



Weekly Briefing

**Bosnia-Herzegovina external relations briefing:
European Parliament's Resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina
Zvonimir Stopić**

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin

Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 office@china-cee.eu

 china-cee.eu

European Parliament's Resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina

Summary

In June this year, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus recognizing challenges which stand in a way of Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming a European Union's member state. Majority of the Croatian members of the European Parliament voted against or sustained, mostly because the Resolution did not make any references to the "rights of the constitutive peoples" and "legitimate representation". This voting shows the major difference in attitude Croatia has over the European Union regarding the solutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina's issues.

Introduction

In our March and May 2021 External Relations briefings we made an attempt to outline the reasons why Bosnia and Herzegovina's neighbor, Republic of Croatia, cannot truly be Bosnia and Herzegovina's guide to Bosnia and Herzegovina's aspiration to become a European Union member state. In this briefing, we will use the Resolution, recently adopted by the European Parliament, as an examples of why this is so. Although both the European Union and Croatia wish for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a European Union's member state, the agendas these two political entities have are not fully synchronized. The largest difference in the attitude between Croatia and the European Union falls on the understanding on how the ethnic issues which exist within Bosnia and Herzegovina should and can be resolved. On one hand, the European Union's policies, in theory at least, generally aim to make the national questions within Bosnia and Herzegovina less important, or even obsolete with the right amount of time. Croatia, on the other, albeit sporadically and even inconsistently, often acts as it strives to do the exact opposite. This briefing will present these two contrasting approaches.

The European Parliament's Resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina

On June 24th, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina, prepared previously by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. This document listed most of the issues and challenges that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to surpass in order to become a

member of the European union.¹ In this document, the list of challenges were grouped in seven categories, namely Reconciliation, Functioning of democratic institutions, Rule of law, Fundamental rights, Socio-economic reforms, Connectivity, energy and environment, and Foreign policy and security.

Among many other addressed issues, the Resolution condemned historical revisionism and “anti-constitutional, secessionist, nationalistic and inflammatory rhetoric and related acts, denial or glorification of war crimes committed during the 1990s war”. It did the same with the “statements and proposals aiming to undermine Bosnia and Herzegovina’s statehood and constitutional values”. Resolution reconfirmed the European Union’s “support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina” and underlined that the “effective establishment, independent functioning and accountability of democratic institutions are essential feature of a viable democracy and a prerequisite for moving forward with the European Union integration process, including obtaining candidate status”. Resolution also noted that the European Union is quite aware of the “ethno-nationalistic and anti-constitutional rhetoric, and attempts to obstruct the functioning of institutions undermine country-wide co-ordination and decision-making on key policies and reforms, as well as unity and lasting stability”. When it comes to the question of one of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s largest issues - the widespread various types of discrimination, the Resolution was quite direct. It scorned Bosnia and Herzegovina for the lack of progress on judicial reforms and general inability and/or unwillingness to adequately recognize and implement rulings from its own Constitutional Court and the international courts, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Further more, the Resolution also expressed a concern over the situation regarding the fundamental rights of its citizens. Demonstrating that the European Union is well informed of the depth of the problems, the Resolution called for more effort to be placed in designing “more effective and comprehensive country-wide human rights and anti-discrimination strategies, as well as measures against inter-faith and inter-ethnic intolerance”.

¹ For the full text of the Resolution see: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0317_EN.html>.

Croatia and the European Parliament's Resolution

Written in a direct and clear language, the European Parliament's Resolution, pinpointed many of Bosnia and Herzegovina's shortcomings, which both undermine the country's ability for progress and prevent it to get any closer to the European Union. While acknowledging the issues, the Resolution also urged political actors, both within and outside of the country, to find a way to develop some kind of matrix capable of surpassing or at least reducing the issues accumulated by political exploitation of animosities between ethnicities, nationalities, religion, languages and various historical narratives. However, not all members of the European Union gave their support for the Resolution. One of those who did not, was Bosnia and Herzegovina's neighbor Croatia.

The Resolution itself, sponsored by the vice-president of the European People's Party Paul Rangel, was adopted with 483 votes in favor, 73 against and 133 abstentions. During the voting, however, majority of the Croatian delegates did not support the proposed text of the Resolution. Members of the Parliament belonging to the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ), namely Karlo Ressler, Tomislav Sokol, Sunčana Glavak and Željana Zovko, all voted against the Resolution. Exactly the same did the their rivals in the Croatian political scene, the Socialist Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske, SDP) MP's Romana Jerković, Predrag Fred Matić, Biljana Borzan and Tonino Picula. The Croatian Conservative Party (Hrvatska konzervativna stranka, HKS) MP Ruža Tomašić, together with the independents Mislav Kolakušić and Ivan Vilibor Sinčić abstained. The Istrian Democratic Assembly's (Istarski demokratski sabor, IDS) MP Valter Flego was the only Croatian member of the European Parliament who voted in favor of the Resolution.

The main reason of why the Croatian delegates did not support the Resolution in the form it became an official European Union's document in June, was because the amendment which included the "rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitutive people" and the "legitimate representation", proposed by Croatia's MP's, was rejected during the general discussions within the Parliament. For Croatia's Government, which attempted to use the discussions over the Resolution to secure the European Union's support for Dragan Čović's solutions regarding the amends of the Bosnia and Herzegovina's election law, discussed in detail in this month's political briefing, the rejection of the amendment was recognized as diplomatic failure. This was partly because Croatia diplomatic initiative failed, but more so because Croatia's initiative itself showed that Croatia's values, when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, do take a step back from the ones the European Union nurtures. After all, although the "rights of constitutive

peoples” and “legitimate representation” did not find a way into the Resolution, many other “rights” that are currently clouded and set aside precisely because of ethnic tensions within Bosnia and Herzegovina, did. The Resolution mentioned human rights, fundamental rights (dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizens’ rights and justice),² children’s rights, women’s rights, rights of persons with disabilities, employment and social rights, intellectual property rights, and right to stand for election, in detail all of them usually with the note that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to work more on their enforcement. Further more, the Resolution also noted that the European Union wishes to see Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the implementation of proper reforms, transform “into a fully functional and inclusive state which fully ensures the rights of all citizens”. The whole point of the Resolution was to avoid placing ethnic issues in front of any of mentioned “rights”, mostly because, looking from the European Union’s perspective, such approach leads nowhere.

Conclusion

When we look at the concepts used in the European Parliament’s Resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina, and compare it with the political discourse that has been used in Bosnia and Herzegovina ever since the Dayton Agreement, it may seem like they are worlds apart. Carefully chosen words on both sides, often either stand in conflict with each-other, or, when they do match in syntax, they do not to the same in semantics. In our July Political briefing, we mentioned that Bosnia and Herzegovina politics exists within a certain political paradigm which is based on ethnic division and intolerance. The European Union, stands in a completely different paradigm, defined by ethnic tolerance. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina’s neighbor, implement both views, with one foot standing in the European Union, and with another stuck in the swamp of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s politics. The crucial difference in the European Union’s and Croatia’s approach lies in acceptance of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s paradigm. While the European Union’s somewhat idealistic policies toward Bosnia and Herzegovina are attempting to be constructed in way that they can steer the country could be steered towards a path of progress, justice and functionality, Croatia, if nothing else, struggles with such ideas. Croatia’s connection with Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Croats, to whom Croatia never truly had developed a clear and well defined policy, keeps it tied to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s ethnic issues. This involvement inadvertently helps Bosnia and Herzegovina to stay locked within the

² For the full list of fundamental rights as they are defined by the European Union see the “Charter of the fundamental rights of the European Union”: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>>.

mentioned paradigm. Therefore, if we want to expect the political paradigm within Bosnia and Herzegovina to change, the same simply has to occur in its close neighborhood, namely Croatia and Serbia, both of which still much to cling to selective historical narratives combined with political opportunism.