Sarajevo because that would mean that only the Muslims had a good state, and they would smoke us out of three regions: Eastern Herzegovina, old Herzegovina and Romanija - nothing would remain there if we didn't have our Sarajevo". The need to distract the international community was undoubtedly taken into consideration in the decision to lay Sarajevo to siege (from the persecution of the civilian population and the atrocities carried out in other areas of Bosnia).

Until the spring of 1992, Belgrade had anticipated that BiH would remain in some form of union with Serbia. The situation in BiH was considered to be particularly difficult and fragile, because of the question of the three constitutive national groups, none of which had an absolute majority and none, consequently, could make a decision which was to the detriment of the others. This was the position Belgrade put before the world, thereby announcing war in the event of Bosnia becoming independent. "Separating BiH from Yugoslavia" as Borisav Jovic put it, "is very dangerous and should not be undertaken". He considered that the "best solution was for Serbia, Montenegro and BiH to be constituted as a new democratic Yugoslavia to ensure its continuity". The European Community decision to recognise Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence and sovereignty was interpreted by Belgrade as the decisive error

which led to the escalation of the conflict. Jovic stressed that this was the fundamental cause of the conflict and suffering in BiH, not only for Muslims, but for the Serb and Croat people, too. The launch of the RAM project in Bosnia was initiated by General Uzelac, who was responsible for its operation.

The war aims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were already very clearly articulated in the RS parliamentary sitting in May 1992. Robert Donia, the American historian, in his expert witness testimony at the Hague Tribunal, identified six Bosnian Serb war aims. The first was separation from the other two communities, then the establishment of a corridor between Semberija (in the east) and Krajina (in the west); the third aim was the forming of a corridor along the Drina valley, to eliminate the Drina as a border between Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina; the fourth war aim was establishing borders on the Una and Neretva rivers; the fifth was the division of Sarajevo into Serb and Muslim parts, and the sixth aim was an outlet for RS to the sea.

### **Reluctant acceptance of the Dayton Agreement**

The Serbian elite accepted the Dayton Agreement under the pressure of reality, and in the knowledge that RS would otherwise be totally defeated. The international community halted the Croatian-Muslim offensive which threatened the fall of Banja Luka and Prijedor, and a probable new exodus of Serbs from BiH. As SPO leader Vuk Draskovic emphasized at the time, "if the war had not been halted with the support of the major world powers, the whole of Republika Srpska would have fallen within a few weeks". Slobodan Milosevic in his contacts with the international community threatened that if that happened those [Bosnia's] Serbs would be sent to Kosovo, which would generate a new conflict, which the international community would not be prepared for. The international decision to accept the ethnic division of Bosnia and the war results, meant that, at the very outset, elements were introduced which could not guarantee a functional state. Regardless of Annex 7 (the return of refugees), whose application would at least in part ensure the reconstruction of the prewar demographic picture of BiH, the Dayton Agreement, without a basic refugee returns policy, would not be able to secure the consolidation of the Bosnian state.

Before the end of the Bosnian war, dissent arose between Belgrade and Pale in relation to the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan, which even led to Belgrade introducing sanctions and closing its border with RS in 1994. On the very eve of Dayton, Milosevic was forced to secure the support of relevant factors in RS, Serbia and Montenegro in order to be in a position to represent all Serbs in the forthcoming talks. The Agreement of 30 August 1995 guaranteed the position of the main negotiator on the Serb side, which all the relevant Serb leaders signed at the time.

The Serbian elites, on the other hand, did not accept the Dayton Agreement, as they considered that Milosevic had yielded under pressure, and that the Serbs had lost 'ethnic' territory in the Bosnian Krajina. The Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) synod was the most vocal of all in opposing the Dayton Agreement and, in an appeal to the international community, maintained that the signature of the Patriarch should be considered void. Even the antiwar opposition in Serbia disapproved of the Agreement, essentially indicating that all parties were of the same view, fearing that Milosevic, under certain conditions, would gradually abandon Serbia's objectives. DSS President

Vojislav Kostunica expressed doubt that the Dayton agreement, as it stood, would not lead to further wars and instability. According to him, “the Serbian president from his room at Dayton ordered the Bosnian Serbs to congratulate Republika Srpska and wish peace and cooperation with the Muslim-Croat Federation. In other words, not in cooperation with the FRY, which meant that he had once again written them off and, with those congratulations, confirmed that they would live in another state”. He further asserted that “if RS was formalized at Geneva, then the frontier between RS and the FRY was formalized at Dayton. This is the time, therefore, to consider strengthening the ties between RS and the FRY, which should be stressed in all plans”.

Vojislav Seselj stated that the so-called peace agreement signed at Dayton represents confirmation of the Serb defeat, and that “the Serb people will never be able to accept such hysterical anti-Serb policies as those of Milosevic and the international community as final, and a future democratic and nationally-oriented authority will certainly know how to fulfil the aspirations of our people to live in a united and strong Serb state”.

Slobodan Milosevic considered the Dayton Agreement as a new opportunity to present himself to Serbia and the region as a peacemaker. As he declared: “I am certain that this moment, this historic day, one might say, will mark a move towards peace, understanding and cooperation in the Balkans. It is time that all nations in the region move towards economic recovery, development, reconstruction and mutual cooperation”.

### **Refugees as an instrument towards the creation of ethnic states**

The negative attitude towards the Dayton Agreement rapidly shifted once it was realized that this was the maximum achievable in the prevailing international climate, and that it was necessary to uphold the Agreement until such time as change occurred in the international context, so as to enable RS to secede from BiH. In formulating that ‘waiting’ strategy, an important role was assumed by the round table: “The Serb nation in the new geopolitical reality” (1997), when objectives and tactics became clearly defined: unification and freedom as a long term strategic national aim. The starting point was that the river Drina “remains to link the Serb people”.

The strategy was primarily defined in the policy to prevent the return of Bosniaks and Croats to RS. The refugee issue had an essential role in resolving the “Serb national question”. From the very start of the war, refugees were ‘created’ to demonstrate that ‘life together was not feasible’, while at the same time all non-Serbs were expelled from areas which were proclaimed as ethnic Serb territory. In that scenario, Kosovo could be divided with the Albanians on the basis of the model of territorial division carried out in Croatia and BiH: in other words, a massive “displacement of the civilian population”.

The exodus of Serbs from Croatia, and later from Sarajevo and the Western Bosnia, was significant in the light of the plan to move Serbs to territory viewed as part of the new Serb state, namely, RS. The refugees best illustrate that the war aim of the Serbian regime was territorial conquest, and not exclusively the “unification of all

Serbs". That, amongst other things, was what Dobrica Cosic declared at the very outset of the war, when he asserted that "Serbs, with the fall of Yugoslavia, are compelled to find a state-political kind of solution to the national question. I see this in a federation of Serb lands. In that federation, it is necessary that not 'all Serbs' are included, but Serb ethnic lands.

In the above-mentioned gathering at Fruska Gora (1997), particular attention was paid to the form of the strategy towards Republika Srpska aimed at refugee return. It was confirmed at that time that:

(...) the main danger for the survival and prosperity of Republika Srpska was Annex 7 of the Dayton Agreement, that is, the Agreement on Refugees and Displaced Persons (...) From the viewpoint of Serb national interests, that agreement was a double-edged sword. In its implementation, the cohesive power of RS would be lost, and the role of those forces which [utapaju] RS in a united state of BiH would be strengthened, and, even worse, the interests of the Serb people would be subordinated to those of the Muslims.

(...) From the viewpoint of Serb interests, RS is the one bright point in the process of SFRY disintegration. Yet, in the ensuing period, far greater pressure and blackmail by the so-called international community might be expected, [mocnika] of a new world movement, on RS due to the implementation of the Annex 7 provisions. One way of confronting the realization of Muslim objectives, whose fundamental aim is breaking down of RS via the return of Muslims to their territory and the biological dynamic, is the return of Serb refugees to RS and the promotion of demografic policies to increase the Serb population.

(...) Optimism as regards survival and overall advancement, especially in the socio-economic sphere. This is founded on the fact that RS and its Serb people at this moment, and for the foreseeable future, are necessary to Europe, to protect its interests, above all, in the role of RS in preventing the infiltration of Islamic fundamentalism into the heart of Europe. Also RS has adopted the role of the former Serbian Military Krajina. When the reasons for its existence disappear, our enemies, the Croats and the Catholic Church, will destroy RS if they are in a position to do so, and extend the Catholic borders eastwards (...) the role of SPC in stimulating measures to popularize the policy is very important, as is the immutable fact of the existence of RS.

The return of Bosniaks to RS is considered the greatest threat to the ethnic consolidation of RS, as was reflected in the reaction of RS towards the returns process. Various measures and means of intimidation were used to prevent Bosniaks from returning to RS in large numbers. At the same time "a radical programme and official personnel changes in the organisation of education, from elementary level to high school, was set in motion, in order to "defend the integrity and preserve the Serb consciousness", and to prevent their "assimilation" into the Bosnian state. In this way, culture and education were placed on equal footing with the police and army.

Amongst other things, refugee return was the main instrument, as envisaged in the Dayton Accords, to soften the consequences of the war and ethnic division. The

international community did not, however, devote sufficient attention to that process on the ground, despite 1997 being proclaimed the year of returns in BiH. Return was realized through the national-ethnic “key”, and also consolidated the ethnic division of Bosnia.

The efforts of the international community to relativise the ethnic division of Bosnia only partially succeeded by means of administrative measures, and in unifying some state functions. In this manner, the BiH army was united, and freedom of movement was secured throughout BiH, as well as a number of other concrete issues. RS persistently rejected or resisted the annulling of the state ingerencies of RS. Belgrade at all times openly supported that policy.

Wolfgang Petritsch, the international High Representative in BiH, succeeded in just one year in changing the situation in the entities and, in that sense, the New York declaration of November 1999, signed by the Presidency of BiH was encouraging. A decision was made on the Brcko enclave, which the Serb side considered a strategic point, as RS was cut in half. The government of the FRY (Serbia) protested, insisting that this was “yet one in a series of illegal acts on the part of Wolfgang Petritsch and yet “another attempt to impose foreign political and strategic objectives in BiH, against the legitimate interests of RS and the Serb people”. The Socialist Party of Republika Srpska at that time pledged to arrive at a long term solution for all refugees to remain in RS. The electoral headquarters of the District committee of that party announced in Zvornik that “insofar as Serbs fleeing from BiH Federation (of whom there were some 400,000) were not retained, and long term accommodation and perspectives and work found, RS will not survive”.

The introduction of single passports for all BiH provoked a stormy reaction in RS, especially within the SDS, which appealed to all the state organs of RS and the Serb representative in the joint organs of BiH to adopt a united stand over the decision, which entailed annulling the entities on which BiH rested, as well as the Dayton Agreement. The RS Socialist Party also announced that the imposition of “such legally binding resolutions will destroy the joint institutions of BiH and lead to the domination and hegemony of one of the three nations of BiH”. The RS parties also strongly criticised the suggestion of Haris Silajdzic to establish four economic regions in BiH, since that would ostensibly lead to the unitarisation of BiH. In Brcko, on 18 October 2000, there were Serb nationalist demonstrations in the secondary schools, which shouted: “This is Serbia” and “Brcko is Serbian”.

### **Democratic changes in Serbia and RS**

Even following the democratic changes in Serbia (2000) there was no change in policy; on the contrary, everything was clearly oriented towards preserving RS. The victory of Vojislav Kostunica meant that for the first time the nationalist bloc achieved legitimacy and international support. The amalgam of communists and nationalists disintegrated with Milosevic’s defeat, leaving only nationalism which spread and assumed, amongst other things, a strong anticommunist stance and constituted an umbrella for legitimizing the ideology represented by Nikolaj Velimirivic, Milan Nedic, Draza Mihajlovic and Dimitrije Ljotic. Milosevic’s territorial legacy was the starting point in the establishment of [Serbia’s] geostrategic objectives.

Vojislav Kostunica very promptly demonstrated his priorities in the region. Just days after taking over the FRY presidency, he announced that “it is not normal that there are Serb towns abroad” and that globalists think that “the Drina is not a river but an ocean”. On the occasion of the recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the FRY (following international pressure), Vojislav Kostunica announced that the FRY would insist on the literal implementation of the Dayton Agreement. He warned that everything “which leads to the suppression of the entities will meet with our reasoned and well-grounded criticism”, and that five years after Dayton there was a need for “the people to decide their future for themselves”. His announcements, right at the outset of his mandate, demonstrated Belgrade’s position on the division of BiH.

### **Kosovo in the context of Bosnia’s division**

The Serb national ideology after 2000 was nourished by the unresolved status of Kosovo. The Serb war adventure began with the idea of amputating Kosovo (due to the impossibility of controlling the Albanian demographic boom), and the Serb state spread in the north-west. This essentially hypocritical stance towards Kosovo as an inalienable part of Serbia had the function of claiming the right on RS. Bosnia’s future, when Serbia was in question, was placed in the context of the resolution of Kosovo’s status, which became a trading tool. When it became clear at the end of 2007 that Kosovo’s status would be resolved within a few months, Belgrade and Banja Luka coordinated their policies and, in the newly arisen situation, initiated a campaign to open the question of RS independence. So, the idea of compensating Kosovo for Republika Srpska came into force in 2007. Vojislav Kostunica in his pre-election campaign in 2007, declared “If we give up Kosovo, then we also give up the right to defend and protect Republika Srpska as a part, an independent part, of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Amongst other things, he stressed that Republika Srpska and Serbia were of the same spiritual and cultural space, despite “official and unofficial positions”.

### **The genocide judgment**

On 26 February 2007, the international Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered its judgment in the case brought by Bosnia and Herzegovina against Serbia and Montenegro for contravening the Genocide Convention. This years-long dispute, and the judgment itself, reverberated strongly amongst the public in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

The Court, in its judgment, confirmed that in Srebrenica in July 1995 genocide had been committed against the Bosnian Muslims, which was in accordance with the judgments of the Hague tribunal. According to the ICJ, Serbia was not declared responsible for carrying out, complicity or participation in genocide; it was, however, declared responsible for not preventing genocide. Serbia was also declared responsible for not handing over war criminal Ratko Mladic, indicted for genocide and complicity in genocide, to the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia.

The ICJ judgment was received in Belgrade with “relief”. Despite the judgment having confirmed genocide in Srebrenica, and Serbia’s responsibility for not preventing it, the political class in Serbia challenged the decision.. Such ambivalence in the formulation

of the judgment did not merely provoke the dissatisfaction of Bosniaks but provoked further disputes regarding the character of the war, and Serbia's role in it.

The decision was obviously a kind of political compromise on the part of the international players. The ICJ judgment resulted in deteriorating relations in BiH and led, quite justifiably, to questioning the legitimacy of the existence of Republika Srpska, provoking a sharp reaction from RS politicians.

In the course of 2007, an initiative was launched to divide Srebrenica from RS structures. That is to say, Srebrenica's municipal assembly adopted a resolution which sought to separate that municipality from RS ingerention. Serb committee members walked out of the sitting before the vote on its adoption, with the argument that there was no mandate for destroying the constitutional and legal formation of Republika Srpska, nor for violating the Dayton Agreement. Two truths about the past, with completely different interpretations, the ICJ judgment at The Hague, and the deep disagreement about the future of that town, converted a regular sitting of the municipal assembly into a debate lasting several hours. The then High Representative in BiH, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, stated that the decision on separating Srebrenica from RS was not in accord with the Dayton Agreement.

### **Kosovo independence: a new momentum for Bosnia**

The declaration of Kosovo's independence radicalized the behaviour of Milorad Dodik, and opened the question of the status of RS. Although Bosnia did not recognise Kosovo, unlike all the rest of Kosovo's neighbours, relations between Sarajevo and Belgrade continue to be tense. Dodik at one point emerged with the request that RS be permitted a referendum on independence. The RS Assembly resolution in February 2008, in which the possibility of a referendum was explicitly mooted for the first time, marked the beginning of a serious new crisis, not only in BiH, but in the region as a whole. Hidden behind Dodik's radicalization was the years-long strategy of Belgrade, supported by politicians, the media and the academic elite. In addition, Dodik's position strengthened the economic ties between Serbia and RS. Reactions to the views of RS politicians were strong, both amongst other politicians in BiH, and in the international sphere. It was made clear to Dodik that RS independence was not a matter for discussion.

The destabilisation of BiH once again attracted the attention of the United States and the EU. Bosnia was unexpectedly placed on the priority list of the new American administration, albeit not at the top. Numerous experts at the beginning of 2009 began pointing to the unsustainability of the situation in Bosnia, and the possibility of renewed conflict.

Only in the United States was a resolution passed in the Congress; a chain of articles and commentaries appeared in leading US media centres; the Bosniak diaspora in the US strengthened its activities in Congress and the State Department, and a series of Bosniak politicians visited the US. All of this anticipated the arrival of the new administration. In Congress, on 9 April 2009, there was a hearing on which occasion attention was paid to the fact that Milorad Dodik "had taken advantage of the international community's neglect of Bosnia and the deficiencies of the Dayton

Agreement which even more made RS more independent". Attention was also drawn to the fact that Dodik "had exploited Europe's fear of Muslim terrorism in order to avoid any efforts at constitutional reform in BiH". It was also emphasized that a new American initiative was essential in order to bring about stability in the region as a whole, especially Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia. Priority was given to Bosnia, and for the the US administration to complete the Dayton process through initiating a new plan for Bosnian reintegration not, however, based on ethnic principles. It was underlined that ethnic territorialisation works against unity in complex states.

As Daniel Serwer, Director of the Balkan Program at the US Institute for Peace, said: "If changes to the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina are not seriously set in motion, the international community must consider the maintenance of a new Dayton. The only theme that should be discussed is that question. No division, separation or similar nonsense". Morton Abramovitz and Serwer, in a joint article, suggest a renewed European mediation and US initiative to carry out the constitutional reforms. To start with, the EU and the United States have to state clearly that the current constitutional situation in BiH is unacceptable and must change. If that does not produce results, it will be necessary to convene a new Dayton conference, with the original participants, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with its two entities, as well as the EU, Britain, France, Germany and Russia. After consultation with all participants, the United States and the EU should prepare a draft of a new constitution which would meet European standards.

In the course of 2008, three events took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina which were of historical significance there. The first was the capture of Radovan Karadzic in Belgrade in the July. Although it took place on Serbian territory, his capture was of particular importance for BiH for at least two reasons. Firstly, Karadzic is being tried at The Hague for war crimes and genocide, not only in Srebrenica but in 11 municipalities in Bosnia. Additionally, General Momcilo Perisic is also being tried in The Hague, according to the indictment, through his position as the Chief of Staff of the Yugoslav Army in founding the so-called officers' centre, which was responsible for financial and logistical assistance to the Army of Republika Srpska, for carrying out their orders to army chiefs. In this way, according to the indictment, Perisic from the middle of 1993 to the end of 1995 contributed to the atrocities in the siege of Sarajevo, the shelling of Zagreb and the fall of Srebrenica. Both of these trials (Karadzic and Perisic) play an important part in bringing to light the role of Belgrade in planning and carrying out genocide in Bosnia.

The second event was the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and BiH. The Agreement was signed on 16 June 2008 in Luxemburg, in parallel with the SAA, a Temporary Trade Agreement was signed, which marked – as was stated in the conclusions of EU state and government leaders – "an important step for BiH along the road to the EU". The signing of this agreement was made possible following reforms of certain segments of the joint state: "reforms" of its policy, public administration and public RTV services.

The attempt for find a solution within Bosnia, the Prud Agreement between the leaders of the political parties (Milorad Dodik, Sulejman Tihic and Dragan Covic), did not secure the full support of the Bosnian public. Essentially, the real content of the

Prud Agreement was never disclosed but, from the declarations of the three leaders, it was possible to conclude that there was, inter alia, discussion of the creation of a third entity with the headquarters in Mostar, the division of state property, the beneficiaries of which would be the entities. That attempt failed, despite support from the international community. The High Representative, Valentin Inzko, also confirmed that: I support all that the three peoples do willingly, such as the Prud process. It would be good if the other parties joined in. This is not the only condition for closing the OHR, or for its transformation, but it would be a sign of maturity.”

The European Parliament passed a resolution on BiH which sought the formation of a functional state and institutions, in order to accelerate the process of EU integration. Evidently, the failure of these talks also prompted the renewed internationalisation of the Bosnian issue.

However, the international community allowed Dodik to continue with the process of weakening the unitary state, which further distanced BiH from the European perspective. The only positive medium-term strategy in relation to Bosnia was the adoption of the Bonn Powers for a longer period. The RS position within BiH also became redefined during this time. In the longer term, a serious revision of the Dayton Agreement will be essential, as this is a stumbling block in the process of consolidating the state.

Redefining relations within BH remains the first precondition for the development of the country. The possibility of restoring genuine relations between Serbia and BiH will only be realized if Belgrade relinquishes its practice of destabilisation towards BiH, and officially and formally apologizes to the victims of the Bosnian war, and their families, in a responsible manner. In other words, it will be impossible to heal relations between Serbia and BiH in a meaningful way until the Serbian political leadership demonstrates in an honest manner its remorse for atrocities committed in the 1990s. The policy of aggression and ethnic cleaning which resulted in the murder of over 100,000 people, tens of thousands of cases of rape, and the displacement of more than 2 million people, has never - at least formally - been adequately condemned in Serbia, the RS parliament, the president or government. Moreover, on the question of concrete material compensation, there has not been even a word.

### **Belgrade and its neighbours**

The main problem is Serbia's relations towards its neighbours and its desire to maintain patronage over them. Even two decades after the fall of SFRY, today's political leaders still do not comprehend the context of European regional cooperation and, in that sense, the meaning of "European perspectives".

One of the key directions of Belgrade's activities in the region is linked with the population census which is scheduled to take place throughout the region during 2011, on the occasion of which the Ministry for the Diaspora introduced the Strategy for Preserving and Strengthening relations between the motherland and diaspora, and the motherland and Serbs in the region, which is viewed in the region as a mini Memorandum. This strategy has been in process for three years, with numerous institutions and individuals contributing to the document. The Minister for the

Diaspora has stressed that “no longer will our people in the world be treated as political opponents, and Serbs in the region will no longer be misused for daily political purposes. We must all contemplate the fact that 40 per cent of our people live outside our national borders, we should draw lessons from the past, and we should never again allow in Serbia the dominance of a policy which encourages people to leave the country”.

The Strategy stresses that it was the intention of Republika Serbia to assist the diaspora and Serbs in the region, on the one hand to integrate into local areas and, on the other, to resist assimilation and, on that question, close cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church was expected. With the fall of the SFRY, Serbs who were the constitutional peoples have become the minority in the newly formed states. The Strategy seeks that Serbs in Croatia and Montenegro receive the status of a constitutive people again. Due to the reaction in Montenegro and Croatia, the bid for this status was abandoned. It was alleged that in neighbouring states the Serb communities have been disenabled, and in certain quarters, the minority have not been guaranteed international standards and basic human rights, freedom of movement, schooling in their native language, employment, and so on.

In relation to Republika Srpska, the Strategy stresses that RS should represent the most important area of interest and one of the state and national foreign policy priorities of Republika Srpska...It is further stressed that the relevant ministries should permit all citizens of Republika Srpska who wish it to obtain Serbian citizenship. Republika Srpska should represent the most important areas of interest, and one of the state and national foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Serbia (...) Should insist on the consistent implementation of the Dayton Agreement and continuous empowerment of Republika Srpska and its institutions. The Foreign Ministry should, in every way, diplomatically support efforts for the survival of Republika Srpska, and to defend its rights before the EU, the USA, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UN. It is essential that the ministries responsible enable all citizens of Republika Srpska who wish it to obtain Serbian citizenship.

It stresses that the Ministry for Economic and Regional Development should encourage investment into districts in Republika Srpska, especially in zones with little growth (Herzegovina, Podrinje, Manjaca) and zones of vital strategic importance (Brcko, Posavina, the Una valley).

The Ministry of Education should continue with the process of unifying the two educational systems. The Ministry of Culture should devote considerable attention to the advancement of culture of the Serb people in Republika Srpska and its ties with the motherland.

The Ministry of Religion should continue concern and the financing of priests and monasteries, bearing in mind their spiritual mission in protecting the national identity, in offering assistance to religious, cultural and educational institutes, publishing projects, radio and TV stations, and the restoration and renewal of sacred heritage of the Serb people.

The strategy also addresses the position of the Serb people in the Federation of Bosnia

and Herzegovina, starting from the point that all Serbs are a constitutive nation in that entity, but also [bears in mind] their unfortunate position vis-à-vis Bosniaks and Croats in Republika Srpska. The strategy holds that the relevant ministries in Republika Serbia, alongside their normal activities, help the return to, and economic survival of Serbs in, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In short, Republika of Serbia supports the restitution of property taken from Serb citizens, Serb societies and institutions (banks, savings banks and cultural-educational companies) as well as the Serbian Orthodox Church; the restoration of the sacred heritage of the Serb people; the development of educational centres and the Serbian Orthodox Church (seminaries, secondary schools, primary schools, nurseries, etc).

Republika Srpska is becoming increasingly confirmed and cemented as a war booty which Serbia will not give up. This was also referred to at the recent international conference in Sarajevo by Goran Svilanovic (May), who quoted one Serbian politician who, on the question of what was the result of supporting the Milosevic project and nationalist policy, answered that – Serbian Vojvodina and Republika Srpska. Svilanovic said: “In defending these results, the Serbian national opinion is far more united than might be apparent, despite what Goran Svilanovic says, or anyone else who comes to Sarajevo. The honest answer to the question of whether those are the results which this and any future government of Serbia endeavour to protect, the answer is – yes. Secondly, and more unpleasantly: my impression is that it is important to say in Sarajevo that the constitutional patriotism amongst citizens (not politicians) of Republika Srpska, is almost equal to zero in relation to the state of BiH”.

### **The role of Belgrade in normalizing relations within Bosnia**

The normalisation of relations within Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be possible in the longer term while Belgrade persists with its imperialistic pretensions in the region. In other words, the exchange of Kosovo for Republika Srpska is not possible, and therefore it is important that Belgrade finally sends a clear message to the citizens of Republika Srpsks that Bosnia and Herzegovins is their country, not Serbia.

The resolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s problems depends on the constructive role of Serbia. The influence which Serbia has on politicians in Bosnia can be of crucial importance for the development of events. And, if Serbia wishes to speed up its path to the European Union, its behaviour towards Bosnia will be particularly important.

Belgrade’s continual insistence on the status quo and on the immutability of the Dayton Agreement, and on the mantra that Belgrade will accept everything “which is agreed on by the three groups” speaks more about the weakness of Europe than the strength of Serbia. Serbia rose on the support and help of the EU and US, and its policies and blackmailing powers are the consequence of the weakness of the West to resolve some of the fundamental questions which are not local in character.

The arrest of Ratko Mladic could assist in a new international initiative in Bosnia. At the same time, Serbia’s candidature, and the start of negotiations for EU membership, would certainly reduce Serbia’s support of RS. This would also imply the orientation of RS towards Sarajevo as its centre.

Consequently, the Bosnian question is still open, due to the lack of political will to approach the issue also from the moral standpoint. Bosnia was, and remains, a moral issue for Europe. It is finally time for the international community to adopt a position in relation to the crimes which have taken place against Bosnia and the Bosnian people. It is immoral that Srebrenica remains in the Serb entity and that the killers and persecutors walk around in the streets of that town freely. When the Mothers of Srebrenica are no longer around, that town will be not only a town of the dead, but a dead town. Srebrenica is a symbol of atrocity, and of the insensitivity of the world, especially Europe.

The Declaration of the European Parliament is an important document, therefore, which returns to Srebrenica in an attempt not to forget that atrocity. Finally, Europe treats that atrocity as its moral responsibility. Nation-building in Bosnia must be set on new foundations where the citizens are the central focus. The Bosnian Serbs must be helped to free themselves from the exclusive responsibility for genocide that Belgrade has foisted on them, because that will place a lasting wall between them and the Bosniaks. And finally, reconciliation in Bosnia will be possible only based on the truth, and not on the equalisation of all three sides.

In the completing of the Balkan mosaic, Bosnia is the last. It is also the place in which the most errors were made. It would be useful for Europe to acknowledge some of its own blunders and errors. It would help the region itself to act more responsibly in relation to its recent history.

The first official visit of Boris Tadic to Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina (at the beginning of July) could mark the beginning of a new policy of Belgrade towards Bosnia.

© 2011 *Sonja Biserko*

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.