



türkiye ekonomi politikaları araştırma vakfı

Bosnia and Herzegovina on Its Way to 2010

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The year 2009 is a year lost for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The right to a visa-free entry to the European Union granted to citizens of Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, wasn't granted to those of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to the lack of necessary advances in reforms, Bosnia and Herzegovina hasn't been presented with the NATO Membership Action Plan. Because the Butmir talks begun in October 2009 have come to a deadlock, the much needed changes in the constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina couldn't be carried out. With 2010 as an election year, the nationalist movement is expected to gain more strength in the country within the upcoming months.

Washington and Brussels which both aim to turn Bosnia and Herzegovina into a more functional state and have served as mediators in the Butmir talks, have announced that they would insist even more profoundly on their plan to carry out constitutional changes in the country during the first half of 2010. This time, however, the Western pressure wouldn't focus on the whole of the constitutional reform package offered to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but on reaching an agreement on minimum acceptable parts. The fact that Washington and Brussels are getting ready to lower the bar regarding changes in the constitution is nothing else but Bosnian Serbs leader Milorad Dodik's victory.

From the very beginning Dodik has been opposing all changes in the constitution that would help Bosnia and Herzegovina gain power as a state. Namely, Dodik is dreaming of gradually changing the status of Republic of Srpska, which he is the Prime Minister of and which he uses as his personal political toy, into an independent state. In order to have the West concede to that which could serve him at the Butmir talks, in the past days Dodik has found himself threatening to block Bosnia and Herzegovina's NATO and European Union integration process in form of referendums.

The West is almost powerless, standing on the opposite side of Dodik's unyielding and tension-provoking ways. With its "policy of conditionality", the European Union cannot obtain any results in Republic of Srpska. Although aware that it cannot succeed on its own, Brussels is trying to outshine the USA in the diplomacy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, whatever the topic, what remains at the back of Republic of Srpska is Russia, defying the West. Aiming to add even more power to his authority, Dodik has been making good use of the developments achieved in this respect. To make things even more interesting, Dodik is gradually starting to enjoy more and more respect amongst Bosnian Croats. Bosnian Croats who believe that they are living in the Bosniak shadow within the federation and that they cannot express themselves enough, feel gratitude for Dodik whose suggestion is to form a third entity for Croats.

As for Turkey, in such an environment it is doing its best to break the political deadlock in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to support the reforms needed in the country. The West, which has now alone, wrongfully so, set forth to solve the problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina, didn't invite Turkey or Russia to

act as mediators in Butmir, two countries both capable of contributing to the negotiations. In spite of this, however, Turkey, which refuses to act as an observer in this delicate process Bosnia and Herzegovina finds itself in, has begun a diplomatic attack directed at Bosnia and Herzegovina. Initially, Ankara started a policy aimed at bringing Belgrade and Sarajevo closer together. In this context, Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu initiated a three-party monthly meeting tradition with his colleagues from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Davutoğlu, who visited Croatia on 12 December 2009, also formed the basis for three-party monthly talks with his Croatian and Bosnian and Herzegovinian colleagues. It seems Turkey is trying to stabilize the state in Bosnia and Herzegovina, aided by the influence Belgrade and Zagreb have over Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats, respectively. Of course, Turkey is trying to act for better future of Bosnia and Herzegovina not only on regional level, but at local and international levels too.

Bosnian Serbs are not at ease with Turkey's mediation efforts. Even if Belgrade was to suggest to Dodik to adopt a more constructive position, Dodik would undoubtedly continue with his familiar one. Even during the Bosnian war, there were situations and periods when Bosnian Serbs have not responded to demands coming from Belgrade. Republic of Srpska has now the authority almost reminiscent of that of "a state within a state". Because in the negotiations, related to constitutional changes, being constructive will mean giving up some of Republic of Srpska's authority, Dodik will continue to sabotage the said negotiations as much as possible. Moreover, Belgrade is also opposing any form of restriction regarding Republic of Srpska's authority. In addition, influenced by Montenegro and Kosovo's declarations of independence, the first one to yet again fuel Republic of Srpska's controversy was the former Serbian government.

Unlike Belgrade, in recent years Croatia has constantly been reminding Bosnian Croats that their homeland was Bosnia and Herzegovina, and their capital wasn't Zagreb but Sarajevo. With this attitude Croatia has proven that it could be a country of key importance in providing a peaceful and safe environment in the Balkans. For this reason, within the framework of the politics it engages in, directed against Bosnia and Herzegovina, the fact that Ankara has entered an alliance with Zagreb bears utter importance. In 1993 Turkey applied a similar strategy and joined an initiative with Croatia in order to put an end to the emerging conflicts between Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats. In that same period, had it not been for the good relations between Croatia and Turkey, providing a generally peaceful environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina wouldn't have been as easy.

Referring to a lesson from the past, insist of simultaneously bringing together three constitutional ethnic groups for negotiations, Ankara could perhaps venture to contribute to the efforts of Bosnia and Herzegovina while acting with Zagreb in order to overcome the existing issues between Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats. After securing "new reconciliation" between Bosniaks and Croats and after securing common stand of Federation part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ankara could continue to act as a

mediator so as to broaden the reconciliation that would include Bosnian Serbs. No matter what, Turkey's task in Bosnia and Herzegovina is bound to be difficult. Since 2010 is an election year in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic based politics in the country will gain momentum, and politicians will attempt to gain political favour from ethnic dividedness. As for the media, controlled by politicians, it will continue to promote the ethnic hate environment present in the country. Therefore, in order to achieve complete success, all the outside parties involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina's diplomacy will eventually have to demonstrate greater solidarity.