Around Europe
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Still no Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 1995 the Dayton Agreement formally brought an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) but it did not bring peace. The fighting between Bosniacs, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs stopped, but with no winners emerging from the conflict, the struggle continued and is still continuing twelve years on. Designed to bring an end to the fighting, the Dayton Agreement now acts as a constitution for BiH; both preventing the country from falling apart and from moving on.

The Agreement enshrines the ethnic and political division of the country; a division that was pursued so violently during the 1990s and is now being sought by political and diplomatic means. To stop the fighting Dayton laid down a structure that all sides could agree on. That constitutional structure is now the non-violent vehicle of the struggle it set out to pacify, which has found new and potentially destructive forms in which to manifest itself. One with considerable potential for destruction is that between the Bosnian State and one of its two constituent entities, the Republika Srpska (RS).

This entity's political class has taken every opportunity it has had to reduce the power of the Bosnian State, as have many politicians from the country's other entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This movement away from Dayton has been alarmingly successful and in the wake of the Kosovo declaration of independence, the arguments made by the RS in favour of its secession from BiH have become increasingly bold and seemingly more powerful. However, if the RS is successful in its drive for independence, Europe's newest addition will have been carved out through genocide and other such methods that violate the Geneva Convention. How is this so you might ask?

On 26 February 2007 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found Belgrade not directly responsible for genocides that took place in BiH during the war, but rather indirectly responsible. This ruling was greeted as a victory by many Serbians. However it infers that the direct responsibility for these atrocities lies with the Bosnian entity of the Republica Srpska and the leaders of its bloody inception during the 1990s.

Sarajevo - the official capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina

As the RS is not a state it cannot be brought to trial by the ICJ. Responsibility for dealing with these events has largely fallen upon the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the BiH State. The ICTY is pursuing the most prominent figures implicated in the atrocities and the Serbian secret services

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have only recently handed over the wartime leader of the RS, Radovan Karadzic following EU pressure on Belgrade. Karadzic's trial represents an opportunity to formally recognize the events that took place in the name of Bosnian Serbs during the war, thus, the theory goes, helping BiH as a whole to begin dealing with its recent past.

The main obstacle to the success of the ICTY process is its lack of legitimacy in the eyes of many Serbs. They do not recognize the legitimacy of either the ICTY or the BiH State, leaving any ruling or enquiry the ICTY might make meaningless to the people with whom it would need to carry most significance. Indeed, such processes alone are unlikely to abate the RS's drive towards secession. They must be complemented by EU pressure and EU support for peacebuilding and transitional justice. One way real pressure can be applied by the EU is through its Enlargement process. The EU can and should use this process to transform BiH's economy as well as its internal inter-ethnic relations.

The EU should very clearly and very publicly state, (so that the citizens of BiH can have no doubts about it), that BiH can only accede as an integral and properly functioning state. The EU must insist that if BiH is to move towards European integration then the RS must relinquish the quasi-sovereignty it has managed to acquire and recognize the BiH State and insignia. The EU should back the United Nations Development Programme's transitional justice programme in BiH and the politicians brave enough to support this process. It should see how it can help ensure the satisfactory operation of its Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) so that it is not choked by RS's political strategy. The IPA must help to build the capacity of the BiH State and provide flexible support for peacebuilding activities designed to bring social harmony via the grass roots.

The EU must promote the notion that commitment to an integral BiH, participation in transitional justice and support for peacebuilding will not signal the end of a politician's career, rather on the contrary, the beginning of it. Such politicians will be the leaders of the movement that will inherit BiH as a Member State of the EU. At present the EU is failing to do any of these things and thereby failing the people of BiH, failing the people of Europe and above all failing the values it so often and proudly claims to represent. If it wants to prevent RS secession and the birth of a state founded on genocide, then it must be prepared to get more directly involved and bare what few teeth it has. Only then will Bosnia and Herzegovina have a chance of peace.

Text and photo: Calum Shaw

Is Belgium Still One Country?

QCEA has its offices in Brussels, capital of Europe of course but also the capital of Belgium, the capital of Flanders and the capital of the French speaking community, which is different from Wallonie, situated in the south of Belgium. With this small introduction, it maybe that you are already lost… Don't worry, that's normal, even Belgians don't understand everything. But let's start from the beginning…

Belgium is a federal country but not a normal one. For historical and political reasons, which are really too long to explain here, Belgium has three Communities based on the language spoken in each: the Flemish one, the French one and the German one. Belgium also has three regions based on territorial limits: Flanders, Wallonie and Brussels. Are you following ? OK, now it is really starting. The Flemish community has merged with the region of Flanders. This is the first merger of its kind so far. Some people think it would be good to merge the French community and Wallonie. But Brussels is located in Flanders, is part of the French Community and is a bilingual region which has about 15 % Flemish inhabitants. This does not make things easy.

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The Irish 'No' Vote - a View from an Informed Irish Voice

The rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland by 53% of the 53% of the electorate who turned out, reveals a complex of concerns at a number of levels.

Referenda are only partly about specific texts. They take place in a different context from a general election, as they cannot effect a change of power. In Ireland, where strong loyalty to parties is declining, a referendum is perceived as being outside party politics. Hence, it provides voters with a means of expressing their underlying concerns: their perceptions of the state of the nation, and of their place in the overall power structure.

As with the Nice referenda, Irish voters showed distrust of and disaffiliation from both domestic and EU power structures. Lisbon was supported by all but one of the political parties, by big business and most trade unions. They all made the same error as in the first - negative - Nice vote. Their presentations to voters were ill-considered, limited in time, and failed to engage with wider concerns: the abrupt ending of a ten-year boom, with loss of employment, and sudden price increases. Worse, they again failed to perceive the disaffiliation from Irish and EU political structures.

Whether accurate or not in Treaty terms, six specific fears were important:

a. EU militarisation / Irish neutrality;
b. Exclusion from Commission decision-making for five years in each 15-year period;
c. Privatisation of health services [a controversial current issue];
d. Effects of World Trade negotiations on farming;
e. Possible tax harmonisation, undermining favourable rates for companies;
f. Immigration, a new phenomenon.

The debate was introverted, too short, and suffered from distractions, including a change of Taoiseach (prime minister) and the bursting of the construction bubble.

Irish politicians had sold the Union as a cash cow, not as a means of stabilising and expanding Europe without war. The Union became an exterior entity, marginal to Irish self-interest, apart from funding. The Lisbon debate failed to spell out the concrete effects of a 'No' vote on the newest Member States, many of them financially weaker than Ireland was in 1973. Neither did it take account of the need to adapt a Union structure overloaded after constant expansion.

The level of information and discussion on these issues was inadequate. The National Forum on Europe was virtually unique in seeking to provide an arena for ongoing debate. Apart from the Forum, the earliest information came in November 2007 and was politically biased. Independent information came too late. With Lisbon we again witnessed a political refusal to accept the need for a long-term debate. In effect this was an act of condescension by power groups, which catalysed voters' inherent distrust.

In any event, is a Treaty appropriate now at all? How far have Irish and EU politicians and administrators become victims of their own propaganda? Ireland joined the EEC in 1973 and took thirty years to bed in. The EU is now a far more complex entity. Both the structures of the Union and of the recent and future accession states will require a similar time-frame to adjust to each other, with no developmental model to work from. The EU will change hugely in the process. In such a fluid scenario, is the absolutist structure of a treaty like Lisbon appropriate?

Seán McCrum

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Each structure has its own parliament and its own government. There are six parliaments: one for the whole of Belgium, one for Flanders, one for the French community, one for Wallonie, one for Brussels and one for the German community (which is located in Wallonie, near Germany). And of course we also have six governments. In Brussels, it is even more complicated: the Brussels parliament is in fact divided into three parts: one which deals with matters relating to French speaking structures and inhabitants, one for Flemish and one for bilingual situations. I will not explain here that there are also ten provinces (with parliaments!), otherwise you will think Belgians are crazy. Why make things easy when you can make them complicated?

For the last 40 years Belgian history has been trying to make this work. It is obvious that it is not working well. But on the other hand there has been no war, no casualties, no physical damage. So it seems to be better than some situations in other parts of Europe, doesn't it?

But the next question is what is the future for this country? Is Belgium still one country or already nearly two (or three) trying to share some matters to improve efficiency? Since June 2007 it seems that most politicians, Flemish as well as French, are more orientated in the second direction. If this goes on, I don't think Belgium has a future as a country. But if politicians realize, as their colleagues have done in the past, that building a country with all its varieties is more rewarding than separating people, Belgium could survive another 179 years.

Xavier Verhaeghe,
Belgian citizen and QCEA Office Manager

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