

The Bosnian Problem: Milorad Dodik and Republika Srpska

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"I do not think we will have another war. Why would someone go to war? Thousands died, and are their descendants living better now?" – Milorad Dodik, Feb 19, 2015

The whole basis for Republika Srpska being an autonomous entity of its own accord was always going to be problematic. It was a child born of secessionist misfortune, and misfortune, as a mother, tends to give birth to many problematic children. The President of the Serb dominated entity, Milorad Dodik [Pictured left. Source: Wikipedia], is a creature of that tendency, a product of extremes, and behaves accordingly. Enlightenment is deemed a weakness, and the Dayton accords not the cure. The result is that Dodik feels he has room to operate.

The entire ceremonial he managed to precede over on January 9 had the fundamentals of state hood and recognition. But given that such entities as Palestine have had a mountain to climb when it should have been a hill, the problems with Dodik will not be small. The republic is a messy, confused entity that cries out for cooperation rather than repulsion. Unfortunately for those in Bosnia, this means that nationalist ties are being reasserted. Some Croats within the federation have even gone so far as to pitch in their qualified, periodic support for Dodik as something of a lesser evil.

Dodik has been on record as believing that the Republic is a viable, autonomous entity with every right and credentials of being a state. This may well be fanciful, the sort of nonsense one expects from a mechanic who can envisage a machine being built without the necessary tools.

For one, the RS administrative identity exists alongside that of its sparring partner, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina comprised of Croats and Bosniaks. Neither is separate from the Bosnian entity in any true sense. To suggest that would imply true secession.

After the bitter civil wars that broke up the Federation of Yugoslavia, with the most savage fighting taking place in Bosnia, the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was reached (21 November 1995). Annex 4 of the agreement designates the Republika Srpska as a composed legal and territorial entity, as it does the federation. It does still continue that dangerous tradition of a forced meshing of ethnicities and nationalities.

"Serbs would not have stayed here for more than 20 years without the RS," claimed Dodik to *Glas Srpske*, the Banja Luka daily, "because majority of them would not have accepted Bosnia-Herzegovina. For that reason, the fight for the RS is the basic interest of all of us

who live here.” His insistence on the existence on this hybrid entity is that it must be cherished, however imperfect, or, as he suggests, “even when not everything in it is exactly the greatest.”[1]

As much of the region depends on show and ceremony, Dodik was particularly peeved by the idea that RS day, January 9, could be dismissed by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina as having no valid basis. Who, he asked, “gave the right to a court to, with three votes of foreigners and two of Bosniak (Muslim) judges, outvote other judges and make a ruling.”

The response to the November ruling was to stage a defiant commemorative show of independence, with full pomp and ceremony. This also showed that Dodik was keen to ignore the reasoning of the court, which was that holding celebrations on January 9, in coinciding with an Orthodox Christian holiday, might be deemed discriminatory against Roman Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks.

The other obvious point is the date’s other connotations. “January 9,” observed a member of the association of mothers from Srebrenica, “is the date which actually celebrates the decision to eliminate one people and to seize territory from Bosniaks” (Reuters, Jan 9).

Dodik’s colourful political existence is largely premised on the basis that Dayton’s arrangements were themselves strained. He breathes because the entity he represents has itself stemmed from various assumptions. From the start, the effort to confect an entity of entities within the Bosnian framework was bound to be, not merely problematic, but temporary. Dodik might well be regarded as extreme, but in the region, this is all relative.

Efforts persist in trying to see Bosnia-Herzegovina, or its variants, as a viable entity of itself. This is only plausible if one accepts that all its ethnic representatives deem it a lasting reality. On the evidence, many do not. The Serbs have always been questioning of it, but so have the Croats. At stages, they have agreed to divide it between themselves, in various degrees, excluding the Muslim contingent as politically meaningful representatives.

For all of that, neither the mother capitals, Belgrade or Zagreb, necessarily wish to see full involvement in it, whatever their public stances. The public position of Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, who made a point joining the January 9 celebration, is ever smarmy: “Serbia is always there for you.” The Bosniaks are the ones who have been pushed into difficult trappings. This remains a tragedy among tragedies, and as ever, they risk getting the rum deal.

In this constitutional and political work of freak fiction, one that could be argued to be yet another dubious offspring in post-Yugoslav politics, the one with most daring may well win. Dodik may be on to something. It will be impossible to dismiss his claims in their entirety. He even has the Serbian Prime Minister stating that no one can abolish Republika Srpska with a decree, as it was never established by one to begin with.[2] The sad end of such a rationale, however, tends to the sanction of the bullet.

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Notes:

[1] http://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2016&mm=01&dd=08&nav_id=96637

[2] <http://inserbia.info/today/2016/01/vucic-love-for-republika-srpska-does-not-mean-hate-for-bih/>

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