
EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans

On February 1, 2012, **Milena Borden**, Ph.D. in social sciences (School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College, London), lecturer on nationalism and EU enlargement at Reading University, and media commentator on east European political developments, held two open lectures at the Faculty of Political Science "Roberto Ruffilli" in Forlì as part of the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe (MIREES).

The first lecture, entitled "**Serbia's EU Accession: Dilemmas of National and Supra-National Politics of Identity in the Western Balkans**", was dedicated to the topical issue of further EU enlargement, with a focus on Serbia.

The speaker structured her lecture around the key present, past and future themes of **Serbia's EU accession**. Starting with the present, Dr. Borden attempted to define Serbia's present-day political situation. Tracing the country's candidatureship process from its start in 2005, the speaker pointed out Serbia's failure to start accession talks with the EU in October 2011, despite a fairly positive evaluation of the country's progress in preparing for **candidatureship**. In her review of the patterns of Serbia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Dr. Borden related these patterns to the country's movement toward Europeanization and renegotiation of relations with the EU with the prospect of possible accession. The speaker emphasized the prevailing view that the country is not ready to join the EU, and she also identified specific political and academic questions inherent to the controversy surrounding Serbia's future in Europe. The question of whether **EU conditionality** applies to all countries equally was discussed in relation to the legacy of the wars of 1990s, and to the issue of Kosovo.

Attempting to identify what Serbia would bring to Europe if it joined the EU in the foreseeable future, Dr. Borden argued that Serbia in the EU might provide a greater sense of **security** on the EU's eastern borders. Other advantages include the opportunity for Serbians from all walks of life, including academicians, people in politics, ordinary citizens, tourists, and students, to increase their presence in Europe, as Serbs are rather underrepresented in the EU.



On the other hand, for the EU to have to pay the price for accepting one more politically and economically unprepared and under-reformed country, was mentioned as a possible negative outcome.

The unresolved issue of **Kosovo**, a disaster which the EU is extremely reluctant to take on board, was discussed from numerous aspects, including the impact of the Belgrade-Priština negotiations on Serbia's EU accession; Kosovo as a factor of conditionality in Serbia's aspirations to gain candidate status; and the humanitarian situation of the Kosovo Serb community.

Dr. Borden then shifted the focus of her presentation to EU studies (in particular, the European identity studies). The speaker reviewed ideas and definitions of **European identity** and shared **European citizenship** which go beyond national identity. The ideas of Timothy Garton Ash and

other authors were discussed in relation to central and southeastern Europe, particularly to Serbia, where it is especially hard to disconnect the past from the present. Unlike other countries where pro-EU elites had a clearer vision of their future in the EU and consequently managed to quickly restructure their countries according to EU conditions, Serbia's elite was neither pro-European, nor pro-NATO back in the 1990s.

The speaker then presented the main schools of thought on **EU enlargement**, mainly from a British perspective. The pro-enlargement school unites political and academic circles in the belief that since the collapse of the Cold War, the future of Europe lies in its expanded version, including Turkey and beyond, so as to become a bigger player in the world. Another school of academic thought, equally supportive of enlargement, focuses on disconnecting history from contemporary politics, and instead attempting to work out a pragmatic agenda for EU enlargement and proceed with practical reforms. A harsher view of Serbia's bid for EU membership after the wars of 1990s, represented by Noel Malcolm, calls for responsibility, rationality and humanism in dealing with the past, and focuses on Serbia's "disintoxication" from the legacy of the 1990s.

Regarding the economic incentives for EU enlargement the speaker presented the widespread argument that the alternative to EU expansion in the Western Balkans would be the inevitable and progressive **marginalization** of the rest of the countries of Southeastern Europe. Without clear prospects they are likely to slide into this marginalization which in the long run will inevitably work against the EU.

Dr. Borden then expanded upon differences in the **official discourse** of western and Serbian political circles with regard to enlargement, as well as differences between Serbian and western visions of Europe. She pointed out discursive elements that could gradually bring Serbia into unison with the original founding ideas of the EU. The speaker particularly focused on the vision that belonging to Europe could "make Serbia a better country", providing incentives to reform the country's political, economic, and educational structures, steps which would be hardly possible without EU membership. On the other hand, Serbia's inertia dates back to the times of the non-aligned movement.

Other **questions** debated during the lecture included: should Kosovo be a condition for Serbia's EU accession?; Does the EU have double standards with regard to Southeastern Europe?; Is the EU sufficiently committed and clear about its aims in the western Balkans?; What kind of country would Serbia be as a member state and what voice would it have within the EU? The EU's loss of trust in southeastern Europe, and particularly Serbia, was discussed in the context of the peculiar Balkan specificity, related to its ethnic heterogeneity.

During the **debate** which followed the lecture, the audience attempted to evaluate how exceptional Serbia is as a potential candidate to the EU. One conclusion was that most new member states have struggled with the same issues as Serbia, with the exception of war.

Dr. Borden's second lecture was entitled "**Does the EU Have a Moral Obligation Towards Bosnia and Herzegovina's Membership?**".

Dr. Borden started with a general assessment that a positive climate exists in Europe vis-à-vis **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, and its sustainability and progress. The speaker then attempted to examine the relationship between the feeling of guilt resulting from the European Community's failure to intervene in the bloody conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the country's prospects for joining the EU. Defining Bosnia and Herzegovina as the only western Balkan country that needs international help, the speaker went on to analyze the country's main **political problems**. One of the major impediments to Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for EU candidate status is the country's dysfunctional government, resulting at times in the lack of a government (the situation up to the end of December, 2011). The country cannot become an EU candidate unless it

achieves a national consensus. Likewise, there is the problem of war damage, with all infrastructure established and supervised by an international administration which is supposed to ensure security. Differences between what is legal and what is legitimate were discussed in relation to the role played by the international administration both during the Bosnian war and in the after-war period.



Turning to **identity issues**, the speaker argued that at the present stage, no one will permit the borders of Bosnia to be changed. Although in the pre-war years Bosnia seemed to have escaped the fate of countries with extremely segregated ethnic populations, a situation which still characterizes Kosovo and Macedonia, subsequent developments and the current situation raise a fundamental question for Bosnia and the rest of Europe: can we really live together with differences in Europe?

In conclusion Dr. Borden argued that the noble **European idea**, no matter how imperfect it is in policy, is something very good to aspire to. The speaker crossed her fingers for both Serbia and Bosnia to move forward to become EU member countries, no matter how difficult this might be.

There were three main areas of debate from the students' point of view:

- How appropriate are the EU designed **instruments** for reforming Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina?
- Can we define "**moral obligation**" during post-war reconstruction in political science terminology?
- Where is the boundary between national and supranational **political power** in an enlarged Europe including the Western Balkans?

The discussion was lively and well supported with academic evidence from reading sources as well as personal opinion. The students were well equipped to follow and examine complex academic arguments surrounding the Balkans in the EU.

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