

New Balkans Wars on the Horizon

Part II

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In-depth Report: [THE BALKANS](#)

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The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina will get strained soon as Bosnian Serbs are going to hold a referendum on their constitutional status. Its aim is not to let the leaders of Sarajevo, US and EU put an end to Republika Srpska. The outgoing Croatian President, Stjepan Mesic, promised that in case the referendum takes place, the regular army of Croatia will enter the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina to cut off the 15-km Posavina corridor, which connects the western and the eastern parts of Republika Srpska in the area of Brcko, close to the Croatian border.

“If Milorad Dodik (Prime Minister of Republika Srpska) decides to hold a referendum on separation, I will send the troops to divide the region inhabited by the Bosnian Serbs”,- the Croatian President said, adding that in case of success, a sovereign state of Bosnian Serbs will ‘seize to exist’. He made the announcement during an informal press-conference in Zagreb on January 18.

A military campaign against Banjaluka may be held simultaneously with an armed action by Kosovo`s Albanian authorities against the city of Kosovska Mitrovica and Serbian communities in Northern Kosovo. In this case the US, NATO and the EU will manage to complete separation of the Serbian territories. The Serbian Republic will be surrounded by hostile states and thus will be no longer able to carry out independent foreign policy. The defeat of the Kosovan and Bosnian Serbs will become Russia`s biggest loss in the Balkans over the past two decades and will harm Moscow`s attempts to play an active role in other strategically important regions in Eurasia.

The first reaction of Serbia and Russia to such rude interference of the Croatian leader into affairs of the neighboring state was surprisingly reserved. Serbia`s President Boris Tadic made an attempt to respond to the remarks made by his Croatian counterpart at the UN Security Council meeting on Kosovo on January 22. But he commented on the issue not during his main speech (though parallels between what was going on then in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo were more than obvious). He spoke during the debates because he found such kind of issues could not be discussed during official reports. Mr. Tadic also met the UN Chief Ban Ki-moon to tell him that Mesic`s ‘dangerous words were unwelcome in political discourse’ but immediately noted that Serbia did not want to worsen relations with Croatia.

Such peace-loving rhetoric was accepted in Zagreb. Croatia's Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor told journalists that Serbia and Croatia should abandon debates and work together to develop neighborly relations. However, the Prime Minister did not disavow the President's announcement.

Russia's reaction is still too vague. Summing up the results of 2009 at the press-conference on January 22 in Moscow, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov commented on Mr. Mesic's announcement: "We insist that all the sides involved respect the Dayton Agreement and avoid the use of force". (1)

Meanwhile, the way the situation is developing in the region in recent months proves quite the contrary: the West and the leaders of Sarajevo are definitely going to undermine the Dayton agreement. Two rounds of talks held by the heads of the Bosnian political parties in October 2009 at a NATO base in Butmir outside Sarajevo, revealed the the western strategy toward Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnian Serbs are demanded to abdicate their authorities settled in the Dayton Peace Agreement. Though formally Russia is a member of the Dayton Agreement Peace Implementation Council, it did not take part in the discussions in Butmir. So, it would be a fatal mistake to expect the US, EU and NATO to abandon their new political course. It would also mean to be inexcusably weak in regard to Russia's interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the Balkans in general.

It was not accidentally that the International Crisis Group, which traditionally deals with promoting the western political propaganda in conflict regions, in every detail commented on the future of the Balkans a few months before the recent events. Experts in the Group believe that Moscow and Belgrade remain the West's major rivals in the region because "an international approach to the Balkans is dominated by concern over Serbia's reaction to the independence of Kosovo". In their opinion, Russia "has become stronger to oppose to the Western policy it sees hostile to its interests". (2)

Under these circumstances, Moscow should better revise its policy in the Balkans. Russian diplomats should no longer view the Dayton agreements as too weak to withstand political attacks. This all will make it logical to put in question political status of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This approach will help Moscow no longer be an outsider in Bosnia and launch a series of international talks on territorial, political and ethnocultural problems in the Balkans, where peoples and their interests are in jeopardy. Taking into consideration intentions of the West to put an end to the Serbian Orthodox community in the Balkans, revision of the existing borders in the conflict regions may become the only way for Russia to defend its interests. As of today, there are at least three self-proclaimed states which statuses are being doubted: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. Their territorial and administrative revision could become the least painful way to avoid new wars in the Balkans.

It is remarkable that recently the authorities of Sarajevo have been urging Russia to contribute to the 'implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement', the Bosniak Muslim member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haris Silajdzic, said at the meeting with the Russian special envoy for Kosovo, Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko. And this is a very disturbing sign because Silajdzic has long been known for his extremist views about Republika Srpska. The majority of people in Western Europe cannot but be aware that the Bosnian Serbs remain the only counterbalance to radical pan-Islamic tendencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And this it what gives Russia the right to boost its activities in the Balkans.

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Notes

(1) http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf

(2) Bosnia`s Incomplete Transition: Between Dayton and Europe. Sarajevo-Brussels, 2009. P.14

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