

The European Union and the Western Balkans: Bad Plans and Unfulfilled Promises

17. December 2018 by [Zlatko Dizdarević](#)

When 15 years ago, in 2003, the leaders of the European Union countries signed 'The Thessaloniki Promise' which, among other items, states that 'the future of the Western Balkan countries is in the European Union', a great majority of them probably believed it. As did most of the leaders of the countries which still only belong to the Western Balkans, i.e. the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia and Croatia, which have become members of the European Union, and plus Albania which has entered the alleged waiting room for the EU; six countries in total.

Nowadays, the situation with Europe and the Western Balkans 'waiting room' is far from the Thessaloniki optimism, not only on the level of sentimental and political convictions, but also on the basis of what used to be quite clear and solid criteria for both the candidature and EU membership. As far as the EU is concerned, a representative of the German Left recently said, quite cynically, that 'the EU is now in such a condition that if it wanted to be a member of itself, it would not meet the criteria for its own membership.' At the same time, concerning potential candidates for future membership in the EU, the enthusiasm of citizens is evidently declining. Reactions following each of the many 'initiatives' for joining the EU are drifting away from the former enthusiasm, away from the former dreams of the implied happiness that is awaiting candidates there in the future.

Currently, the balance of all initiatives is as follows: Serbia and Montenegro are negotiating the accession and, at best, if they meet all the requirements, they can become EU members by 2025. The most difficult condition for Serbia regarding 'transitional measures' is 'a full normalisation with Kosovo'. Macedonia and Albania, already candidates, can start negotiations in June 2019. Further steps depend on extremely demanding reforms. B&H is not yet a candidate. There is hope that it can become one by the end of 2019, although, along much else, it is late with the submission of 655 additional questions. It is only at the end of 2019 that it may be possible to start negotiations after demanding reforms. Membership in the EU remains uncertain. Kosovo is altogether under question, including candidate status, although it is aided from the outside. A big problem concerning 'normalisation' is the situation with Serbia, which is even worsened by Pristina's moves. (The condition is to solve it as early as the end of 2019.) Another hurdle is the fact that it is not yet recognised by many, not even the Balkan countries.

In the past three decades, the results of the promised transition - at least in most countries of the former SFR Yugoslavia – have not been achieved. The economic and political situation, the functioning of the system, standard of living, employment, health, education, culture, all represent a yet more compelling reason for recollection of 'former times'. Regardless of how much the former state was, by textbook definitions, formally undemocratic, based on comparative criteria for elementary human satisfaction – it is repeatedly mentioned for a reason. Today's democracy, the rule of law, nationality and religion, as criterion more important than any other, the lack of solidarity, humiliation and dependence on large 'patrons' at home and abroad, are equally a cause for frustration that is visibly growing.

Concerning the economy, there was a thorough 'liquidation' of the once enviable production of goods of a wide spectrum which had been valorised and recognised outside the borders of the former state. Industrial production was particularly significant, of high-quality and profitable. It facilitated the level of employment never again reached in the new countries. All this enabled social security, as well as the assumptions for a strong and comprehensive advancement of the society. Unlike the countries of then Eastern Europe, state and society here were open to communication with the world. The right to private property, freedom of movement, openness to the world were unquestionable. The political system was much more liberal than many assumptions and interpretations from abroad would have it, especially compared to the European East. All this created different criteria for progress, as well as a different mentality and direct competitiveness in the West in many spheres. Radical change - additionally stimulated by war, the demolition of the former state and the entire system, was disastrous for ordinary citizens, workers and the middle class. The new, profit-making class managed very successfully under the new circumstances. Life and the system were adapted to them. The pressure of relationships imposed overnight, the forms of organisation, technology, the fragmentation of production and the elimination of large economic systems, the unplanned opening-up of the market and competition from the regulated European countries devastated not only the economic but also the social essence of the country. A brutal plunder of state and social property left particularly devastating consequences as the profit was passed into the pockets of the privileged, in the name of privatisation. The creation of complete dependence on foreign capital and banks, false promises and deceptions about help from abroad in the past three decades produced the current feeling of defeat which cannot be suppressed by repeated promises of 'Europeanisation'.

Also, there is the internal turmoil in the EU and strong pressure on the Balkans by influential external geostrategic players such as America, Russia and Turkey. The European Union also demonstrated a certain unpreparedness for shocks as Brexit, the emergence of refugees and migrants, the (r)emergence of the radical right and nationalism, and an obvious stratification within the EU itself (Hungary and Poland, the Višegrad Group, repercussions from Ukraine and the Middle East). There is serious corruption especially in countries with underdeveloped economies such as Romania, Bulgaria and some Baltic countries. Croatia is becoming more susceptible to the old influences of radical nationalism which openly rejects the civic concept as an elementary European value, and in the name of the exclusive ethnic organising of 'their Croats' in neighbouring Bosnia where Croats, alongside Serbs and Bosniaks, are recognised as a constitutive people. These are, among many others, the reasons why doubt and discouragement have sprung up in relation to today's Europe, regardless of how much the people in the Western Balkans have always been its supporters.

The results of the long delay for the Western Balkans to join the European Union are coming back as a boomerang. Some good transitional ideas aimed at gaining time before a 'better tomorrow comes' are slowly falling into oblivion. Even the enthusiastically welcomed idea which was expressed at the Western Balkans Summit in Trieste about the Balkans Customs Union cooled in just over a year. It made sense, indeed, in a situation when discussions on expansion and the 'different speeds' of expansion were a good reason for compromises. It makes sense even today, only the relations between many of these countries are now a serious problem. Today, inter relations between the Western Balkan countries, in addition to

relations to other countries in the region, are so bad that they leave no room for discussing even the before mentioned Customs Union, let alone a Union on a larger scale.

The transition of the Western Balkans: miscalculations and omissions

Believing that the transition of the Western Balkans will proceed according to the common principles of the EU, especially in terms of the economic model proposed by Brussels, as well as that democratic reforms primarily directed at ensuring the rule of law will actually take place, are two of numerous miscalculations and omissions which have been made and that the EU administration is still not aware of, or is simply not ready to admit. Instead of radical application of the concepts and plans for a more thorough and efficient transition in both economic and political aspect, European standards and requirements were drastically lowered in response to incompetence and various interests within the candidate countries and their elites. This approach encouraged obstructions, not a comprehensive implementation of what is unquestionable. The advocates of such approach believed that it would prevent the sparks and destabilisation of the candidate countries, as well as Europe. However, the opposite happened. The countries of the Western Balkans have thus moved further away from the EU and its original values, while at the same time contributing to the processes of weakening the EU and its identity.

Plans for the Western Balkan countries have also been defined by insisting on mechanisms by which the alleged (de facto unfinished) transition of Central and Eastern European countries to the EU has taken place, primarily to ensure, in different geostrategic conditions, the energy supply routes from the east through the Balkans to the west, but also to allow NATO to enter countries bordering Russia. There was no major questioning of the capacity of the new 'eastern' members to the EU to meet the criteria for accession. Reducing the criteria in the name of the ultimate goal has never worked miracles in politics as a way to meet vital interests. Geo-strategy as a concern is always stronger than the principle. Just take these examples: the case of the sudden admission of Montenegro to NATO, discovering a mechanism to 'legally' disregard the failed referendum in Macedonia, the categorical recognition of dubious election results in B&H in spite of the obvious fraud, plans to change the borders between Serbia and Kosovo regardless of the principle of inalterability of the borders in Europe, the silence in the EU over the fierce endeavour of Croatia (even through the EU institutions) to adopt a completely non-European principle of ethnic over civil in spite of its jeopardising the existence of B&H.

The empty space left behind unsuccessful plans for the final unification of Europe and the rest of the Western Balkans is continuously filled by 'strategists' who persistently repeat their proposals and visions on how to untie this historical knot. They mostly feed on old and well-known desires of conquering ambitions based on 'blood and soil'. It is well-known that such a victory primarily requires destabilising the people and region. Today, they are fundamentally assisted by the whole systems of propaganda, bribed journalists, the undermining of fact and truth - in short, brainwashing and the creation of an informational jungle where anything can be achieved. Certainly, the creators of different theories of 'solving the problems of the Balkans' are familiar with the wishes of those who have always had an appetite for this area, regardless of the repeated bloodshed and destruction, and whose major initiators were from various parts of the world. People from the Balkans have mostly been only cannon fodder in these wars,

most often even unconsciously persistent supporters of the 'great' powers who have treated the Balkans as an arena for various ambitions and games to their own end.

In addition to the various official plans and initiatives on EU enlargement by accession of Western Balkan countries - with parallel sagas on applications, nominations, dates, negotiations, the first and second gear, customs unions, 'corrections' of the [Badinter border principle](#), a civil or ethnic concept of interior establishment; new ideas keep emerging from the projects conceived in Brussels. Initially, they were generally discarded as ridiculous, but later increasingly referred to as 'possible options'. For instance, at the end of 2016, a former diplomat and analyst, Timothy Less, following the concept of 'the end of multi-ethnicity in the Balkans' put out a radical idea in the magazine *Foreign Affairs* - an important journal close to the US administration, that the Western Balkans should end up in three, de facto, mono-national states: Greater Serbia with Republika Srpska and Montenegro annexed, Greater Croatia with the Croatian Entity in B&H and finally Greater Albania with Kosovo and Western Macedonia. And all this with the consent of, no less, the UK, Germany, France, Russia and Turkey, and with US assistance. Such radical ideas provoke a great surprise when first brought up. The second mention already reveals that the proposal might not be dismissed altogether! How the Balkans would react to the plan created by a certain Less is less important.

It was similar to the idea of changing borders in the case of Serbia and Kosovo. Very little is said about the disastrous idea of opening borders in the region in this way, especially in relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was much more important what Merkel said, what Macron said, even what Wolfgang Petrić said – the former head of the OHR in Sarajevo and a 'peace-keeper' - today a privately-employed lawyer of an international organisation who has an 'understanding' of abandoning the principle of the unalterable borders in the Balkans. Allegedly, a former CIA deputy for Balkans, a certain Steven Meyer, also has ideas about the future of the Balkans. He openly supports Serbia's interest in abandoning the Brussels process based on the conviction that the borders of 'fictitious states, B&H, Kosovo and Macedonia are certain to change...' There are many others with similar ideas, equally trivial as various examples of 'geostrategic exhibitionism'. However, in the situation when the process of enlargement of the European Union has remained unfinished for decades, with full consent of the parties involved, much of this initial exhibitionism is slowly but surely evolving to encourage a new agony in the Balkans. To sum up, the European integration process, once a successful idea and model, has meanwhile led to serious suspicion and even renunciation.

The plans for the realisation and implementation of the great idea of integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union are visibly losing strength due to the problems with their realisation, leading to a different reality both in Europe and in the EU itself. The situation concerning the Western Balkans is currently different than it was at the time of the optimism expressed in the 'Thessaloniki Promise' in 2003. The pressure of unfulfilled promises has also opened new and wider gaps allowing for the decline of the initial enthusiasm among the Europeans in the EU as well as among those who are still in the 'waiting room'; while citizens in the Western Balkans have started asking louder: what are we still doing here?

The specific situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina

It is necessary to point to some important facts in order to clarify the reasons why Bosnia and Herzegovina fails to respond successfully to EU requirements in the accession process, why the majority of its leaders do not show the expected interest in the process, despite false promises, and also why the EU institutions cannot or do not want to understand this in order to undertake successful measures. These facts are equally important in many respects for some of the six countries of the Western Balkans, regardless of how much these facts may be declared irrelevant in this process.

The comparison between the post-war situation in 1945 Germany and the 1995 Balkans - with full respect for the capital differences between the Second World War and the Balkans war from less than three decades ago – gives the impetus for a rational analysis of the causes and consequences of the situation we have today in the Balkans. First of all, the victorious alliance, creating the prerequisites for the new and different democratic future of the world and especially Europe, made a number of rational, concrete and necessary moves at the end of the Second World War. Let's recall the most important ones: All who were part of the ruling establishment of the Nazi-fascist project were promptly removed from the public and political scene. All parties, movements, organisations and associations that acted as part of that system were forbidden, as well as the prominent supporters of the defeated regime. Any segments of glorification of this part of history were removed from school curricula and textbooks for new generations, while including precise explanations of historical facts and consequences of the war. All Nazi and similar symbols and attributes were forbidden. By indisputable laws, decisions and actions, many of the glorified 'values' were eliminated from the historical scene, which, as the synonyms of the past, overshadowed everyday life, culture, art, and sports and entertainment. The state apparatus was cleansed of all who belonged to the politics and the philosophy of the Third Reich. It was particularly important that the process against indicted war criminals in Nuremberg lasted only 11 months, from November 1945 to October 1946 and the execution of the verdicts took place one day after the end of the trial. Only a small number of fugitive war criminals were found and brought to justice later. In the public domain, there was officially no room for dilemmas whether they were criminals or 'heroes'. The 'new (West) Germany' got the efficient 'Marshall Plan' and a large global financial support which triggered the economy and renewal. People got jobs and the basis for existence, as well as the motive to stay in their country. Elections were not organised immediately after the end of the war and not before a great deal was cleared-up to allow for cool heads, rational thought and a new start. The new leadership of the state, once elected, was completely directed towards the future, and the purpose of daily politics was not to recall the ill-fated ghosts of the past, although the dead were not forgotten and well-deserved monuments were erected. This is how post-war Germany, slowly but surely, became great in every way.

Without any ambitions to draw a parallel in terms of the significance and the extent of the two wars - World War II and the Balkans war whose bloody consequences are still felt today, it is a bitter realisation that nothing of German history has been taken as a lesson in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the contrary, the exact opposite has been done. From determining the 'character' of the war, the Peace Agreement and the Dayton concept, to deceitfully repeated proclamations of justice and reconciliation with the manipulative implementation of fake politics in states which still have to fulfil the conditions to join the 'new society'.

First of all, the decision of the Creators of the Dayton Peace Agreement was that the final balance of the Balkans war must not define the victorious and the defeated, allegedly so in order not to compromise the future and expose to frustration future generations whose fathers were war criminals by all criteria. In addition, this ancient and eternally valid imperial logic was adopted in the Balkans as well: ‘... if in your sphere of interest there are more tribes fighting, your partner should be the greatest and the strongest among them...’

Residents of Sarajevo can hardly escape premonitions that it was like this during the 1992-1995 war in B&H, and especially after it. The aim of the Dayton Peace Agreement is persistently repeated today, that it was time to stop the war! The shooting stopped 25 years ago, but the Dayton Agreement is still in force, having devastating effects on country and society. At the same time, new types of ‘warfare’ in the background are becoming stronger and more cunning. To victory!

Even then, the elections were held immediately after the war, with war sites still in ashes. Parties and their ideologies, which along with the general schizophrenia, had led to collapse after having triumphantly joined their national flags have now been legalised as winners. In the end, they emerged from the war on similar winning positions, promising Europe and America peace and democracy, knowing that making these promises would keep them in power with satisfied foreigners and with their own citizens ‘thrown into sheepfolds’.

The International Crime Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague occupies a special place in this dark mosaic. Considering its duration - twenty-three times longer than the Nuremberg trial - there are contradictory conclusions about its results among those who established and managed the court, the foreigners and the many observers from the Balkans. The former glorified its historical role in the process of ‘affirmation of truth and trust’; the latter argued that many of its effects were simply counterproductive. Certainly, the real results are still to be assessed; however, it is certain that the Nuremberg trial has never been seen as a victory for the criminals, which is not the case with The Hague. This fact has been reinforced, throughout the years, by new affirmations and political legitimating of the same principles based on which the war was initiated, conducted and ended. Truth and reconciliation as terms, as values and as interest have changed their essence not only in public, but very often in politics too - on different sides in a completely different manner, naturally. Many criminals have truly become heroes, including official and public acknowledgment of that fact. In addition, public definitions of collective victories and defeats are different. This has created room for initial standards of ICTY verdicts to be interpreted differently after 24 years of procrastination. Crimes have remained but their ‘valorisation’ ranges from slightly different to completely opposite. Many leaders of the Balkan countries are also very much involved, even those who are members of the, in this case, silent EU. In a way, they were helped by The Hague which simply became counterproductive in its practices. An example of this is the fact that verdicts such as Karadzic, Mladic, Šešelj, Stanišić, Simatović etc. are not yet final! Meanwhile, many other indicted war criminals, and even those who partially served the sentence, became true heroes and were welcomed with exultation at the airports even by the current political leadership of the country, some receiving war honours upon returning. Simultaneously, many true heroes - not the fraudsters with fake war records - have been humiliated and condemned to oblivion as the new reality created no space for them.

The solution to the B&H situation does not lie in bureaucratic decisions about the 'European path', but rather in focusing on the substance of a community and in a genuine awareness of the necessity to launch essential civilisation reforms of a gravely disintegrated state and of the distorted values of a once distinguished society.

The political past has to be understood and acknowledged in all this. Under these circumstances, the European Union insisted on measures and standards as if the situation here had developed as in Germany after 1945. Furthermore, fearing the consequence of the defeat of the entire project, there is the absurd public evaluation of the so-called reform processes in B&H as – impressive, coming even from highly positioned EU officials dealing with B&H citizens. Is it because they really do not understand the reality here, or because they trust the B&H leaders who publicly deceive them, or is it because they believe that this system based on corruption and the organisation of politics and businesses according to cartel arrangements can be altered by the false promises of those who run these cartels, formally ethnically separated, but united in interest.

The post-war nationalist elite, deliberately unwilling to change to this day, have been counting on the unquestionable opportunism of European bureaucracy. Most foreigners are convinced that winning over leaders of the three 'tribes' is the best guarantee that a new war will not happen. Everyone keeps 'their' people homogenised and under control by creating tensions and fears of the other. The consensus of foreign and local leaders was created on abandoning radical changes even though it meant silently giving up any substantial and effective reforms necessary to bring the Balkans, especially B&H, closer to Europe. Therefore, in case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU institutions have, deliberately or not, chosen an artificial environment, somewhere in between theoretical democracy and practical stability. It is mockingly referred to as 'stabilocracy' in B&H. And everyone is satisfied and calm because the situation is 'stable', for this is guaranteed by the leaders of the majority in the national division of clans, and democracy will continue to be promised as a convenient mantra from summit to summit where worried European leaders and guests from the Balkans analyse the 'reforms'. Presenting failure as success has long been a routine in the Balkans.

An interesting and accurate statement about this situation was given in an interview recently by a German political analyst, Bodo Weber, who is a rarely good expert on the situation in B&H. As a senior associate of the Democratization Policy Council (DPC), responding to a journalist's question 'why B&H was left alone in the middle of the storm, on the one hand under the blow of all the more aggressive political attacks of Serbia and Croatia on the sovereignty of the state, and on the other hand, to fight internally with the retrograde policies of Milorad Dodik and Dragan Čović, and whether Europe is aware of the danger B&H was led into again,' Weber replied: 'For 10 years, we have been documenting the fall of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a deep structural crisis and the responsibility of the political ignorance of the West, the EU in particular, for the return of B&H to self-destructive dynamics. It is precisely the political vacuum the West left in B&H that was the basis for the rise of nationalist politics that enables the political elites to rule with the combination of the politics, fear and patronage. In spite of various failed initiatives in B&H, the European Union, unfortunately, has not yet found enough political will to seriously deal with Bosnia and Herzegovina.'

Political elites and the lack of political willpower

Most of the objective political analysts and experts regarding the internal situation and essential reasons for the complete failure of many European Union initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina agree that the essential cause of these failures is always the same - the lack of political willpower and fear to explicitly address the question of the responsibilities of the elites who have no intention of entering into structural reforms of the constitution and economy because, in the present state of a dysfunctional and dilapidated constitutional and political order in B&H, they are the greatest profiteers. In other words, any genuine action towards progress in this area would directly jeopardise their positions and survival in power, at the very least. To avoid this, in fear of the consequences of potential riots and the search for different solutions for the country, the institutions of the European Union resort to lowering the reform conditions, which results in two disastrous effects, at least. The first is that, in public, they create an illusion of reform processes, which they, themselves, and local leaders in particular praise, ensuring their continuity in power. And the second is that the institutions of the European Union actually directly undermine the reform initiatives of the EU. That is why better results were achieved through the initiatives that are not directly related to the EU bureaucratic structures, but through, for example, international financial institutions such as the IMF, because those arrangements with B&H were subject to strict abidance by economic reforms. Unfortunately, even in such cases, the EU institutions had the motive to undermine the effort of the IMF to maintain the compliance with the obligations and agreements, as local politicians had to be rescued. The case of 2017 is well known when there was pressure to unblock the second tranche of the credit arrangement for which the state had not fulfilled the reform requirement. Many believe that such moves actually buried the reform agenda at the time.

Under such circumstances, which are often kept in silence and misread, the relationship between the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina was built within the EU enlargement project. This relationship is determined, along with a number of other factors, by the following known, as well as unknown facts:

After the 'Stabilisation and Association Agreement' (SAA) entered into force in January 2015, which was signed seven years earlier, B&H submitted a formal request for membership of the European Union in February 2016. Ten months after submitting the application, in December 2016, the EU handed over a questionnaire with 3242 questions to Sarajevo. Providing answers to these questions, among other things, is a prerequisite for obtaining a candidate status that currently only B&H and Kosovo do not have. They are, therefore, still 'potential candidates'. A four-month period is normal. Bosnia and Herzegovina took 14 months to 'harmonise' the answers to the questions. An additional 655 questions were received on 20 June 2018 with three months of response time. The deadline was not met, followed by politicians' promises before the elections in B&H at the beginning of October 2018 that 'the majority of the responses are ready and translated'. We are still waiting for the rest.

Is such a delay, incomparable to any other, the result of 'ignorance or lack of European enthusiasm' in B&H institutions, or rather of something other countries were not burdened with? It is the result of all which has been mentioned before regarding the reality of B&H, the Dayton quasi-state, as well as of the attitude of the EU towards this reality.

All this has to do with the Coordination Mechanism which is the fruit of not only lowering the negotiation standards, but also of practical distrust in the system of such a state. This is so for a reason. In the background of this situation, there is the initial EU demand for the B&H state to provide only one address to the Commission, which implies that the Commission does not care about the interior character and responsibilities of the institutions or about different answers to a single question. They want harmonised and unified answers that apply to the whole country. This also meant recognising and accepting the non-existent unity of state institutions that, by definition, should represent the state as a whole. However, in the case of B&H, everything is possible and acceptable regardless of the consequences. Therefore, instead of regular common institutions - a 'co-ordination mechanism' was created with the aim to reconcile all differences. In practice, this meant that the representatives of the state institutions of B&H, the two entities, the ten cantons and the Brčko District all had to reach a consensus about each of the 3242 questions. This makes a total of 1300 representatives divided in 35 working groups. In a country where different parliaments do not want to (not that they cannot) agree on anything that does not involve personal, party or ethnical interest of the representative, such requirement has led to what is called a Sisyphian task. An example of total disagreement was, for instance, the population of B&H, as the number obtained by regular census in 2013 was not accepted by some in the state. Or how to describe the level of terrorist threat in B&H?! Or what to call 'Bosnian language' in Republika Srpska, where they do not recognise a 'non-existent Bosnian language' etc.

The Action Plan of the European Parliament in Strasbourg adopted in February 2018 as a prerequisite for the realisation of the EU accession agenda - for different countries different dates – among other issues, highlights six chapters covering the area of rule of law, security and migration policy, socio-economic reforms, strengthening connections, the digital agenda and regional reconciliation. Objectively, regarding most of these issues, the greatest gain would be to maintain the status quo because the latest 'advances' in these fields in B&H, and in most other Balkan countries are taking a negative turn. Generally, the reconciliation processes are even visibly retrograde (Croatia-Serbia, Croatia-B&H, Serbia-Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro, Serbia-Kosovo, Macedonia-Kosovo), not to mention the biggest of all problems – the relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

As far as the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is concerned, from the standpoint of the process of joining the European Union, the general elections held on 7 October 2018 corroborate at least three important tendencies. **The first** is that, on the level of the whole of B&H, the three dominant national parties remain in power, the SDA, HDZ and SNSD, albeit with an extremely uncertain process of forming a coalition and a series of possibilities for the announced obstruction of the process. First of all, the HDZB&H is threatening to impose a blockade of parliament if their demands are not met. Nevertheless, a more important question is how radical reform changes in B&H - as the EU requires in the process of joining the Union - can be expected if the authority remains with the same political powers that have been denying European reform principles for decades. **The second** tendency is to further jeopardise constitutional reforms, which are unilaterally perceived from the position of increasingly aggressive nationalism and open advocacy of the internal division into exclusive ethnic entities, until final territorialisation is implemented on that principle. The HDZB&H aggressively takes the lead in this sense following the alleged inequality of Croats in B&H which is 'proven' by Željko Komšić's election to the Presidency of B&H. For HDZB&H (but also HDZ of Croatia), he

is not their 'Croat', but a politician elected by Bosniaks. It is not important to them that Komšić's election is based on the existing Constitution, which means it is legal and legitimate. This tendency of the HDZ is supported by the currently strongest politician in B&H, Milorad Dodik, and his SNSD from Republika Srpska. An additional pressure on the political situation in B&H in this context is the unusually strong and aggressive siding of the neighbouring Croatia, increasingly constrained by internal rightist extremism, - with the HDZB&H and their direct interference with B&H's internal affairs. Unfortunately, silence from the EU regarding all this, even if Croatia is a member of the EU, does not go in favour of EU principles, nor does it help stability and regional reconciliation.

The third major tendency in terms of the elections loaded with irregularities is the waking up of the opposition parties of the centre-left which have gained a coalition victory over the dominant party SDA at the cantonal level in the B&H Federation, especially in large communities such as Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica.

This opens up opportunities for strengthening the processes in favour of the European path, and at the same time it is also a significant signal to the (apathetic) passive voters in B&H, who have, with their attitude so far, strongly supported 'everlasting winners', i.e. the retrograde national parties and their obstructions of the true reform agenda of B&H.

Equally important is whether the EU institutions will recognise this new political force as a potential solution for a better future of B&H and support them, or whether they will continue to hold on to their 'traditional partners' in preserving the devastating logic of 'stability' at the cost of democracy, progress and reforms, as well as responsibilities for those reforms before the citizens and EU institutions. The answer to this question is very important for B&H's European fate.