



C•A•P

**Southeastern Europe**

**Conflict Survey**



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Bertelsmann Foundation  
Center for Applied Policy Research

## Conflict Survey

Actual and potential conflicts in Southeastern Europe range from weak or failing states, economic disparities and social deprivation to national histories and competition for EU and NATO membership. Typically, *nation and state building* are still the most prominent conflict areas in the region, although underlying conflicts may be far more potent. More often than not, conflicts are propelled by party interests and/or economic motives, but couched in terms of national self-determination and ethnic hatred. Therefore, the shared justification of self-determination (or, conversely, state sovereignty) and the underlying notion of the ethnically homogeneous nation-state enhance the danger of regional escalation and precedents. These risks are an inherent part of the political interplay among regional actors as well as between regional actors and the international community, the European Union in particular.

The EU agenda of regionalisation and integration requires a certain level of state functionality and political conscientiousness. At the same time, the EU agenda of stabilisation demands that all states and entities be included, in particular those liable to produce instability with regional ramifications. These legacies of the past - unresolved issues or inadequate processes of nation and state building - constrain state functionality and the options of reform-oriented politicians, fearing a nationalist backlash. The same legacies also restrict the options for the international community: Full priority for national self-determination would reinvigorate the model of the ethnically homogeneous nation state and inevitably lead to more ethnic strife and state fragmentation. Full priority for the status quo in terms of sovereignty and state structures, however, often impedes state functionality. Many conflicts seem deadlocked with parts of the elites interested in instability rather than constructive arrangements enhancing the functionality of states.

In line with the conflicts and crises of Yugoslav disintegration – Croatia and Bosnia

(1991-95), Kosovo (1997-99) and Macedonia (2000-01) – the three sub-regions are characterised by different stages in post-conflict management as well in nation and state building. The following survey of conflict potentials analyses these three triangles of conflict as separate constellations, while indicating both linkages *between* the triangles and sub-systems of conflict *within* states or entities.

### Belgrad-Sarajewo-Zagreb

After a relatively short struggle for national self-determination from Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia, Croatia and Slovenia were recognised as independent states in late 1991. The presence of strong Serbian minorities resulted in continued fighting. Croatia managed to retake control of its territory by force, driving out most of the Serb minority. The November 1995 Dayton Agreement ended violent conflict in Bosnia after three years of civil war between the three major nationalities, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. Evidently, the intervention by the Milosevic regime on the side of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and by the Tudjman regime on the side of the Croats created the bloodiest conflict in post-war Europe. The change of regimes in Zagreb (1999/2000) and Belgrade (2001) created a basis for normalisation of relations and co-operation. With the reduction of external interference by Belgrade and Zagreb, the chances for a viable and functioning state of Bosnia-Herzegovina also increased significantly. Nevertheless, nationalist forces claiming the role of protector for co-nationals in neighbouring states (if not part of the territory) are still strong in the Zagreb and Belgrade political scene and in public opinion. Thus, the window of opportunity for pro-European, reform-oriented governments is limited.

1. **Legacies of the Past:** Some of the legacies of the warfare of the first half of the 1990s are urgent and concrete, such as the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Stability Pact has recently initiated a process to break the

deadlock of return and reintegration involving all three republics. Other legacies concern the coming to terms with the national past – partly by judicial means, to determine individual guilt and partly by educational means, to confront the dark side of national history and the issue of “collective guilt”. Co-operation with the Hague Tribunal impinges upon national sovereignty and casts doubt on the process of national liberation, part of the founding legitimacy of the Croatian and Bosnian states. The rewriting of national history in a more critical and tolerant manner is unpopular and thus offers politicians of a nationalist leaning an easy point of attack. Consequently, even many reformist politicians in Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo prefer to prioritise economic and political reforms over the legacies of the past in order not to play in the hands of their nationalist competitors. The adequate handling of these legacies requires process-oriented international mediation balancing norm-setting and a keen eye for delicate issues of reconciliation and mentalities. The historical myth of the perennial hatred between Croats and Serbs further invigorates the stand-off, impeding regional co-operation and a normalisation of bilateral relations, e.g. in trade and visa policies.

2. **External Interference:** The prime objective of the Dayton Agreement and the state it created was the immediate termination of warfare and stabilisation on the ground. The dictated and enforced constitution of the state corresponded neither to the objectives of the three warring groups of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, nor fulfilled the requirements of a functioning self-sustainable state: The stabilising role of the SFOR troops is decreasing, but politics is still dominated by the authority of the High Representative. Despite the change of regimes in Zagreb and Belgrade, external interference from neighbouring countries has not ended. Incendiary statements by

nationalist politicians concerning support for the respective co-nationals or even territorial claims created anxieties. As did concrete political backing for hard-liners in the ethnic communities of the Bosnian state. Croatian and Serbian communities in Bosnia continue to relate to their nation-state rather than to the multiethnic Bosnian state. Thus, economic and social networks across the internal ethnic divides are slow in developing.

3. **The State of Bosnia-Herzegovina:** The key problems concern the legitimacy and viability of the Bosnian state as such and the dilemma of how to reform Dayton to accommodate the needs for consolidating a functioning central state without reopening all other contentious issues. Recent steps in this direction have indicated that some progress is possible, but also demonstrated the tension between a true democratisation of Bosnia and the extensive authority of the High Representative. Thus, transfer of competencies to national politicians and an exit strategy for the High Representative are part of the agenda for the coming years. Whereas local Croatian leaders in Herzeg-Bosna reiterate their claim to a third entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serb leaders in the Republika Srpska equally obstruct a rationalisation and centralisation of institutions and competencies. Eventually, without a stronger central state and a solution for the extreme aid-dependency of the Bosnian economy progress towards a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU is out of the question. The key risk, therefore, concerns the lack of incentives for ethnic leaders to engage in a process towards the legitimisation and consolidation of a functioning central state. The ensuing deadlock in economic reforms and political democratisation undermines the state, produces popular frustration and poverty and thus threatens to revive ethnic and religious animosities.

## Belgrad-Podgorica-Pristina

After the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992, Milosevic created a successor state, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), consisting of Serbia and Montenegro. The lopsidedness of this federation with Serbia 17 times as big as Montenegro became apparent as soon as the smaller republic embarked on a pro-European, reformist course under Djukanovic in 1997. Its neutrality in the Kosovo War added to the international sympathies for the regime in Podgorica. Despite of the EU-commissioned 1991 Badinter Report granting Montenegro the right to independence, however, the international community insisted on “a democratic Montenegro in a democratic Yugoslavia”, all the more so after Milosevic’ ouster in October 2000. A unilateral declaration of independence might be another precedent in a region rift with projects of nation and state building, running counter to all efforts to achieve a minimum of regional co-operation. The viability of this mini-state of 600.000 inhabitants would be questionable, not only economically, but also because polls indicate that only a small majority favours independent statehood. In March 2002, the EU brokered an agreement for a 3-year moratorium on independence referenda and the creation of the state-union “Serbia and Montenegro”.

Both in political praxis and in terms of international law, the status of Kosovo is even more devious. In the federal structure of Yugoslavia, Kosovo had a status almost equal to that of a constituent republic, with its own federal representation. Formally, Kosovo remained an autonomous province within Serbia. After Milosevic had eliminated autonomous rights in 1989-1990, the conflict between Serbs and Albanians, claiming the Kosovo territory on historical and ethnic grounds respectively, eventually escalated into war, triggering NATO intervention in March 1999. UNSC Res. 1244 ending the war determined that Kosovo would come under international rule, but would remain de jure under Yugoslav sovereignty. Whereas a

return to a *status quo ante* seems impossible, Kosovo independence might set a precedent of national self-determination for a province without the formal right of secession according to the Yugoslav constitution, e.g. for Republika Srpska or Albanians in Macedonia.

1. **The Union of Serbia and Montenegro:** As long as politicking by local elites in Belgrade and Podgorica prevent a sustainable program for economic integration and a constitutional charter for the new state under the Belgrade Agreement, Yugoslavia’s procedure for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement will be on hold. Reformers in Belgrade, however, rely on the symbolic gestures (e.g. admission to the Council of Europe) and substantial EU assistance to ward off nationalist competitors. A unilateral declaration of independence on the part of Montenegro might have a destabilising effect both domestically, with a population almost evenly split on the issue, and regionally, as the last stage of Yugoslav disintegration before Kosovo. At least, the Belgrade Agreement has legally detached the Kosovo issue from the future of Yugoslavia, by defining Serbia as successor state regarding UNSC Res. 1244, if the occasion arises.
2. **The Status of Kosovo:** Any change of Kosovo’s status towards independence would be to the detriment of pro-European reformers in Belgrade and would most likely be blocked by a Russian veto in the UNSC. Independence for Kosovo would reinvigorate the ideal of the ethnically homogeneous nation-state. Consequently, the pressure on Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo might increase. Conversely, Serb leaders in the de-fact secessionist enclave of Mitrovica joined forces with nationalists in Belgrade to block normalisation and to keep options of secession and exchanges of territory open. Unilateral independence might be perceived as a precedent of secession by the Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina and by the Albanians

in Macedonia, too. Conversely, although the myth of Kosovo as the cradle of the Serbian nation may be waning in Serbia proper, no politician can afford to sign an agreement actually recognising Kosovo's independence. Similarly, politicians in Kosovo have to insist on a declaration of independence and can hardly afford to engage in negotiations with Belgrade, although all sides recognise that this is the option for a normalisation of bilateral relations and eventually a status arrangement. The UN Special Representative's program of "state functionality before status solutions" collides with a significant part of the elites in Kosovo, who fear both ICTY war crimes indictments against former UCK leaders and a clamping down on economic grey zones in the region. In retaliation to recent arrests by UNMIK, they might incite new ethnic unrest in hot spots like the Presevo Valley in Serbia or the Tetovo region in Macedonia, whereas direct revenge against KFOR is less likely.

3. **The Serbian State and Nation:** The relations between the federal and the republican level in Belgrade are also undefined and a source of continuous conflict over competencies and resources. The constitutional charter for the new union ought to clarify these issues. Moreover, the relative weakness of the new federal level would concentrate key political players on the republic level. Without ending the competition, this would at least define the rules of the game. For Belgrade politicians the formulation of the constitutional charter also raises the issue of devolution and the autonomy of Vojvodina and the Sandjak region, divided by the Serbian-Montenegrin border. In neither of these cases a real potential for interethnic conflict exists, but insistence on the de-jure status of Kosovo as a province of Serbia, equal to Vojvodina, leads to manifold legal complications.

## Tirana-Pristina-Skopje

The so-called Albanian Question involves the relations between the Albanian state(s) and neighbouring Albanian minorities as well as (perceived) threats of a Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo. Apart from the nation-state, Albania, the nation also encompasses an equally homogeneous entity, Kosovo, and minorities in Montenegro, Greece, southern Serbia (Presevo Valley) and Macedonia. The only leverage the weak states of this triangle possess to compensate for deficits in economic and political reform and their failure to meet European conditionalities is instability.

1. **The Regionality of Instability:** The outbreak of violence between the Macedonian titular nation and the rapidly growing Albanian minority in FYROM in late 2000 underlined the regional character of instability. Both the international community and neighbouring state-nations fear agendas of Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo involving the Albanian minorities in their state and parts of their territory. Conversely, discrimination and armed conflict have created a class of uprooted Albanians, mainly from Kosovo. Striving for an independent Kosovo, but unwilling to come to an arrangement with the Serb minority, they produce instability in the known hotspots of the region: the Presevo Valley and the Tetovo region, tapping the economic deprivation and discrimination of local Albanians.
2. **The Weak State of Macedonia:** The outbreak of violence tapped Albanian frustrations at the failure of the Macedonian state to come to terms with the multiethnicity of society. Apart from the inclusion of an Albanian party in each government coalition, negotiations on group rights for the ca. 30% Albanian minority had brought little results in ten years. Macedonian hard-liners ineffectively tried to squelch the uprising with excessive force, whereas the rebels calculated with international intervention

by flashing the threat of secession. Due to the implication of politicians and administration in organised crime, typical of a weak state, too many have a keen interest in instability rather than state functionality. The EU-mediated Ohrid Agreement of August 2001 prevented a regional escalation, restored some fragile stability in Macedonia and started a protracted process towards a new interethnic arrangement. The conflict also discredited EU policies for the Balkans, as Macedonia has been the first country to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU - at the very moment when the conflict escalated in April 2001: Meanwhile, Macedonia has *de facto* become the third international protectorate in the region.



## Project Activities

The Bertelsmann Foundation as an operative foundation and the Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research at the Center for Applied Policy Research as a think tank institute - sharing over ten years of experience in research and policy recommendations in European affairs - have further intensified their project activities concerning Southeastern Europe in recent years.

- a. The **Balkan Forum**, a policy dialogue in co-operation with the Policy Planning Staff of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, brings together academic experts, policy-makers and practitioners for a series of meetings and a roundtable conference to present the annual strategy paper to regional and European decision-makers.
  - Strategy paper, conference report *Negotiating the Balkans* (Sept. 2001)
  - Strategy paper, conference report *Integrating the Balkans* (Oct. 2002)
- b. **Towards European Integration**, network of NGOs and think tanks in East Central and Southeastern Europe in co-operation with the World Bank ([www.euintegration.net](http://www.euintegration.net)). The themes of the conferences are determined by the network institutes and relate to the process of EU integration.
- c. **Risk Reporting** is an annual publication surveying stability risks in the states and economies of Eastern and Southeastern Europe and their consequences for Europe as a whole. The reports are written by experts from the respective regions and states. The 2002 report focuses on the unintended consequences of weak states and strong international support for Southeastern Europe.
  - *Beyond EU Enlargement, II. The Agenda of Stabilisation for Southeastern Europe* (Gütersloh 2001)
  - *Risks and Challenges beyond EU Enlargement, II. Southeastern Europe: Weak States and Strong International Support* (Cologne 2002)

- d. Strategic partnership with the **Office of the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact** for Southeastern Europe including a policy dialogue on the re-orientation of the Stability Pact towards priorities issues and enhanced complementarity with the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process.
  - *From Stabilisation Process to Southeastern Enlargement* (Sept. 2002)
- e. **Policy papers** on specific events and trends in the region, available as CAP Working Papers on-line ([www.cap.uni-muenchen.de/bertelsmann/soe.htm](http://www.cap.uni-muenchen.de/bertelsmann/soe.htm)).
  - *The Stability Pact after Eastern Enlargement 2004* (Dec. 2001)
  - *September 11th and European Balkan Policies* (March 2002)
  - *Serbia and Montenegro* (April 2002)

## Contact

### **Bertelsmann Foundation,**

Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256, D-33311 Gütersloh

**Cornelius Ochmann** - Director Central and Eastern Europe, Tel. +49-5241-8181.198,  
[cornelius.ochmann@bertelsmann.de](mailto:cornelius.ochmann@bertelsmann.de)

**Stefani Weiss** - Director Reorganizing Security in Europe and on its Borders, Tel. +49-5241-8181.317,  
[Stefani.Weiss@bertelsmann.de](mailto:Stefani.Weiss@bertelsmann.de)

### **Center for Applied Policy Research,**

Maria-Theresiastrasse 21, D-81675 Munich

**Dr. Wim van Meurs** - Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research, Tel. +49-89-2180.1339, [meurs@lrz.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:meurs@lrz.uni-muenchen.de)