

The end of the war?

From war to Dayton - the new order in the Balkans

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Trying to assess the outcome of 21 days of hard negotiations in Dayton - the peace accord on Bosnia-Herzegovina and a number of agreements aimed at re-establishing peace, stability and normality in the region with the idea that the implementation instruments will be developed at several international conferences planned to take place in the near future - is an exercise marked by mixed feelings.

The prospect of peace after years of total mistrust gives rise to disbelief and caution - behind us are too many agreements which served as an alibi for continued aggression, a cover for ethnic and geopolitical "reprogramming of the region". It will take time for hope to turn into confidence. On the thin line between justice and realpolitik, where moral principles and lofty values clash with the international balance of power and conflicting interests, it is difficult to have a clear vision of the long-term effects of the agreements.

Nevertheless, I am deeply convinced that the Dayton accords mark the turning point in the political resolution of the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a milestone on the road of defining the regional and European security architecture on the eve of the 21st century. I therefore propose to look beyond the doubts, dilemmas and necessary caution of the moment and outline some of the basic elements of the "Dayton logic" and its long-term effects. In order to do this, it is important to focus on the time the United States chose to become directly involved in the resolution of the conflict - although formally acting within the Contact Group. I believe that this timing was not merely in the service of American electoral pragmatism: although it may have triggered it, it was part of a wider realization of the real dangers inherent in the prolongation of the crisis caused by ineffective political action.

In retrospect, it is already clear that the international community - leaving aside its self-justifying moralizing - finally recognized and accepted the historical inevitability of a redefinition of the overall regional ethnic, political and international-legal outlook; it had accepted or was beginning to adapt to the foreseeable final results of that process, but chose to leave it to the logic of war to be the instrument of the transformation.

This applies in particular to the situation of a year ago, when the international community realized that a lasting resolution was possible only if conditions were created for a new regional order based on balanced relations between the Croat-Bosnian and Serbian entities in territorial, political, military, economic and demographic terms - by satisfying the realistically

assessed interests of the Croats, Bosnians and Serbs against the background of the desirable geopolitical and geostrategic outlook of the region and at the same time "separating the overheated ethnic groups". It was only on this basis that the necessary commonality of interests of the European powers could be expected.

To that extent the "logic of Dayton" results from the "logic of the Contact Group", which was just another name for the internal separation of the Croats and Bosnians from the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with clear indications of a constitutional solution which would leave open the possibility for a number of future options (the two extremes: complete separation or coexistence). It is important to note that this process in Bosnia-Herzegovina will depend on the overall development of European processes, that is, on whether Europe will allow the logic of polarization and confrontation to prevail or whether it will try to create a global transparent and cooperative system reaching "from the Atlantic to Vladivostok". If they are implemented, the Dayton accords will preserve the status quo in Bosnia-Herzegovina; in the forthcoming period, the processes in Europe and in Bosnia-Herzegovina will be mutually complementary and will determine the nature of future relations on the continent.

In this situation, the Dayton accords and the ensuing implementation instruments will put an end to the war but will not freeze the actual historical, political, ethnic and social processes in the region. To put it crudely, we are entering a period in which "peace will be the continuation of war with different means". Therefore, in order to evaluate the results of the Dayton accords for each party to the conflict it is necessary to assess from what positions and with what cards they are entering the coming period and the inevitable process of the final shaping of the region, including its ethnic and geopolitical outlook.

The international community, then, recognized and tacitly accepted the concept of the internal separation in Bosnia - Herzegovina ("The Federation of Independent States of Bosnia and Herzegovina") as the starting point for the creation of a new and balanced regional order; for the past six months it has left it to the 'parties in the conflict' to use a combination of military and political means to shape their new geopolitical, military and territorial relations.

Under these circumstances it was essential for Croatia to realistically assess the military situation in the early summer of 1995.

It may be useful to remember at this point that the Western indulgence towards Belgrade had led to a geostrategic situation which was highly unfavourable for the Croats and Bosnians. Belgrade was aware of the fact that a state of neither war nor peace would weaken its position (impaired by sanctions and the military position of the Bosnian Serbs) and was trying to revert the war dynamics and prepare the ground for the final delimitation of Serbian territories in ex-Yugoslavia. With the then still existing Krajina, which it kept alive as the final negotiating stake through manipulation (change of leadership), the international community (negotiations on ways of "integration": autonomy of districts, Z-4, etc.) and direct logistical support (weapons, food), the Serbian side launched military operations aimed at the definitive ethnic cleansing of eastern Bosnia. Their strategy of maximum gains was obvious; their tactic of "intimidating" the international community (kidnapping UN soldiers, blocking humanitarian convoys, continuing the total blockade of Sarajevo, targeting NATO aircraft) was aimed at strengthening the position of those international forces (capitals) that were against direct military intervention because of their own interests.

In retrospect, the achievements of Dayton can probably best be measured against the background of a possible development in which Belgrade would have succeeded in holding on to the Krajinas in Croatia and in tailoring the map in Bosnia-Herzegovina, on which at least half the territory of Bosnia including the Bihać area and eastern Bosnia would be Serbian, without any intervention by the international community. Had this happened, negotiations would hardly have been necessary.

This very real possibility shows the vital importance of Operation Storm. It not only reversed the course of the war and thwarted the Serbian global strategic goals (the Krajinas plus at least half of Bosnia-Herzegovina) but it opened the way for new strategic relations and, through the national and strategic alliance with the Bosnians, created the preconditions for a balance of power in the region that was on the line of interests of the international community.

The strong American involvement in the Contact Group - which emphasized the fact that the big powers were acting in unison while adhering to the logic of internal separation - occurred at the moment when military operations had created a balance of power between the Croat-Bosnian and the Serbian sides. An additional motive for this timing - when the processes of separation had not yet been completed and the geopolitical landscape was not yet quite stable and logical neither from the standpoint of the three peoples nor in terms of European relations as a whole - was the realization that a continuation of the process through military means would lead to unforeseeable consequences for the relations in the region and Europe and, possibly, to a scenario of catastrophe and anarchy.

The moment chosen for action and the assessment that the crisis was "ripe" for resolution pointed to the principles on which solution would be based.

The starting concept, according to which the only lasting solution was possible by redressing the balance and thus creating a framework for the future stable regional order - indicated that the logic of realistic

compromise would be the key to the negotiations, applying both to territorial and constitutional-political dimensions of the accords.

The second starting point was only indirectly present in Dayton, but it is crucial for future developments: the nature of the proposed and adopted solutions for Bosnia-Herzegovina clearly displays that the processes of the final territorial and political shape of the region have not been completed with the initialling in Dayton nor will they be halted by later developments. This does not apply only to the controversial and open questions which are to be solved through international arbitration - although it is significant they include the area around Brčko and the so-called corridors, undoubtedly the most important points for a final settlement in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the region.

In a nutshell, the process envisaged by the Dayton accords stops the war as a means for ordering relations in the region and introduces elements of normalization - ranging from mutual recognition by the states involved to reconstruction - while leaving room for the next stage, in which military confrontation will be replaced by "soft", gradual solutions.

In these circumstances, an objective assessment of the achievements and effects of Dayton for the future position of Croatia must start from a number of indisputable facts.

Firstly, that six months ago Croatia's military and political position was far more unfavourable in terms of the final territorial and political solutions for the new regional configuration outlined in Dayton.

Secondly, that Croatia succeeded in recognizing the fundamental principle in the approach of the international community - political compromise as an instrument for achieving balanced relations in the region - and in using it to the best effect to protect its national and state interests in the present phase of the crisis. In this, four elements stand out: the agreement on Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium with firm guarantees (the USA; recognition; and Croatia's strength today); the agreement on the strengthening of the Federation as the basic framework for Croatian national and state interests, with indisputable geostrategic, economic and other advantages in the context of the expected balanced outlook of the region; normalization of relations in the region (recognition, economic development, communications, etc.) and prospects for stability and development in the entire region.

The processes that will follow after the peace agreement will be marked by attempts of the three parties in the crisis to use political, economic, social and other means to strengthen their position and achieve maximum gains wherever possible. As the implementation of the agreement will depend on its interpretation and on the power of Zagreb, Belgrade and Sarajevo, it is reasonable to say that Croatia is entering the forthcoming period with the strongest strategic position and that the consistent implementation of all the Dayton agreements will secure its fundamental strategic interests and make it the key to the creation of a new, balanced regional order in this part of Europe. ■