

Europe's Last Colony

Bosnians are allowed to vote, but not to govern themselves.

By **Brendan O'Neill**

LONDON—Liberal commentators in Europe are desperately worried about Burma. They cannot bear the sight of a military junta using batons and worse to beat peaceful, saffron-clad monks and pro-democracy protesters off the streets. They are also perturbed by Pakistan, where Pervez Musharraf, a military strongman backed by the West, has declared a state of emergency and continues to delay the “day of democracy” when the people might choose the leader that they want.

Their frustration with bloody oppression in Burma and the snail-pace march toward democracy in Pakistan is understandable. Yet there seem to be strict limits to their liberal outrage. They get hot under the collar about repressive regimes in Asia, yet seem to feel no angst over the continued existence of a deeply undemocratic, almost feudal fiefdom right here in Europe, where an old-style colonial chief, appointed from without, enforces his writ with ruthless efficiency.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is falling apart. It is in the grip of its most serious political crisis since the Dayton Accord brought the civil war to a close in November 1995. Senior officials in EUFOR, the European Union peace-keeping force still stationed in Bosnia, are for the first time talking openly about the possibility of renewed conflict. And the crisis has been precipitated not by outbursts of ethnic hatred on the streets of Sarajevo but by the actions of Bosnia's High Representa-

tive, the supreme governor of Bosnia appointed by the Peace Implementation Council, a collection of 55 countries and agencies that represents the “international community” and oversees the enforcement of the Dayton Accord.

Unlike Burma and Pakistan, Bosnia has regular elections. The people choose their representatives. Yet the ultimate authority—the unelected High Representative, chosen and imposed by the PIC—has the power to override the decisions of elected politicians.

On Nov. 1, the current elected prime minister of Bosnia, Nikola Spiric, resigned in protest over the actions of the current unelected High Representative, Miroslav Laják, who, in a feudalistic move designed to make his job easier, overhauled Bosnia's constitutional makeup. The Dayton peace agreement decrees that every major political decision made in Bosnia must have the backing of all three of Bosnia's segmented ethnic communities: the Bosnian Muslims, Croats, and Serbs. The aim is to ensure a fairly smooth-running, consensual form of democracy and to keep ethnic one-upmanship to a minimum.

Yet in October, Laják brought in new measures aimed at “streamlining” the operation of Bosnia's central governing institutions. In a striking snub to Dayton, his measures drastically reduce the need for consensual agreement in the political decision-making process.

For the bureaucratic mandarins who

run Bosnia on behalf of the “international community,” the attraction of ditching tripartite consensus on every issue is clear: their jobs become less complicated if they don't have to manage the disagreements that inevitably arise in a divided political system, as they do in every democratic political forum.

Many also suspect that Laják's ultimate aim is to isolate those pesky Bosnian Serbs, whose elected politicians have been known to put forward political proposals that go against the wishes of Bosnia's colonial overlord. According to David Chandler, author of *Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton*, Laják is creating a situation where “state institutions no longer have to take into account the opinions of Serb representatives of the Republika Srpska entity [the Serb section of Bosnia-Herzegovina].” In short, Laják's meddling with Bosnia's constitution is not only an affront to the internationally agreed Dayton peace agreement, it is also an implicit attempt by an unelected overseer to limit the power and punch of elected Serb leaders.

As he resigned in protest, Prime Minister Spiric voiced many Bosnians' discomfort with the continuing domination of their state by an unelected outsider. Spiric declared, “Bosnia-Herzegovina is absurd.” It is “unfortunately not a sovereign state” more than a decade after the civil war ended and Bosnia's status as an “independent nation” was institutionalized. “Twelve years after Dayton, for-

eigners have exclusive rule over this country, and I believe this isn't good for this country or its citizens," said Spiric. He added, "If the international community always supports the High Representative and not the institutions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, then it doesn't matter if I am the head of that state, or Bart Simpson." Currently, Bosnia has no elected PM—not Spiric, Bart Simpson, or anybody else.

Laják's meddling with the tripartite system and his attempt to sideline elected leaders are only the latest intervention into Bosnian politics by the strongman that is the High Representative. This colonial figure has quite extraordinary powers. In 2003, a European think tank called the European Stability Initiative described Bosnia as "the European Raj." It argued that "in Sarajevo in the early twenty-first century, as in Calcutta in the nineteenth, foreigners play the part of 'benevolent despots.'" The ESI condemned the "unlimited authority of an international mission to overrule all of the democratic institutions of [Bosnia], a sovereign member of the United Nations."

How far does the High Representative's authority extend? Well, the Office of the High Representative can dismiss elected presidents, prime ministers, judges, and mayors without submitting to review by any independent appeals body. In 1999, the third High Representative, Wolfgang Petritsch, dismissed the elected Serbian mayor, Mile Marceta. According to ESI, Marceta, an eminent non-nationalist leader of a displaced Serbs' movement, was thrown out of office because his championing of Serbs' right to return to land from which they had been expelled during the civil war irked "international field officers, who resented [his] visibility and his impatience with their mission's lack of progress toward securing the right of return." The Office of the High

A Lebanese woman, who became a U.S. citizen through a sham marriage and obtained security clearances that led to sensitive jobs with both the FBI and CIA, will likely be deported to Lebanon,

where it is probable an attempt will be made to kill her because of her CIA affiliation. Nada Nadim Prouty, who resigned her position after it was revealed that she fraudulently became an American citizen, was not a spy for Hezbollah as some poorly informed media commentary has been claiming. She was recruited into the CIA as an operations officer because of her fluent Arabic and worked in the Baghdad CIA station on terrorist targets, where she was highly praised for her efforts. She first provoked interest in 2005 by breaking internal regulations by searching FBI databases for derogatory information on her new brother-in-law, whom she distrusted and who had attended a Hezbollah conference in Beirut. The CIA position required extensive background checks as well as a second polygraph exam that apparently did not address her sham marriage. According to a senior CIA official, there are no counterintelligence concerns about her CIA employment and no evidence that she was working for or passed on information to Hezbollah. Aside from breaking internal FBI regulations, the only charge against her, to which she pleaded guilty, was obtaining her citizenship fraudulently, but she faces possible jail time before being forced to leave the country.



There has been a tendency when drafting counterterrorism legislation to enable criminalization of thoughts and intents in addition to penalizing substantive plans.

A 23-year-old of Asian descent who called herself the "Lyrical Terrorist" has just become the first woman convicted under the draconian terms of Britain's new Terrorism Act. On Nov. 9, Samina Malik was found guilty at the Old Bailey. The jury was told that she had written extremist poems praising Osama bin Laden, supporting martyrdom, and discussing beheading. Malik, who worked in a bookstore and has denied all the charges, had earlier been found not guilty of the more serious charge of possessing an article for a terrorist purpose. She has said the poems she posted on websites were "meaningless" and claims to have only called herself the Lyrical Terrorist "because it sounded cool." But the police reported they had found a "library" of extreme Islamist literature in her bedroom, including *The Al-Qaeda Manual* and *The Mujahedeen Poisons Handbook*. The court also heard that she had written, "The desire within me increases every day to go for martyrdom" on the back of a cash-register receipt. She was convicted of having articles "likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism." Now similar legislation is pending in the U.S. Congress. The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act passed the House by a 405 to 6 vote and is awaiting approval by the Senate Homeland Security Committee, headed by Sen. Joe Lieberman. The act defines "homegrown terrorism" as "planning" or "threatening" to use force to promote a political objective and "violent radicalization" as the promotion of an "extremist belief system."

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