



***ASSESSING THE WESTERN BALKANS’
WAY FORWARD***

High Time for Action in the Western Balkans

Principles, Policies, Proposals

Sarajevo - New York – Baku

June 2021

Table of Contents

Foreword & Acknowledgements

1. PROLOGUE

- 1.1. Key Questions that Drove Discussion*
- 1.2. Why the Western Balkans Matter; and Why US-EU Leadership is Necessary*

2. PRINCIPLES

- 2.1. High Time for a New Euro-Atlantic Policy for the Western Balkans*
- 2.2. Consolidate Pro-Western Political Forces*
- 2.3. The EU Agenda is at the Heart of the Process*
- 2.4. Cooperation through Values Rather than Confrontation over Borders*
- 2.5. Investment, Economic Integration, and Infrastructure Corridors*
- 2.6. The Relationship Between Serbia and Kosovo*

3. POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

- 3.1. Integrating the Western Balkans within the EU Single Market*
- 3.2. Transport and Digital Infrastructure in the Western Balkans*
- 3.3. A Coal-Exit Strategy for the Western Balkans: a EU-US Initiative Integrated within the European Green Deal*
- 3.4. A Regional Initiative for Natural Disaster and Pandemic-Related Responses*
- 3.5. Building Regional Confidence as a Response to Arms Races*
- 3.6. Keeping NATO in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina*

APPENDIX A

- Zlatko Lagumdžija's, **Euro-Atlantic Commitment to Shared Society and Liberal Democracy in Normal Secular Civic State of Bosnia and Herzegovina**, Paper Created and Updated During Discussions from International Conference on “The Legacy of Peace – 25 years of Dayton,” Zagreb, December 2020, and the Forum on “Assessing Western Balkan – Way Forward,” Sarajevo – New York – Baku, June 2021 – *sic erat scriptum*

APPENDIX B

- Selected Speakers and Participants Involved in the Roundtable Discussions 2019-21

APPENDIX C

- Links to References and Recommended Sources

ASSESSING THE WESTERN BALKANS' WAY FORWARD

High Time for Action in the Western Balkan

Principles, Policies, Proposals

Foreword & Acknowledgements

The principles, policies, and proposals that follow in this paper have been prepared after intense and extensive engagement and activities presented and discussed at a June 2021 Forum on “Assessing the Western Balkans’ Way Forward”. The Forum is a part of an ongoing process led by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP), Nizami Ganjavi International Center (NGIC), and Shared Societies and Values Foundation Sarajevo (FSSV).

Our intention is to continue this work and develop a partnership of likeminded people and entities who are ready to share their thoughts and experiences in support of their shared values with stakeholders and decision makers who hold sway over Western Balkan and Euro-Atlantic integration.

At this stage the “3P Paper” is not yet a “non-paper,” but a working paper and open document meant to serve as an incremental building block for strengthening dialogue, tolerance, learning and understanding. Its three chapters consist of consolidated principles, policies and proposals that came out of our discussions, as well as through reflections on our previous experience and relevant official and academic documents.

Appendixes are also referenced as supporting documents which are relevant to the prescriptions and recommendations offered.

Appendix A is a personal position titled “Euro Atlantic Commitment to Shared Society and Liberal Democracy in Normal Secular Civic State of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” which has been written and updated during different discussions throughout 2021.

This undertaking involved high-level officials, including 15 former heads of states and government from the region and EU, diplomats, civil society representatives, and members of the academic community. We engaged individuals from the United States, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Azerbaijan,

Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, Latvia and the Republic of Ireland.

Gratitude must also be expressed for President Ilham Aliyev, whose personal and concrete support for the work of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center in the Western Balkans is commendable. His leadership and commitment to its activities, underlined in a web-conference held May 20, 2021, are greatly and truly appreciated.

Special thanks to Ambassador Susan M. Elliott, President and CEO of the NCAFP, and to Rovshan Muradov, Secretary General of the NGIC, for their leadership through this process.

Particular thanks also go to our speakers and contributors from the US: Frank G. Wisner, Kerry Kennedy, Matthew Nimetz, George D. Schwab, Tracey A. Jacobson, Mary B. Warlick, Hoyt B. Yee, Cameron Munter, Michael C. Ryan, Ben Hodges and Stephen Whittaker; as well as our speakers and contributors from Europe: Ivo Josipovic, Jadranka Kosor, Boris Tadic, Mladen Ivanic, Mirko Cvetkovic, Filip Vujanovic, Igor Luksic, Branko Crvenkovski, Bujar Nishani, Rosen Plevneliev, Petre Roman, Edin Dilberovic, Amer Kapetanovic, Jasmin Mahmuzic, Jasmina Selimovic, Ivan Barbalic, Adnan Cerimagic, Marko Savkovic, Ivana Stradner, Filip Sasic and Jovana Marovic.

We are grateful to the more than 50 people who were engaged in our roundtables and discussions for their insights, debate, candor, experience and passion during this highly valuable series of meetings and events.

We hope that this will be helpful in creating necessary awareness and long-term commitment from global and local stakeholders working together to advance the Western Balkans on its citizens' journey to peace, stability and prosperity.

---Zlatko Lagumdzija

1. PROLOGUE

In 2018, the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP), in cooperation with the East West Institute (EWI), published “Time for Action in the Western Balkans” (<https://www.ncafp.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Time-for-Action-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>), an analytical report and set of policy recommendations for the future of US policy vis-à-vis the region. While some prescriptions laid out by that report have come to pass, many continue to require careful attention from policymakers both in the United States and Europe.

As many of the core issues and policy recommendations laid out in 2018 remain the same, they must be reiterated with a high degree of urgency. Regrettably, new challenges have also appeared while their antecedents continue to sow discord. It is now “High Time for Action in the Western Balkans”, and the issues afflicting the region should not be treated with a “business as usual” complacency.

Critically, we must highlight a key recommendation from the 2018 report imploring key officials from both sides of the Atlantic to clarify and coordinate their efforts to more closely integrate the Western Balkans into European and transatlantic political, economic and security institutions. This remains one of, if not the paramount concern for policymakers and stakeholders in the United States, European Union and the region.

Amid the deepened uncertainty and the continued interference of malicious external actors in the domestic affairs of Western Balkan nations, it is a particularly apt moment to reexamine and assess the path forward for the region.

Following a gathering in December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a change to planned activities, resulting in a series of virtual forums held under the Chatham House Rule with the aim of diving deeply into specific critical issues.

Ultimately, this “Season One” of NCAFP-NGIC-FSSV efforts concluded with a “hybrid” Forum in Sarajevo in June 2021 aiming to present and discuss the outcomes of these smaller sessions and chart a possible path forward for the region.

1.1 Key Questions that Drove Discussion

What work remains to be done, regionally, to bring the nations of the Western Balkans closer to the EU and NATO?

What steps can be taken to deepen a “multi-speed” approach to integration so the Western Balkans can become a part of an evolving and changing European Union?

What can be achieved between Serbia and Kosovo in the short term, and what circumstances lead to the “light at the end of the tunnel” in terms of normalizing relations?

How can near-neighbors within the EU (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, and Greece) be helpful to accession-seeking nations?

What key policy recommendations could be given to the United States or the European Union vis-à-vis the Western Balkans? What needs to continue or change?

How are regional dynamics shifting following local elections?

How can rule of law be strengthened to support state-building and human rights?

How can Euro-Atlantic structures and states support and integrate the Western Balkans through mutual security concerns?

Looking forward, how can the Western Balkans engage proactively with issues such as the green economy, transport interconnectivity, digital transformation and high-quality inclusive education?

How can pro-Western political forces be consolidated and supported in their attempts to strengthen human rights, shared societies and secularism?

1.2. Why the Western Balkans Matter; and Why US-EU Leadership is Necessary

The stability and security of the region has significant implications for Europe and Euro-Atlantic security. It presents a microcosm of the challenges that Euro-Atlantic countries face globally and serves as a test of their capacity to meet them.

One would expect the Western Balkans to be a path toward stability and prosperity since the end of the wars following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, but instead are becoming exporters of instability.

The US continues to prioritize its global focus elsewhere, and the EU has proven to be ineffective over the last several years as it faces challenges such as migration, the rise of populism, Brexit, COVID-19, and the coopting of enlargement policies for political gain.

In concise terms:

- The European Union remains an ineffective partner without Washington when it comes to issues of security and stability. This is especially true in the face of outsized influence levied by Russia and China. The critical leadership of Euro-Atlantic powers, and the values they espouse, are undermined without the political will of European capitals and Washington.
 - Inaction on the part of the EU and the US has led to an influence gap being filled by Turkey, China and Russia.
- NATO remains a critical steppingstone for many nations in the region – with only two now outside the alliance. Focus should be on getting Bosnia-Herzegovina into the alliance, and finding ways to cooperate with Serbia.
- Neglecting verdicts and actions taken by The Hague’s International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia undermines respect for rule of law and diminishes the weight of the crimes committed, including genocide.
- The Dayton-Paris Peace Agreement, that brought an end to war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, is one of the most significant achievements of US foreign policy in Europe. Yet, it is

threatened by weak institutions and corruption because of nationalistic policies and attempts to drive disintegration of states and society.

- The status quo is not sufficient for maintaining security and stability, and runs against the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Lastly, if the European Union intends to maintain peace, stability and prosperity in its neighborhood it cannot forget that enlargement is based on values such as “unity in diversity.” The future of the Western Balkans rests within the European Union and enlargement should keep moving forward in advancement of the most lasting peace project in the history of the continent.

In looking back to the NCAFP’s 2018 report, the importance of the region to Euro-Atlantic security continues to ring true:

“The Western Balkans are a European vulnerability – conflict there spills into in European politics and erodes Europe’s security. Transnational crime, international terrorism, illegal migration resulting from underperforming economies, weak institutions and poor governance in the Balkans will affect Europe. And Europe’s vulnerabilities impact American national security interests... The dangers of continual inaction are too great to wait for the lesson to be taught anew that a failure to deal with incipient dangers will invariably require a far greater US commitment when crisis erupts full-blown... [in particular] Bosnia requires immediate attention.”

2. PRINCIPLES

2.1. High Time for a New Euro-Atlantic Policy for the Western Balkans

Support for civil society and human rights must be at the core of any policy and efforts toward capacity building. Tackling corruption must also be part of the preconditions in pressing for reforms and stronger democratic institutions.

2.2. Consolidate Pro-Western Political Forces

The new US Administration is in a unique position to exert outsized influence on the region. By focusing on the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the contentious talks between Serbia and Kosovo, and political deterioration in Montenegro because of the August 2020 election, the US can have a significant, low-cost impact.

Sanction mechanisms should play an important role against those who undermine the peace and stability of the region.

If the US and the EU are committed to accession, they must demonstrate that they are themselves maintaining their commitments to political, military, administrative, economic, and diplomatic engagement.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the issues plaguing the Western Balkans. The time of great international conferences is over; Action plans are needed for each country with accession aspirations to the EU and NATO that are complementary in nature. Additionally, regional frameworks must work in concert with accession needs.

2.3 . The EU Agenda is at the Heart of the Process

The countries of the Western Balkans must prioritize internal transformation with regard to the EU accession process, alongside efforts to bolster collaboration and cooperation regionally and with other European nations. The accession process, based in rule of law and economic reform, should be supported by reforms in public administration as well. Regrettably, only marginal progress has been seen thus far—both in the region and in terms of EU support.

All sides must continue to press toward delivering results, despite the lack of a consistent approach on the part of the EU. It is only just that the accession process cannot reach its conclusion until reforms are carried out, but the EU cannot afford to allow the aspiring members to seek support elsewhere.

In the specific case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, accession talks can help to jumpstart the implementation of reforms. It may also help to break internal political deadlock regarding critical constitutional questions.

2.4. Cooperation through Values Rather than Confrontation over Borders

It is high time for progressive and patriotic political forces to unite in changing the stayed narratives within the Western Balkans. Leaders should strive to replace confrontation with cooperation; segregation with shared societies; nationalism with human rights and shared values; corruption with rule of law; and populism and self-interest-based transactional politics with institutions and values-based policies.

2.5. Investment, Economic Integration, and Infrastructure Corridors

Investment will be key for the growth of regional economies. These investments should focus on fusing traditional support mechanisms from the EU with sustainable and green efforts to bring the region in the 21st Century.

Infrastructure corridors should also be treated as such, and not subdivided because of ethnic or border concerns.

2.6. The Relationship Between Serbia and Kosovo

It is crucial that the Serbia-Kosovo relationship be improved, and that avenues for achieving this goal be widened. Local economic integration coupled with regional common market efforts could be a mechanism to spur dialogue. Furthermore, the Four Freedoms Initiative can bolster these mutual efforts. In political terms, allowing Kosovo to gain observer status at the UN and within other bodies would be a positive step forward.

3. POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

3.1. Integrating the Western Balkans within the EU Single Market

With strong US and EU support, the Western Balkans have committed themselves to building a Common Regional Market. The Regional Cooperation Council is already charged with monitoring the implementation of [the Common Regional Market Action Plan](#), endorsed in November 2020.

However, for the region and its economies to fulfil their full potential, but also to protect themselves from the undue economic and financial influence of third actors, full integration with the EU single market is necessary.

With Western Balkan countries years, if not decades, away from becoming full EU members, integrating the region into the EU single market can and should take place sooner. In an [October 2020 document, the European Commission](#) noted that “the Western Balkans should develop a Common Regional Market, as a stepping-stone to integrate the region more closely with the EU Single Market ... before they accede to the Union.”

By following the historic examples of Sweden and Austria, who both joined the single market before the full extent of the European institutions, the EU should discern a concrete roadmap for pre-accession integration.

This should be a five-year roadmap, with a fixed deadline for possible membership in the single market to encourage target-setting. If there is a fixed timeline, this could help make the Western Balkans an attractive investment region for those EU companies and industries interested in bringing production and supply chains closer to home.

Integrating the Western Balkans with the EU single market can go hand-in-hand with the creation and adoption of a Western Balkan Common Regional Market, noted in the European Commission’s comprehensive Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. This effort aims to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region, support a green and digital transition, foster regional integration, and convergence with the European Union.

A September 2020 report from the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies and Bertelsmann Stiftung highlighted an [evaluation of regional economic cooperation in the Western Balkans](#), concluding that “the economic upside of additional efforts towards regional cooperation is likely to be limited and not attractive enough to get leaders in the Western Balkans to fully embrace them.” Furthermore, the study noted that “current proposals for deepening regional cooperation in an economic sense are fine, but they will not fundamentally change the situation [in the region] and are likely to run into familiar obstacles of the past.” This led to a recommendation that “a greater level of economic integration with the EU ...is both possible and desirable”. Concluding that membership in the EU Single Market,” could actually spur regional integration, seeing that trade integration between the Visegrad countries increased substantially after EU accession.”

3.2. Transport and Digital Infrastructure in the Western Balkans

The US and the EU, building on the already existing [Connectivity Agenda for the Western Balkans](#), and in line with the [Build Back Better World \(B3W\) Partnership](#), should allocate funds to invest in critical transport and digital infrastructure in the Western Balkans.

Similar to economic integration efforts, a five-year roadmap would be an important goal-setting tool for connecting all six Western Balkan capitals by 2027 with modern highways and railways, as well as through the development of digital infrastructure.

3.3. A Coal-Exit Strategy for the Western Balkans: an EU-US Initiative Integrated within the European Green Deal

A joint EU-US initiative aimed at transforming the Western Balkans into green and digital economies can be built around the clear goal of having a coal-free region by 2030.

Next to the existing EU [Green Agenda for the Western Balkans](#), as well as [the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#), the EU and the US could add the region to existing efforts toward a coal-free future by jointly encouraging, support and implementing climate friendly

policies. Both should consider dedicating additional funds that would follow the coal-exit of the Western Balkans in support of the creation of a baseline for a green and digital future for the region.

3.4. A Regional Initiative for Natural Disaster and Pandemic-Related Responses

The EU and the NATO, together with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), should work together toward a regional initiative for natural disaster and pandemic related responses. This regional initiative would make sure that the countries of the Western Balkans are working together to prepare for response to natural disasters and any possible pandemic threats in the future.

In light of the 2014 Floods and the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that climate change, disasters and pandemics are not bound by national borders. Therefore, the response and means to mitigate these threats needs to be cross-border.

Next to institutional cooperation, foresight and modernization, this regional initiative should aim to build trust between security and military components in the region. With it, divisions between NATO and non-NATO members could be made less visible. Their cooperation should build on already existing [EU](#) and [NATO](#) initiatives and mechanisms in natural disaster response, and potentially extend to their efforts related to pandemic threats.

3.5. Building Regional Confidence as a Response to Arms Races

According to the annual report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Serbia is spending more on defense than all five other Western Balkan states together. The official budgets of the Serbian ministry of defense show a sharp increase in annual spending of 38 percent (305 million euros) between 2013 and 2019. No other area of government spending saw as great an increase. This has not gone unnoticed, and some within the region speculate this trend may cause an unintentional arms race.

The Agreement on Sub-Regional Arms Control, of which Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia are all party, established ceilings in five categories of conventional

armaments (battle tanks, artillery pieces, combat aircraft, attack helicopters and armored combat vehicles) and is monitored by a Sub-Regional Consultative Commission. This Commission is composed of representatives of the parties and meets regularly. The Sub-Regional Consultative Commission should be encouraged to come out with regular reports on how far the parties are from the established ceilings in order to bolster trust and transparency among these partner nations.

3.6. Keep NATO in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina

In May 2021, rumors regarding a NATO departure from Kosovo drove grave concerns not just in Kosovo, but also in Serbia where authorities see NATO's presence as a form of security for the substantial Serb minority. Furthermore, disagreement between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community on the election of the next High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina has left many worried that by November 2021 Russia may try to prevent the continuation of EUFOR's mission and the presence of the NATO headquarters in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It is critical for the continued peace and security of the region that the Euro-Atlantic community makes clear that the KFOR and EUFOR missions will continue to be present and in full fulfillment of their commitments to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia and Kosovo.

APPENDIX A

Full Text of Zlatko Lagumdžija's, **Euro-Atlantic Commitment to Shared Society and Liberal Democracy in Normal Secular Civic State of Bosnia and Herzegovina**, Paper Created and Updated During Discussions from International Conference on “The Legacy of Peace – 25 years of Dayton,” Zagreb, December 2020, and the Forum on “Assessing Western Balkan – Way Forward,” Sarajevo – New York – Baku, June 2021 – *sic erat scriptum*:

This year is 26th anniversary of Srebrenica Genocide as a last sentenced crime of that scale in European soil. For me it is also a reminder of 52nd sad anniversary of the assassinations of two heroes of my youth Robert F Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

Since the beginning of Sarajevo besiege in the beginning of the war almost three decades ago I have often thought about the words that King spoke on the night before his death and thought, again and again, that they are brutally applicable to our reality. He said,

“Well I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I have been to the mountaintop and I have looked over. And I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I’m happy tonight.”

So why am I happy tonight in Bosnia and Herzegovina that is under attack by nationalistic corrupted forces of segregated and exclusive societies?

Because I have seen the Promised Land of shared society and normal liberal democracy and secular civic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina inside European Union borders with European Convention on Human Rights and Freedoms fully implemented and being part of our everyday lives. Convention which is for 25 years “dead ink on the paper” although being integral part of our Dayton Constitution.

I have gone to the mountaintop and seen the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina of human rights united in diversities in peaceful and prosperous Europe.

I believe that it is our future because we have no alternative. After all, life is better and more fun in shared societies instead trying to live in dreams that already got their verdict in Hague for genocide and a joint criminal enterprise.

Anyway people who think, talk and walk European values know that there is no plan B.

Respecting our history and building our shared future, while treating our differences like assets not trying to getting rid of them like they are our liability. Celebrating and protecting, institutionally and individually, our multiple identities – ethnic, religious, gender, sex orientation, or whatever – as citizens of Bosnia and Hezegovina and European Union. Through dialogue, respect, learning and understanding.

From EU and USA we do not expect nothing else but to treat us without double standards and offering us only the reforms and institutional constructs which they are offering to themselves.

I am confident that American administration will act along that principle which is encapsulated and in words of President Biden and his clear messages while he was commemorating last year 25th anniversary of Srebrenica genocide.

“Convening EU partners and NATO Allies with US to jointly develop a strategy for anchoring the Western Balkan in Euro-Atlantic institutions... while being committed to always stand against hate and guaranteeing Bosnia and Hezegovina sovereignty, territorial integrity and multiethnic character...”

Neglecting genocide in Srebrenica is unacceptable seeking for justice and reconciliation is fully supported”

In same manner I have no doubts and I fully endorse Josep Borrell words as well as the spirit of his article in The Brussels Times “From Dayton to Brussels: Working together for a stable and democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina” and of his last visit in Sarajevo not so long time ago.

“Letts’s acknowledge the fact about war crimes, while focusing on building lasting peace and society based on democracy, rule of law, equality, non-discrimination and the full protection of human rights...”

Bosnia and Herzegovina and EU were founded on same values and in this regard can be seen as “twins”...

Deep rutted political divides, shortfalls in the justice system, corruption, and persistent negative rhetoric continues to block progress...

This is my message: everything is possible. An European Union is there to help and hope that we can do it together...

With its cultural, ethnic and religion mix, Bosnia and Herzegovina has traditionally been “United in Diversity” the same way the EU is.”

To these words I can only add that in 2030 I am sure that EU, Western Balkan and us will look the same. They will become like us, or we will be more like them. We may all look like Sarajevo during 1984 Olympics or to look like besieged city of Sarajevo 1992 where later sentenced war criminals are killing thousands of innocent children before the rest of the world wakes up. The only difference is that this time no one could say that we could not imagine such a bloody scenario.

Let me shortly outline few proposals for our Euro-Atlantic friends and Dayton peace agreement signatories that require their commitment to work on together.

First, European Convention of Human Rights and Freedoms, as stated in Constitution, has to prevail over every legal act and if necessary be applied directly until legislators do their job.

We have 4 European Court for Human Rights verdicts about discrimination of members of non-constituent people in overall country as well as for Serbs being discriminated in Federation and Bosniacs in RS. No one appealed for Croats who are discriminated in RS.

We hear repeated claims that European Court verdicts, which are about discrimination of all citizens, becomes misused for so called issue of “Constituent” people.

Paradoxical is the fact that self-proclaimed defenders of European values are putting on a side track individual human rights and insisting on ethnic rights based on old Communist/Bolshevik construct of “Constituent” people. Construct that does not exist anyplace anymore after significantly contributed to bloody death of former Yugoslavia.

Second, insist and monitor fulfillment of our international commitments and legally defined objectives of speeding up our NATO and European Union path. Just to remind ourselves – BH accession goal and path to EU and NATO has been defined with state legislative adopted by Presidency and Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Third, have active consultations and advisory mechanisms for Bosnia and Herzegovina government to start actively participating in Economic and Investment Plan for Western Balkan.

We should keep in mind that if we would get 25% of potential funding (which is our GDP ratio in WB) then we could boost our economy for around today's unimaginative amount 6% of our GDP per year only as a result of this activity.

Inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the rest of Balkan in European Green Deal as an equal partners would not give only another irreplaceable boost to sustainable development and stability but to the regional climate change contribution and transformation as well.

Fourth, do help most vulnerable people – children. Blocking PISA test by President of Presidency by calling that to be “vital national interest” and results of TIMSS are showing that our educational system is “producing” teenagers that are “not ready for jobs in 21st century”.

With “brain drain” that is jeopardizing any future for new generations, PISA and TIMSS, education should be number one priority of anyone who dares to talk about interest of citizens or constituent people. That is specially the case for country like us where recent surveys are noting that in 50 years number of citizens will be smaller for 50% while in European Union there will be 5% less inhabitants with global population number going up for 50%.

Instead dealing with quality of education our governments are still maintaining system of so called “2 schools under one roof” in Federation where children are segregated along ethnic lines while in RS authorities are neglecting right for children to have Bosnian language in schools even that name of the language is explicitly defined in Dayton Accord.

I appeal to EU and OSCE that are committed to “normal” state of Bosnia and Herzegovina to use all authority to stop this educational system madness.

Finally, Fifth, everyone knows that citizens and overall country are hostages of corruption and organized criminal enterprises with political support while juridical system is at its lowest peak since beginning of reforms.

Opening up chapters 23 and 24, in any form, and support along that line is must. Lack of trust in politicians have to be tackled urgently through upgraded legislative and transparent process of seizing or forfeiture of illegal assets starting with top politicians.

This is right time to call for implementation of latest Council of EU adopted decision and regulation establishing a EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime. Similar to the US Magnitsky Act, this framework enable the EU to target individuals, entities and bodies responsible for, involved in or associated with serious human rights violations.

It goes hand to hand with President Biden signing Executive order on additional sanctions against authorities and individuals threatening peace, security, stability or territorial integrity of any area or state in the Western Balkans.

I am sure that Euro-Atlantic commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina by using this mechanism could open and speed up lot of positive processes on our way from Dayton to Brussels phase.

Until some years ago I could of be seeing as someone who is representing state institutions or relevant political party. Today I have much easier job since I represent and being responsible only for myself. My Bosnian colleagues now have very tough job since you may wrongly see them with much bigger legitimacy than it is the case in reality.

When COVID-19 started one relevant international institution conducted Western Balkan, regional, survey in which you could find out that there is enormous lack of trust in politicians. In Bosnia and Herzegovina that bar was the lowest one.

Four party leaders that have full control of institutions (Presidency, state and entities governments as well as over 2/3 majority in Parliament) and our lives ended on a top of the list when people were asked to name one person that you trust the most. Four of them together collected 15% of all votes.

That survey could be misleading but in local elections parties led by those 4 leaders, that still hold all the power needed for any reforms including constitutional changes collected in total almost 1/3 of votes or about 16% of all registered voters.

Local elections showed that people are not ready to follow their so called ethnic leaders or tribal chiefs as much as they claim for themselves.

This may be a chance for Dayton signatories as well for our 4 leaders, which all together have support of 1 out of 6 citizens or countryman, to rethink their position and try to be change that people need.

Our greatest live poet and writer Abdulah Sidran has a masterpiece line about Bosnia , and Bosnians as well as Bosniacs, worth mentioning when we are talking about Euro-Atlantic Commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“My bad luck is that I was not well understood either by the ones who have been killing me or by the ones who have been defending me.”

We are Europeans proud on our identities and culture asking nothing else but being treated with dignity and we are always trying to give it back in return much more.

After some of us survived genocide, joint criminal enterprises, ethnic cleansing, we are asking nothing more than justice and to be treated equally with other citizen of EU and their states.

We expect Euro-Atlantic commitment to condemn or at least do not take seriously those who think that represent European values by telling us that human rights are only for citizens and not for us, since we are just members of different tribes or herd of sheeps that will be slaughtered if they do not follow their shepherds.

When someone, claiming to represent European values or states, is telling to people with strong European identity as well as their Bosnian or Muslim one – to people who survived ethnical cleansing organized by joint criminal enterprises - that first they have to clean themselves by soap and than to keep living in long term dreams or to live in herds, then we expect European and human rights values representatives to act.

We expect that commitment not because we are insulted, but because we think that those types of people are insulting true representatives of European family and values.

Difference between us and fake Europeans in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the rest of the Europe is gigantic. In our dream or in our world, or in normal Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a shared society, there is a room for everyone. Even for those who neglect us a right to chase our simple goal which is to live in dignity, respect human rights and letting everyone to be what they are. In their world, of fake Europeans, there is room only for them and for the people who are same as they are.

Finally, Euro-Atlantic commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina should be seen through the clear message from European friends that they do not have a problem with normal liberal democracy and secular civic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina because Muslims happen to be mathematical majority or most numerous groups of citizens.

If less than 2 million Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks with strong European and Bosnian identity want to be citizens of European Union where great majority of out of 500 million citizens are Christians, then it is unacceptable to treat Bosnians as second rate Europeans that are not eligible to be living as a citizens in their own state and shared society.

If European Union and NATO are serious about themselves as well as about the values they claim to stand for, then Euro-Atlantic commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina have to be vocal, visible and action based while supporting us to keep changing our country becoming normal liberal democracy and secular civic state and shared society.

APPENDIX B

Selected Speakers and Participants Involved in the Roundtable Discussions 2019-21

Ivan BARBALIC; Mirko CVETKOVIC; Edin DILBEROVIC; Susan M. ELLIOTT; Mladen IVANIC; Marko IVKOVIC; Tracey A. JACOBSON; Ivo JOSIPOVIC; Amer KAPETANOVIC; Kerry KENNEDY; Zlatko LAGUMDZIJA; Igor LUKSIC; Jasmin MAHMUZIC; Cameron MUNTER; Rovshan MURADOV; Matthew NIMETZ; Bujar NISHANI; Sally A. PAINTER; Rosen PLEVNELIEV; Petre ROMAN; Michael C. RYAN; Filip SASIC; George D. SCHWAB; Jeffrey R. SHAFER; Jasmina SELIMOVIC; Ivana STRADNER; Boris TADIC; Filip VUJANOVIC; Stephen WHITTAKER; Frank G. WISNER; Mary B. WARLICK; Hoyt B. YEE

APPENDIX C

Links to References and Recommended Sources

<https://www.ncafp.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Time-for-Action-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>

<https://www.rcc.int/docs/543/common-regional-market-action-plan>

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/communication_on_wb_economic_and_investment_plan_october_2020_en.pdf

https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/user_upload/Pushing_on_a_string.pdf

<https://www.wbif.eu/sectors/connectivity-agenda>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/>

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en_0.pdf

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/IP_20_1811

https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/disaster_preparedness_en

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52057.htm?