
Report
2020 ASEES (Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies)
(Virtual) Annual Convention

On 8 November 2020, Francine Friedman (Ball State University) chaired a panel for the (virtual) Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies, titled “Twenty-five Years after Srebrenica and the Dayton Peace Accords: Echoes of the Past/Portents for the Future?”

Stefano Bianchini (University of Bologna) talked about echoes, saying that Srebrenica is still echoing. There are still court cases pending about this wartime event. There is a persistence of a search for justice through the ICTY, while there are expectations for recognized justice of the crimes vs. those who deny the genocide. Karadzic has been sentenced to life for his crimes, but Mladic’s appeals are continuing. This reinforces the tensions about the end of the war. Denying genocide and accepting the reality of what happened leads to a conflicting memory of the past, disallowing reconciliation. Germany needed at least two generations to accept the guilt for their Holocaust crimes, so maybe we need patience with regard to Bosnia and Herzegovina. But the killing in Srebrenica was not only of one generation; there is a generational impact. The new generation grows with controversial memories; there is still the idea of two schools under one roof and different narratives are proposed for history. After 12 years, the Bosniaks and Croats in Mostar City Council are working maybe a little way toward getting rid of tensions. There are still major tensions between the two entities, and reconciliation is slow. There are claims of discrimination between both ethnic groups in the Federation. Yugoslavia had been considered in the West as a pretend communist configuration, not a framework that might evolve into a democratic federation drawing inspiration from other examples, as for instance Switzerland, India or Brazil. To a large extent, the collapse of this institutional framework paved the ground for a post-Dayton week governance (if any) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Furthermore, Bosnia-Herzegovina is still in the

waiting room of the European Union, and not likely to enter soon, if ever. Finally, the Bosnian leadership is increasingly corrupt; aid is not reaching the common people.

David Kanin (Johns Hopkins University) focused on two major points: The Dayton Peace Accords (DPA) is a pinata that we beat on, but we don't know how to replace. It was preceded by the Washington Agreement, where we tried to force Croats and Muslims into a confederation. Bosniak was supposed to be a civic identification, but now is only for Muslims. The DPA was the only 1990s victory for Milosevic, because it preserved a Serbian entity. The DPA configuration meant that Bosnia would never become a real state, which makes it his victory. The Western policy stopped the war but led to a dysfunctional state.

The decline of the West has led to different possibilities for restructuring the international order. The very basis of the liberal institutional structure is being questioned, which opens up a whole new discussion of the future. All of the concepts the DPA is based on are being questioned. The notion of genocide is based on the European wars of the 20th century; Europe made those mistakes, and now Europeans see it as their role attempt to help world avoid their errors. That role is being questioned. Genocide is a word used to judge the worst of human behavior; therefore, if you are from a victim community and your victimization isn't considered a genocide, you are being insulted, killing the victims again. Thus, Srebrenica is getting caught up in whether it was a genocide, which distracts from the mass murder that actually happened. That leaves room for those who are being accused of genocide to question whether it is genocide, instead of dealing with the actual murder they perpetrated. Mothers of Srebrenica kept their loved ones' deaths in the forefront, but they are trapped in that discussion for the rest of their lives.

The West is also dealing with a China that can counter the West both politically and economically, so nonliberal and nondemocratic alternatives are being proposed. Thus, under these new circumstances, the Serbs can deny genocide even as they accept that there was some murder, but there won't be a reconciliation. BiH is too congenitally dysfunctional and the basic hostility between the communities is being nurtured in the future generations.

Craig Nation (Dickinson College) focused on portents for the future. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Srebrenica Massacre should direct attention to all that has not been achieved in the interim. Where is Southeastern Europe going looking forward? Thirty years after the collapse of Yugoslavia the promises linked to post-communist transition and the prospect of "joining Europe" have yet to be realized. Stability is elusive, economic performance poor, populations are in decline, treatment of migrants has become a source of shame, post war

reconciliation efforts have floundered, piecemeal NATO enlargement feeds militarization to no ones advantage – and the beat goes on. Bosnia- Herzegovina is a kind of poster child for these manifold dilemmas, but it is not alone. There is a need for new initiative to address the sources of regional instability more effectively. These initiatives should, in large part, be locally and regionally generated by actors not beholden to this or that external sponsor and built upon the promise of mutual security, reconnection, and mutual advantage.

James Gow (King's College) said that the DPA is success. As bad as the DPA is, things could be worse. It stopped a war and continues to do so. When people talk about changing the DPA, they're talking about the constitution. The DPA was about stopping something, but people want to use it to make things happen - however, anything that happens without consensus would result in a return to armed conflict, so only when there is consensus will change be possible. Chris Bennett has tried to make two suggestions that reflect Bosnia's realities. One is to build on the special status of Serbia and Croatia in the DPA to create a confederation of Bosnia and its entities, Serbia and Croatia - in a sense, a 'mini-Yugoslavia'? However, this is not possible; for one thing, Croatia is in the EU and the others are not; and, for another, Bosnian Muslim attitudes would not favor this kind of arrangement without some great reward for engaging with it. The second suggestion is electoral reform, requiring anyone elected to gain support from communities other than their own. This might well be a good idea. The problem is that consensus will be necessary to change the constitution to allow. The underlying conditions would have to change to allow such a change, but there is no prospect of this - and if there were such a change, then the electoral reform might no longer be needed.

Surface level politics would have to change for any reform, but there is no prospect of this, as there is no real feeling of community in Bosnia between the entities and communities. RS PM Dodik provocatively tries to avoid this, and Muslim leader Izetbegovic also indulges in provocation. The one prospect for change at the strategic level involved the EU and the way in which Serbia's accession would change the dynamic in the region. However, that prospect has faded in the last 5 years, because the EU has been immersed in its own politics and managing the crises of Brexit, migration and Covid 19. Most of all, the underlying conditions in Bosnia are bad: there is an absence of social trust and feeling of common citizenship. There is no commitment to the state. Ethnic intolerance continues at high levels and inhibits and real political community at the level of the country.

What to do? Show patience. Changing the DPA has no quick fix - and nor should it. There are small, slow, low level signs of progress; for example, economic success and multi-communal integration in Gorazde, political cooperation in Mostar and the success of cooperative and inclusive political parties in the Sarajevo canton. My own and my colleagues research on Art and Reconciliation has generated cross-community interactions using visual arts, helping to build trust. These are all small things and can be built upon - but they are also fragile. What would really make a difference is something big and symbolic, which would involve some kind of sacrifice by one or several sides. The ICTY and war crimes tribunal is also 25 years old. It might have had the potential to produce something symbolic at this level, but it has not done so. While the Mladic trial chamber unsurprisingly convicted Mladic of genocide in relation to Srebrenica, the initial trial missed the last chance to convict an individual in relation to events in northern and eastern Bosnia, which had been labelled 'genocide' and which had prompted the creation of the Tribunal, despite having material available to it that no other Trial Chamber had. The last chance to render a genocide verdict for those events in 1992-3 - and so bring catharsis to the Muslims and potentially to transform Bosnia - rests with the Appeals Chamber. The only conclusion for now, therefore, regarding Bosnia is to be humble, modest and patient, until such time as some form of change is possible.

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