

Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo and Saferworld

The missing peace

The need for a long term strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina



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Acronyms

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CSO	civil society organisation
EC	European Commission
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUFOR	European Union Military Force (Operation Althea)
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LOT	Liaison and Observation Team (under EUFOR)
MZ	Mjesna zajednica (smallest administrative unit in the Former Yugoslavia, used today to designate a specific local area or local community)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PIC	Peace Implementation Council
RS	Republika Srpska
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

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Executive summary

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, the steady deterioration in the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) combined with a worsening economic climate has prompted increased attention towards the country from international media, political analysts and international decision-makers. As the international community looks to disengage from its executive role in BiH, unresolved issues continue to block political progress and keep the country in a state of paralysis and vulnerability.

Against this backdrop, the following report outlines the findings of desk and field research carried out by Saferworld and Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo in early 2010 to assess the impact of the current political and economic situation on local communities, and to map out the deeper 'drivers of conflict' in BiH that remain unaddressed.¹ The field research was carried out in 16 locations² across the country.

The purpose of this report is not just to provide a community-based perspective on the current stalemate. It also aims at encouraging the international community to look beyond the immediate deadlock, and to prompt a discussion about how international actors can ensure that their engagement contributes to minimising longer-term threats to BiH's delicate stability. As such, the report and its concluding recommendations are mainly addressed to decision makers and desk officers in international and foreign government institutions engaged in BiH, the European Union (EU) in particular.

A stable but delicate security situation

It is important to stress that communities largely perceive the local security situation to be satisfactory. Inter-ethnic incidents generally do not cause people concern in their daily lives and the police are generally considered to be fulfilling their duties. However, a number of issues contribute to undermining the feeling of security at a community level. These issues have the potential to threaten stability in the longer term.

Concerns over political stalemate, economic pressures and international effectiveness

The current political situation is a key cause of frustration and concern for communities, mostly due to the use of a 'language of fear' and uncertainty among citizens

¹ 'Drivers of conflict' can be defined as factors that contribute to people's grievances. In the conflict analysis literature, proximate drivers of conflict are 'factors contributing to a climate conducive to violent conflict or its further escalation', while structural drivers of conflict are 'pervasive factors that have become built into the policies, structures and fabric of a society and may create the pre-conditions for violent conflict'. Saferworld with International Alert, Africa Peace Forum, FEWER, CECORE and Consortium on Humanitarian Agencies, *Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. A resource pack*, (London, 2004).

² Research was carried out in two local communities (*mjesna zajednica*) in each of the following eight locations: Banja Luka, Brčko, Mostar, Prijedor, Sarajevo, Stolac, Tuzla and Zvornik.

about whether current political tensions could result in violence. Questions surrounding the ability of international actors to break the current political deadlock, and confusion about their future role in BiH, add to the frustration. The international community is broadly seen as untrustworthy, biased, and lacking a strategy for BiH.

High unemployment rates and the resulting social frustration mean that the potential of greater public unrest is seen as a distinct risk. Notably, many respondents were concerned that young people and teenagers are increasingly reproducing ethno-nationalism and ethnic divisions, and – harder hit by unemployment and social frustration – are potentially more vulnerable to extremist messages.

Deeper ‘drivers of conflict’ persist

The research also uncovers some of the deeper ‘drivers of conflict’ underlying the current situation: the unresolved question about what kind of state BiH is/should be; the lack of dialogue or common understanding about what happened during the war; deeply institutionalised ethnic divisions; and a biased and politicised media. The analysis indicates that the current discord between political leaders is not just about political positioning around a changing distribution of power, but also reflects much deeper existential issues and divisions.

Mitigating factors are preventing a return to violence

Despite these challenges, the security situation in BiH remains stable. This is largely due to a number of mitigating factors which are currently preventing a return to violence. These include international and regional pressures to maintain BiH’s unity; the fact that most politicians currently seem interested in preserving stability and the status quo; and a deep aversion to violent conflict among the vast majority of citizens. The police are seen to make a positive contribution to people’s day-to-day security. However, questions remain about the extent to which they would be able to do so were the security situation to deteriorate, especially given the amount of political influence which is exercised over them.

How to ensure future security and stability

Based on the dynamics of these underlying drivers of conflict and mitigating factors, the report outlines possible scenarios for security and stability in BiH in the short, medium and longer term. While in the short term, social unrest appears to be the main security threat, in the medium and long term, there is a risk that the factors mitigating a return to conflict will weaken. This implies a greater risk of violence if the key drivers of conflict remain unresolved or worsen.

This report highlights the importance of addressing the deeper drivers of conflict now, in an inclusive and sustainable manner, in order to ensure that when the international community relinquishes its executive authority, local actors will be able to focus their attention on moving the country forward rather than on addressing old grievances.

To this end, the report contains a number of recommendations aimed at international actors, and EU institutions in particular, in brief:

1. Ensuring that BiH pulls out of the current deadlock while putting in place the conditions for longer-term stability
2. Supporting civil society to address the deeper drivers of conflict
3. Ensuring that international programming in BiH is ‘conflict-sensitive’.

Introduction

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER A CRUEL AND DEVASTATING WAR, where is Bosnia and Herzegovina heading? Towards long-term stability and peace, or towards violence and further disintegration? Is what we are witnessing today simply a painful and slow post-conflict recovery, or should we be alarmed at the lack of progress and the nature of BiH's continued discontent? The fact that these questions endure is cause for reflection in itself.

Since the general elections in 2006, there has been a steady deterioration in BiH's political situation. At the same time, the economic situation in the country has worsened as the impact of the international economic downturn is increasingly felt. These negative trends have prompted increased attention towards BiH from media, political analysts and the international community. Few predict a return to armed violence – in the short or even medium term – yet there is a realisation that as the international community looks to disengage from its executive role in BiH, unresolved issues and the incentives created by the distribution of power resulting from the 'Dayton Peace Accord' continue to effectively block political progress and keep BiH in a state of political paralysis and vulnerability.

Against this background, Saferworld and Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo decided to assess the impact of the current political and economic situation on local communities, and to map out the deeper drivers of conflict in BiH that remain unaddressed. We did so through focus group discussions and key informant interviews in 16 local communities across BiH (for more information on research methodology, see annex 1). The purpose of this report is not just to provide a community-level perspective on the current stalemate. It also aims to encourage international actors to look beyond the immediate deadlock in BiH, and to consider how their engagement could contribute to minimising longer-term threats to the country's delicate stability. As such, the report and its concluding recommendations are mainly addressed to decision makers and desk officers in international and foreign government institutions engaged in BiH, the EU in particular.

This report finds that BiH has come a long way since the end of the war in 1995, and that the local-level security situation currently remains stable. However, many deeper drivers of conflict remain, which are standing in the way of sustainable peace and a secure and prosperous future. In addition, BiH is currently facing a number of key milestones, some of which will significantly influence its future political circumstances and the nature of international engagement in the country: general elections are scheduled for October 2010; a transition from the Office of the High Representative (OHR) to the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) is envisaged but has not yet been realised; and changes are underway to the mandate of the European Union Military Force (EUFOR). In Brussels, the EU's foreign policy instruments are under-

going radical changes with the establishment of the new European External Action Service (EEAS).

In this challenging context, it is important to ensure that informed and strategic decisions are made by the custodians of BiH's peace, not just to assist in pulling the country out of its current deadlock, but also to ensure that robust foundations are put in place for BiH to progress peacefully after the international community has withdrawn its executive authority.

This report first outlines key post-war developments in BiH, based on desk research and interviews with analysts and other key informants. Chapter 2 outlines the findings of the field research, providing an overview of the community perceptions under five main headings. Next, the analysis chapter 3 draws together findings from the two preceding sections with a view to outlining drivers of conflict, mitigating factors, and potential future scenarios for security and stability in BiH. Based on this, a number of recommendations for the consideration of international actors (and in particular the EU) are listed in chapter 4.

1

Context: post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina

THE BREAK-UP OF YUGOSLAVIA triggered a war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH for short), which lasted from 1992 to 1995. The war introduced the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ into the public vocabulary. Massacres, concentration camps and mass rape were used as weapons of war, to drive people from their homes. Approximately half the population was displaced internally or fled the country, and while the process of return has been successful in some areas, the war significantly altered the distribution of ethnic groups across BiH.³ At the end of the war, approximately 100,000 people had been killed. To this day, approximately 10,000 people are still missing.⁴

BiH today is defined by the war, the way in which it ended, and the nature of its post-war reconstruction. This chapter provides a brief overview of key post-war developments, based on desk research and key informant interviews (see *Annex 1* for a description of methodology).

Politics and ethnicity in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Dayton structures

The war officially ended with the signing of the ‘Dayton Peace Accord’ (Dayton for short)⁵ on 14 December 1995. Dayton stipulates the division of power between the country’s three ‘constituent people’ (Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats). Seats in the bicameral Parliament are divided up between the main three groups, and the presidency of BiH rotates every eight months between three members, each representing a different ethnic group. Reflecting the mutual mistrust at the time of negotiation, the system contains a set of veto options, which means that each group can block processes if it considers these to be a threat to its ethno-national interests.⁶

³ Out of the 4.6 million people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, 48 percent are Bosniaks (predominantly Muslim); 7 percent are Bosnian Serbs (predominantly Serb Orthodox); and 14 percent are Bosnian Croats (predominantly Catholic). Less than 1 percent are ‘other’, e.g. Roma. The last population census was carried out in 1991: these figures are later estimates. CIA, ‘The World Factbook: Bosnia and Herzegovina’, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html, accessed 12 May 2010.

⁴ International Commission on Missing People, ‘Southeast Europe’, www.ic-mp.org/icmp-worldwide/southeast-europe, accessed 12 May 2010.

⁵ ‘The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina’, www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content_id=380, accessed 14 May 2010.

⁶ In BiH, ‘national’ and ‘nationalism’ relates to one of the ethnic groups in BiH in Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats or Bosniaks respectively), and not to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a nation. In this report, we add the prefix ‘ethno’ to make the distinction clear (thus ‘ethno-national’ and ‘ethno-nationalism’), except where reporting speech. Also, we are referring to different ‘ethnic’ groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while acknowledging that these differences are primarily socially constructed.

Bosnia and Herzegovina administrative map



Dayton outlined a complex institutional framework for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which consists of two 'entities' of approximately equal geographic size, each with a significant degree of autonomy: the Republika Srpska (RS), which is predominantly Bosnian Serb, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina ('the Federation'), which is inhabited by a majority of Bosniaks and a large minority of Bosnian Croats. The Federation is furthermore divided into ten cantons with significant powers devolved

to canton level. A third self-governing administrative unit, Brčko District, was established with a special status.⁷

While Dayton was successful in ending the fighting, it was not intended to define a long-term political structure, and it forms an unsuitable basis for a functioning state. In addition to being overly bureaucratic, expensive⁸ and inefficient, the system is also in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).⁹ Despite the clear need for constitutional reform, progress on this issue has so far been limited.

Ethnicity and the challenge of developing a democratic culture

Like many other new democracies, BiH is still in the process of developing a truly democratic culture, i.e. a situation where citizens expect and demand accountability from their politicians, and politicians risk not being re-elected if they fail to deliver on their promises. This process is complicated by the ethno-political nature of the BiH system. Dayton institutionalises ethnicity as a determinant of power, and therefore provides the opportunity – and incentives – for politicians to carry on cementing and exploiting ethnic divisions. Accordingly, political parties in BiH are more easily identified by their ethnic affiliation than according to their position on a political right-left spectrum, and politicians often focus on ethno-nationalist issues at the expense of topics such as unemployment and corruption. For their part, voters have tended to prefer candidates from their ‘own’ ethnic group, and to re-elect incumbent leaders. Whether this is due to habit, a perceived lack of alternatives, or due to the ‘rhetoric of fear’¹⁰ having a greater impact than voters care to admit, most elections result in little dramatic change to the political landscape. The next general elections are scheduled for October 2010.

The institutionalisation of ethnic divides

One of the key traits of post-war BiH has been the institutionalisation of ethnic divides, not just as a feature of the political landscape, but of all parts of public life. This means that ethnic affiliation plays a key role in:

- **The education sector:** after the war, the deliberately non-ethnic Yugoslav education system was replaced with a system in which ethnicity plays a key role. While most pupils attend mixed school classes, a number of important subjects (history, geography, language and religion) are taught separately; and many other pupils attend schools that are virtually mono-ethnic.¹¹

⁷ Local politicians are only now agreeing on Brčko’s final status. Because of Brčko’s strategic location (linking together the two halves of RS, see map on p.4), negotiators at Dayton were unable to agree its status. Instead, it was agreed that Brčko would be the subject of international arbitration. The special Arbitration Tribunal decided in 1997 on the district’s (current) special status and on the subject of international supervision. See Office of the High Representative (OHR), ‘History and Mandate of the OHR North/Brčko’, www.ohr.int/ohr-offices/brcko/history/default.asp?content_id=5531, accessed 12 May 2010.

⁸ Government spending in BiH stands at around 50 percent of adjusted GDP. Op cit CIA, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html, accessed 18 May 2010.

⁹ The Bosnian constitution, contained in Annex IV of Dayton, makes a distinction between two categories of citizens: the three ‘constituent peoples’ (Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs) and ‘Others’ (Jews, Roma and other national minorities, as well as those who do not declare affiliation with any ethnic group). In 2006, Jakob Finci (a Bosnian Jew) and Dervo Sejdic (a Bosnian Roma) challenged the constitution before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on the basis of ethnic discrimination. The applicants pointed out that they are not allowed to campaign as candidates for the Presidency and the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly because of their ethnic identity. In December 2009, the ECHR declared the Bosnian constitution to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. Human Rights House, ‘ECHR accused B&H of Discrimination of National Minorities’, 22 December 2009, <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/12891.html>, accessed 10 May 2010.

¹⁰ By ‘rhetoric of fear’ we refer to expressions, words and concepts that are used by political actors in speeches and other public contexts, and that have the effect of provoking feelings of fear or hatred of other ethnic groups among their constituents. This can for example take the shape of referring to wartime atrocities to illustrate a point, and/or implying that similar events may occur in the future.

¹¹ 54 schools still operate under the system of ‘two schools under one roof’, under which children of different ethnicity attend school in the same buildings but are physically separated. This system was introduced by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to facilitate the process of return, and has resisted repeated subsequent attempts to abolish it. But despite the amount of international attention focused on this particular issue, the trend over recent years has been towards a greater degree of ethnic separation. Schools are often (wholly or mostly) mono-ethnic; either because they reflect the area they operate in, or because parents choose to send their children to a school which is attended by children of the same ethnicity, even when this school is located in another area from where the child lives (self-segregation). See for example Francesco Palermo, *Briefing on the Trend of Increasing Segregation in BiH Schools*, OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 26 May 2008.

- **Public institutions:** efforts were made after the war to ensure proportional ethnic representation for civil servants in order to encourage displaced people to return. However, open or covert ethnic discrimination still takes place in the employment practices of local authorities.¹²
- **Public space:** during the war, the reshaping of public space formed a key part of the ethnic cleansing process, i.e. the destruction of religious buildings, or the renaming of roads and squares using names of historical or political figures from the locally-dominant ethnic group. While many churches and mosques have been restored and rebuilt, many roads and squares continue to carry their wartime names. And attempts to shape public space to reflect the local dominance of one ethnic group continue, through the erection of monuments (e.g. for fallen soldiers from one group), or the use of religious or ethno-nationalist symbols in public buildings (e.g. flags or crosses).
- **The media:** the introduction by the international community of media legislation in BiH has all but eliminated hate speech, but most media coverage is still skewed, representing mainly or exclusively the viewpoints of one ethnic group (or of one ethno-political party).¹³

The post-war economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The difficult transition to a market economy

A key characteristic of the BiH economy is that much economic activity is not declared or officially registered. Aside from the fiscal implications of this state of affairs, it means that reliable statistics are hard to come by, which makes accurate analysis difficult. However, there is little doubt that BiH's economy has still not returned to pre-war levels. While much of the infrastructure destroyed during the war has been rebuilt, the transition from a socialist economy to capitalism has been challenging, and the BiH economy continues to suffer from low levels of foreign investment. One reason is the relatively high levels of corruption, which pervades all business sectors and levels of public administration.¹⁴ But complicated administrative and legal structures and a multi-layered bureaucracy also play a part in discouraging investors, both foreign and domestic, and hindering the establishment of new businesses.

Unemployment is a major problem in BiH. Official statistics do not take into account those people who are employed in the grey economy, but the official average unemployment rate for 2008 was estimated to be 24 percent. For young people aged 15–24 the estimate was 47.5 percent.¹⁵ (Real unemployment rates are probably somewhat lower.)

The effects of the global economic downturn

According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the full effects of the global financial crisis were not felt in BiH until the last quarter of

¹² Section IV of the 'Agreement on the Implementation of the Constituent Peoples' Decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina' (March 2002) stipulates that constituent peoples and 'Others' shall be proportionally represented in all public institutions in BiH on the basis of the 1991 census. See www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/legal/const/default.asp?content_id=7274#4, accessed 12 May 2010. According to a 2007 report, not a single municipality lives up to this requirement, which was introduced after the war to facilitate the process of return and post-war integration. Nije Naveden, 'Antiksenofobija – kampanja bazirana na pravima, podrži pomirenju i promociji reintegracije povratničke manjine', 1 October 2007, www.idoconline.info/digitalarchive/public/browsing/bydate/index.cfm/fuseaction/listarticles/code/02.03.17/year/2007/month/10/day/1/, accessed 28 May 2010. Our thanks to Centre for Civil Society, KYODO (www.kyodo.ba), for sharing this report.

¹³ See for example wieninternational.at, 'Bosnia-Herzegovina's media landscape – print media', 15 January 2009, wieninternational.at/en/node/12040 and wieninternational.at, 'Bosnia-Herzegovina's media landscape – electronic media', 15 January 2009, wieninternational.at/en/node/12035, accessed 10 June 2010.

¹⁴ Data indicates that the problem of corruption is perceived to be worse in BiH than elsewhere in the region, but that BiH is not the worst performer in terms of actual levels of corruption. Bosnian citizens rate all of their domestic institutions to be more highly affected by corruption than do citizens from the rest of the region (Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia and the Republic of Macedonia). However, Bosnian citizens report fewer incidents of bribes actually being paid than their neighbours in Serbia and Kosovo. Transparency International, *Global Corruption Barometer 2009*, www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/gcb/2009, accessed 28 May 2010.

¹⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *The Ties That Bind: Social Capital in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2009, www.undp.ba/index.aspx?PID=3&RID=54, accessed 13 May 2010.

2008, when economic activity decelerated and unemployment rose. The economic slowdown continued in 2009 as a result of the drying-up of bank credit, a contraction in foreign investment (which had anyway been relatively modest), lower internal demand, as well as a drop in demand for exports from the EU.¹⁶ The BiH economy is estimated to have gone from growth to recession, contracting by 3.4 percent in 2009 in contrast to a 5.4 percent growth rate the year before.¹⁷ Industrial production (a key contributor to employment) remains depressed, contracting between December 2008 and December 2009 by 9.5 percent, which brings the yearly average fall to 11.5 percent.¹⁸ This has led to an increase in unemployment rates: in the first quarter of 2009, 25,000 workers lost their jobs, mainly in the textile and metal industries.¹⁹ However, as unemployment rates are estimates only, the exact impact of the economic downturn on employment is difficult to measure.

The downturn has also affected the flow of remittances to BiH from the significant numbers of refugees who left the country because of the war, and from BiH migrant workers in other European countries. These funds help families in BiH supplement low pensions and unstable wages. Remittances reached their peak in 2008, at just over \$2.7 billion, or 14.8 percent of BiH's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).²⁰ Remittance flows fell by 16 percent from 2008 to 2009 as a result of the global economic downturn.²¹

To prevent a collapse in state finances, in July 2009 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed to grant BiH a €1.15 billion, three-year loan,²² the main condition of which was significant spending cuts by the state government and the two entities of RS and the Federation. While RS has so far been able to live up to these conditions (partly as a result of income from privatisation), the Federation has faced significant problems in doing so. Here, the single largest area of spending is benefits for war veterans, war invalids and families of those killed during the war – who together represent the majority of the electorate.²³ Decisions to cut these benefits triggered violent protests by war veterans in Sarajevo in April 2010,²⁴ and more social unrest could follow when the cuts begin to be felt (see *The security situation* p.21, for community perspectives on this issue). Economic turnaround and recovery is expected to be a slow process.

Regional relations

Regional influences

Events in the region continue to influence BiH's internal politics and stability. One example is Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008, which sparked strong and opposite reactions in BiH²⁵. Relations between BiH and its two main

16 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), 'Bosnia-Herzegovina: Economic Overview' www.ebrd.com/country/country/bosnherz/econo.htm, accessed 22 March 2010.

17 Op cit CIA, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bk.html, accessed 13 May 2010.

18 Emerging Europe Monitor, 'Macro-economic Forecast Bosnia (summary)', February 2010, www.emergingeuropemonitor.com/file/86983/macroeconomic-forecast-bosnia.html, accessed 14 May 2010.

19 Alic A, 'Bosnia: The IMF Money Crunch', International Relations and Security Network, 25 May 2009, www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?id=100562&lng=en, accessed 13 May 2010.

20 World Bank, 'Migration and Remittances Factbook 2008', [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/RemittancesData_Nov09\(Public\).xls](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/RemittancesData_Nov09(Public).xls), accessed 13 May 2010. (Figures from November 2009.)

21 Balkan.com, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina working abroad remittances fell 16 percent in 2009', *Business News*, 1 June 2010, <http://balkans.com/open-news.php?uniqueNumber=59278>, accessed 10 June 2010.

22 International Monetary Fund (IMF), 'IMF Executive Board Approves US\$1.57 Billion Stand-By Arrangement for Bosnia and Herzegovina', Press Release No.09/258, July 8 2009, www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2009/pr09258.htm, accessed 13 May 2010.

23 Op cit Alic, 2009.

24 66 people were injured when police fired teargas at protesters, who were demanding the resignation of the Federation's president and who set the Federation's government offices on fire. *BalkanInsight*, 'Bosnian War Veterans in Violent Clashes with Police', 21 April 2010, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/27499/, accessed 14 June 2010.

25 During protest demonstrations in Banja Luka, Bosnian Serb students clashed with police, (*BalkanInsight*, 'Bosnian Serb Students, Police Clash', 21 February 2008, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/8086, accessed 16 July 2010), but events in BiH generally remained relatively free of violence. In Sarajevo, public reactions were mainly supportive of Kosovo's declaration of independence. Reflecting this divide, Bosnia's tripartite presidency was unable to agree on a joint stance on the matter: *BalkanInsight*, 'Bosnian Presidency Split Over Kosovo' 19 September 2008, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/13267, accessed 16 July 2010.

regional neighbours, Croatia and Serbia, remain close but complex, given the active role played by both countries in the 1992–95 war. Dayton allowed for each of the two entities to enter into parallel relationships and sign agreements with Serbia and Croatia – a ‘special relationship’ which has been most invoked by the RS and Serbia.

Croatia and Serbia: from antagonists to partners for a peaceful BiH?

Due to the possible differences between public statements and the contents of closed-door bilateral talks between Belgrade and Banja Luka, it can be difficult to ascertain the exact nature of the influence levied by Croatia and Serbia on domestic politics in BiH. However, both Croatian and Serbian policies towards their neighbour seem to have generally become more conducive to stability and reconciliation over the past few years; perhaps partly in response to the political crisis in BiH, and partly motivated by each of the two countries’ interest in maintaining the momentum of progress towards EU accession.

Belgrade’s reaction to the January 2010 decision of the RS Assembly to vote on the RS’s right to hold its own referendum²⁶ was to state publicly that Serbia would not support a referendum for the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁷ In May 2010, Serbian President Boris Tadic met with the Bosniak member of BiH’s tripartite presidency, Haris Silajdzic, in an effort to improve Serbia’s relations with the central BiH government.²⁸ The new Croatian government has also taken steps that indicate a renewed commitment to greater reconciliation – such as the visit to BiH by President Ivo Josipovic in April 2010, when he expressed regret for Croatia’s role during the war.²⁹

International engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina

A key feature of the post-war political and security landscape in BiH has been the sheer scale and nature of international involvement. While the US was instrumental in facilitating the Dayton negotiations, and played an active role in implementing the accords in the immediate post-war period, in recent years the balance of international engagement has shifted towards the EU.

Executive international authority in BiH: the Office of the High Representative

The OHR was established by Dayton to implement the civilian aspects of the accord, and the institution has significant influence in BiH. Via the Bonn Powers³⁰ it is authorised to remove BiH politicians and members of public administration (including the police) from office; to annul and impose laws; and generally to overrule local decisions if it deems them to be contrary to Dayton.

These powers have been greatly criticised for their unaccountable and undemocratic nature, and over recent years the OHR has restricted their use as it attempts to transition to a more limited advisory role. The OHR is governed by a Peace Implementation Council (PIC) consisting of 55 countries and agencies which supported the Dayton peace process. Decisions concerning changes to the OHR’s mandate are made by the PIC’s Steering Board, which meets every three months at the level of political

26 SETimes.com, ‘RS passes controversial referendum law’, 12 February 2010, www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2010/02/12/feature-01, accessed 10 June 2010.

27 B92, ‘Tadic on Srebrenica, Kosovo, neighbors’, 24 February 2010, www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2010&mm=02&dd=24&nav_id=65421, accessed 10 June 2010.

28 *BalkanInsight*, ‘Serbia’s Tadic meets with Bosnian Serb Leaders’, 24 May 2010, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/28312/, accessed 25 May 2010.

29 Arslanagic S, ‘Josipovic Delivers Unprecedented Apology to Bosnia’, *BalkanInsight*, 14 April 2010, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/27333/, accessed 13 May 2010. Josipovic’s statements were met with anger by other key figures within the Croatian government. See Bancroft I, ‘The Dynamics of Apology and Forgiveness in the Balkans’, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 27 April 2010, www.rferl.org/content/The_Dynamics_Of_Apology_And_Forgiveness_In_The_Balkans/2025889.html, accessed 13 May 2010.

30 The Bonn Powers were introduced at a Peace Implementation Council (PIC) meeting in Bonn in December 1997. OHR, ‘PIC – Summary of Bonn Conclusions’, www.ohr.int/pic/default.asp?content_id=5183, accessed 11 June 2010.

directors.³¹ Since 2002, the High Representative has also served as EU Special Representative (EUSR) to BiH.

The nature of international engagement in BiH is currently undergoing significant changes. The plan is for the closure of the OHR and the transition to a 'reinforced' EUSR. The exact mandate and resources of the EUSR have still to be defined,³² but it is not expected to retain anything like the executive powers currently wielded by the OHR. In February 2008, the PIC decided to set up five objectives and two conditions (the 'five plus two')³³ for the closure of the OHR. While some progress has been made towards meeting these targets, they have not yet been fulfilled.³⁴

A safe and secure environment

To ensure OHR decisions can be enforced, and to 'provide a military presence in order to contribute to the safe and secure environment', about 2,000 international troops are present in BiH under EUFOR Althea, the European Military Force.³⁵ Some of these are located at Camp Butmir just outside Sarajevo, while others are deployed through small (8–12 staff) Liaison and Observation Teams (LOT houses) located throughout the country. In place since 2004, EUFOR has now begun preparing for its post-OHR mandate, which will likely take the form of a significantly smaller training mission, focused on building the capacity of the BiH defence forces and the Ministry of Defence.³⁶

BiH's security sector has been the subject of extensive internationally-instigated reforms. NATO-led military reforms to replace the different armies which fought against one another during the war led to the creation of a single Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2005, a process broadly considered to have been a success.³⁷ In contrast, international efforts to reform the BiH police have made less headway. Police administration is decentralised under Dayton: one police force is in place for the RS, and ten for the Federation (one for each canton). The system is not conducive to effective law enforcement and remains prone to political pressures and intervention.

The most ambitious push for police reforms took place under the auspices of the High Representative Paddy Ashdown in 2004. Among other things, the reforms were intended to limit direct political influence over police operations. But following stiff resistance from local politicians (in particular on the RS side), many of the initial international demands had to be abandoned. The parties eventually agreed to a compromise which enabled BiH to sign its pre-membership deal with the EU³⁸

31 The Steering Board consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, the Presidency of the European Union, the European Commission, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), represented by Turkey. OHR, 'The Peace Implementation Council and its Steering Board', www.ohr.int/pic/default.asp?content_id=38563, accessed 13 May 2010.

32 Because of its responsibility to enforce OHR decisions if necessary, EUFOR cannot close down until OHR does. Some contributing states have already begun pushing for a significant reduction of EUFOR troop levels, arguing that the security situation in BiH has been stable for years now and that their troops could be more usefully deployed elsewhere. Key informant interview, Sarajevo, February 2010.

33 The five objectives are: resolution of state property, resolutions of defence property, completion of the Brcko final awards, fiscal sustainability of the state and entrenchment of the rule of law. The two conditions are: the signing of the 'Stabilisation and Association Agreement' (SAA) and a positive assessment of the situation in BiH. OHR, 'Press Conference by the High Representative Miroslav Lajčák following the PIC Steering Board Session in Brussels on 26–27 February 2008', www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/presso/pressb/default.asp?content_id=41353, accessed 13 May 2010.

34 Resolution of state and defence property issues is still outstanding. OHR, 'Remarks by High Representative and EU Special Representative Valentin Inzko at a Press Conference to mark the conclusion of the PIC Steering Board Meeting', 25 February 2010, www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/presso/pressb/default.asp?content_id=44646, accessed 10 May 2010. The closure of the OHR also depends on a positive assessment of the political situation (second condition).

35 From EUFOR's mission statement. EUFOR operates under the 'Berlin-Plus' arrangements, which means it draws on NATO's planning expertise and other capacities. The approximately 2,000 troops stationed in BiH can in theory be reinforced by troops from KFOR in Kosovo and additional 'over-the-horizon' forces. EUFOR, 'EUFOR Fact Sheet', www.euforbih.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=134, accessed 11 June 2010.

36 At its meeting in January 2010, the EU's Foreign Affairs Council decided that EUFOR should begin providing non-executive capacity-building and training support, but also expressed the readiness of the EU to maintain an executive military role beyond the current mandate (which ends 31 December 2010) under a UN mandate, should the situation require. Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, *Council Conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina: Operation ALTHEA*, Brussels, 25 January 2010.

37 The reforms contributed to BiH joining the NATO Partnership for Peace in 2006, and at a summit in April 2010, NATO decided to conditionally approve Bosnia's application for a Membership Action Plan (MAP). A MAP constitutes the last step towards joining the alliance, but BiH is still likely to face a long process of political dialogue and military reform before it meets the necessary standards. The first condition is to address the issue of defence property. NATO news, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina and Membership Action Plan', 22 April 2010, www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-EB22E4CC-EAECFB26/natolive/news_62811.htm?selectedLocale=en, accessed 11 June 2010.

38 EurActiv.com, 'Vote for police reform brings Bosnia closer to EU', 17 April 2008, www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/vote-police-reform-brings-bosnia-closer-eu/article-171719, accessed 11 June 2010.

(the 'Stabilisation and Association Agreement', described further below). International support has subsequently focused on providing technical assistance to improve co-operation and co-ordination within existing policing structures, and strengthening the ability of the police to address organised crime.³⁹

A European future? The EU Accession process

BiH is a potential EU candidate member country, having signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in June 2008.⁴⁰ However, progress towards meeting accession requirements has been limited.⁴¹ Among these requirements are amending the constitution to ensure compliance with the ECHR and creating more functional and fiscally-sustainable institutional structures. Both areas have seen little development. Carrying out a population census is another requirement. While a census is planned for 2011, agreement on the details has yet to be reached.⁴² Similarly, progress on implementing police reform legislation has been very slow.⁴³ Generally, the last few years have seen little consensus on the main reform priorities, and there have even been attempts to reverse previously agreed reforms⁴⁴ see *Bosnia and Herzegovina's current deadlock* p.11, for more detail).

Donor assistance and civil society development in BiH

Before the war, there was little or no independent civil society in BiH. The post-war influx of reconstruction and development aid resulted in a sudden and large rise in the number of local civil society organisations (CSOs). In this phase, donors used many of these CSOs for service delivery only, rather than investing in their organisational development or in broader civil society consolidation.⁴⁵

As BiH has passed through its stabilisation and reconstruction phases, international donor support for civil society projects has dwindled (albeit taking on a more strategic approach), and the funding environment for CSOs has become increasingly challenging, leading to increased competition among organisations. Over the past few years, several donor governments have closed their in-country aid offices or are planning to phase out their bilateral development assistance to BiH, some channelling their support instead via the EU.⁴⁶ The decrease in overall grant levels and the shift from bilateral to multilateral aid poses an additional challenge to CSOs, particularly as European Commission (EC) funding comes with a host of requirements which many CSOs struggle to fulfil.⁴⁷ This shift has a particularly negative impact on small

39 The European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM) is the institution leading these efforts, providing technical assistance and training to the Bosnian police.

40 Vucheva E, 'Bosnia signs EU pre-accession deal', *EU Observer*, 17 June 2008, <http://euobserver.com/9/26335>, accessed 13 May 2010. European Commission, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina – Relations with the EU', EC Enlargement, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidate-countries/bosnia_and_herzegovina/eu_bosnia_and_herzegovina_relations_en.htm, accessed 13 May 2010.

41 Outlined in Europa, 'The European Partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina', 7 May 2008, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/enlargement/western_balkans/r18012_en.htm, accessed 11 June 2010.

42 Bosniak and Bosnian Croat politicians do not want questions on ethnic affiliation to form part of the census, as demanded by Bosnian Serb politicians. They argue this would cement the outcome of wartime ethnic cleansing. *BalkanInsight*, 'EU official Urges Bosnians to Adopt Census Law', 28 January 2010, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/25282/. The EU has urged the Bosnian Government to reach a decision on the Law on the Census before the 2010 summer break, or the census would not be able to go ahead in 2011. 'Joint Statement of the European Commission and Bosnia and Herzegovina', 21 May 2010, www.europa.ba/?akcija=vijesti&akcija2=pregled&jezik=2&ID=702, accessed 11 June 2010.

43 Key informant interviews, Sarajevo, January and February 2010.

44 European Commission, *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2009 Progress Report*, Commission Staff Working Document, (Brussels, October 2009).

45 Smillie I, 'Reconstructing Bosnia, Constructing Civil Society' in ed I Smillie, *Patronage or Partnership. Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crisis*, The International Development Research Center, www.idrc.ca/en/ev-87952-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html, accessed 14 June 2010.

46 Canada closed its embassy and its local Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) office in 2009. CBC News, 'Canada to close its embassies in Cambodia, Bosnia-Herzegovina', 24 April 2009, www.cbc.ca/world/story/2009/04/24/embassies-bosniaherz-cambodia896.html, accessed 11 June 2010. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) is planning to close its office in BiH in February 2011, phase out its bilateral aid and instead channel its funds via EU instruments (key informant interview, Sarajevo, October 2009). The Netherlands is also scaling down its aid, with a view to phasing out its bilateral development assistance completely and to focus on support to BiH's EU accession. Dutch Embassy in Sarajevo, 'Netherlands Development Cooperation in BiH', <http://bosniaherzegovina.nlembassy.org/development>, accessed 11 June 2010.

47 These include for example: English language skills, computer literacy, access to other funds for co-financing and the ability for an organisations to retain staff and keep functioning for several months while funding applications are processed and until funds are paid.

community-based or grassroots organisations based outside of the bigger cities. Such organisations have a key role to play in the development of civil society and are well-positioned to make a positive difference, as they often have an in-depth knowledge of the local context, and good access to communities and local actors. However, many of them are already struggling to find funds.⁴⁸ In addition, there has been a tendency for funding priorities to reflect this shift in the funding environment away from ‘bilateralism’ towards a greater centralisation around the EU. This has meant that issues such as for example minority return, conflict prevention and peacebuilding have been relatively de-prioritised, in favour of themes more directly related to EU accession, such as democratisation and good governance.⁴⁹

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s current deadlock

Since the last general elections in 2006, the political situation in BiH has steadily deteriorated. Most political processes have ground to a halt as local leaders have clashed over the future political structure of BiH and ethno-nationalist rhetoric has increased. This section provides a brief overview of the current situation, while a more detailed analysis of its root causes is provided in chapter 3.

The focus of the confrontations: disagreements over the future shape of BiH

While Dayton succeeded in ending the fighting, the necessary steps towards replacing the peace accord with a longer-term arrangement, and carrying out constitutional reform, have not yet taken place. This indicates that fundamental questions about the political structure of BiH have yet to be answered.

Recent years have seen politicians from the three main ethnic groups clash over this issue. Bosniaks constitute the largest ethnic group in BiH, and the majority view among Bosniak politicians is that power should be centralised at the state level – some even going as far as to argue that the separate Federal and RS entities should be abolished altogether. On the Bosnian Serb side (most of whom live in the RS, which is estimated to be about 90 percent Bosnian Serb), the political leadership generally would prefer to retain power at the entity level, as is currently the case under Dayton. RS Assembly decisions over the past few years have successfully rolled back many of the past powers transferred from entity to state level, and RS’s intention to eventually secede from BiH is repeatedly stated by the RS leadership. Some observers believe a ‘peaceful secession’ would be possible, perhaps following the example of Montenegro’s separation from Serbia in 2006.⁵⁰ But given BiH’s history and ethnic composition it is unlikely that secession could take place in the foreseeable future without causing violence and wider instability (see *Structural drivers of conflict: deeper, underlying issues* p.28). To further complicate the picture, voices on the Bosnian Croat side have begun discussing demands for a Bosnian Croat ‘third entity’. Apart from its political implications, this idea seems logistically problematic given that the Bosnian Croat population is spread across many different areas in BiH.

Similarly, attitudes towards international engagement differ across the three main groups. On the Bosniak side, many believe the international executive role is still needed and should be maintained for the time being, while the Bosnian Serb leadership argues that the international community (and in particular the OHR) has played out its executive role. Bosnian Serb politicians regularly accuse the OHR of abusing its powers, and refuse to comply with many of its demands.

⁴⁸ Key informant interviews, Sarajevo, January and February 2010.

⁴⁹ Support to education and peacebuilding has been decreasing since 2007. ‘Mapping Report 2008–2009’, www.donormapping.ba/docs/DonorMappingReport2008-2009.pdf, accessed 13 May 2010.

⁵⁰ Key informant interview, Sarajevo, October 2009.

Impact: stranded reforms and fears of instability

As mentioned above, the current deadlock has stalled BiH's progress towards EU membership, and this has prompted concern from the EU that BiH is falling behind its neighbouring countries in the accession process. The EU's decision not to grant visa liberalisation to BiH in November 2009 prompted a brief flurry of activity by BiH politicians to meet the benchmark criteria, which resulted in visa liberalisation finally being granted in May 2010.⁵¹ Local politicians were no doubt motivated by significant public frustration at the failure to meet the criteria the first time round, combined with the upcoming general elections.⁵² While EU staff point to this process as an example of the impact of the 'soft power' of EU accession, sceptics argue that this was a unique situation, and that it is difficult to identify issues which might have a similarly mobilising effect in the foreseeable future.⁵³

The political crisis has also prompted concerns among international observers that BiH might slide back into violence. While the overall security situation has remained stable, statistics shown to Saferworld seem to indicate an increase in inter-ethnic incidents from 2007 to 2009.⁵⁴ While there are widely diverging views on the level of risk currently faced by BiH, there is broad agreement that any actual steps taken to split up the country or to abolish the entities altogether would most likely lead to violent clashes at a local level and possibly wider instability.⁵⁵

The current political deadlock highlights the extent to which any discussion about the distribution of power in BiH remains sensitive and is easily jeopardised by the levels of mutual mistrust between the three main ethnic groups. Domestic efforts to solve these issues ran aground in mid-2009.⁵⁶ A high-profile, internationally led attempt to get the parties around the negotiating table in late 2009 (the so-called Butmir process⁵⁷) similarly failed to make headway, and was subsequently criticised for being insufficiently prepared and clumsily implemented.⁵⁸ While wider conclusions should only be drawn from this latest diplomatic attempt with care, key informant interviews with people working for international institutions and donor governments indicate a limited awareness of the sensitive nature of constitutional reform and similar issues. The tendency seems to be to view these issues not so much as part of BiH's unaddressed conflict dynamics, but mainly as technical requirements that need to be fulfilled to advance towards eventual EU membership.⁵⁹

51 The Council of the European Union decision 30 November 2009 granted visa free travel in the Schengen area to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, but denied it to Albania and BiH. 'Visa liberalisation for Western Balkan countries', www.se2009.eu/polopoly_fs/1.25716!menu/standard/file/111561.pdf, accessed 13 May 2010.

52 Visa liberalisation for BiH was granted on 27 May 2010, www.europa.ba/?akcija=vijesti&akcija2=pregled&ID=706&jezik=2. The EC's proposal to enable Bosnian citizens to travel to Schengen countries without needing a visa is conditional on BiH fulfilling three outstanding requirements.

53 Key informant interviews, Sarajevo, December 2009.

54 From a figure of about seven incidents per month in 2007, to about nine in 2008 and 13 in 2009. Statistics collected by international institutions and shown to Saferworld, also quoted in Latal S, 'Bosnia faces critical challenges in 2010', *BalkanInsight*, 21 January 2010, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/comment/25135/, accessed 25 May 2010.

55 Key informant interviews, Sarajevo, February 2010.

56 In late 2008 and early 2009, local politicians from the three sides made progress on constitutional reform and other difficult issues. The so-called Prud Process was a joint initiative by representatives of the three main parties and launched in the city of Prud in November 2008. It created some hope among the international community for locally formulated solutions to the most important political challenges. However, negotiations quickly ran into difficulties, and the process was eventually declared "dead" by the High Representative in July 2009.

57 The Butmir process was named after the EUFOR military base outside of Sarajevo where negotiations took place, and led by the Swedish EU Presidency.

58 Key informant interviews, Sarajevo, Autumn 2009/Winter 2009–2010.

59 Key informant interviews, Sarajevo, Autumn 2009/Winter 2009–2010.

2

Community perceptions of the current situation

THIS CHAPTER DETAILS THE FINDINGS of the field research on community perceptions of the current situation, which was conducted in early 2010 by Saferworld and local partner organisation Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo.⁶⁰ Focus group discussions were held with over 240 citizens in 16 local communities (*mjesna zajednica*) across Bosnia and Herzegovina, and individual interviews were carried out with local community leaders, schoolteachers, religious leaders and local police officers, as well as representatives of a range of local and international organisations. Since young people who did not experience the ethnically heterogeneous society of Yugoslavia are potentially more at risk of exhibiting ethno-nationalist tendencies, we were particularly interested in the perceptions of BiH youth, and separate focus group discussions were carried out with people between 18 and 30 years of age.⁶¹

The following chapter examines the impact of the current situation on local communities, and outlines a number of issues that emerged in the course of the research which may threaten BiH's longer-term stability. It is divided into thematic sections detailing the political, socio-economic and security situation, as well as local perspectives on international engagement. The final section is dedicated to youth perceptions. The main points of the field research are as follows:

- The political situation is a key cause of frustration and concern, mostly due to the use of a 'language of fear' by politicians and the media, and uncertainty about whether the current political confrontations could result in violence. At the same time, there is awareness that politicians are using ethno-nationalistic rhetoric as a tool to manipulate voters. There is deep frustration across all groups at the widespread politicisation of all aspects of daily life, for example in the media and education.
- International actors, including the EU, are broadly seen as untrustworthy, confused, biased, and lacking a strategy for BiH.
- The economic situation is the main immediate concern for most people. High unemployment and resulting social frustration mean that public unrest is seen as a distinct risk. While the economic crisis is seen as having an impact on all ethnic groups equally, access to jobs is largely dependent on political and personal connections.

⁶⁰ This report follows on from a more limited piece of research undertaken in 2008 by Saferworld and Nansen Dialogue Centre, carried out in seven MZs in three locations in BiH. This research was for internal programming purposes only and has not been published.

⁶¹ This methodology (focus group discussion) was chosen for depth of information, as opposed to the breadth that would be afforded by a survey questionnaire with thousands of respondents. The semi-structured format allowed for feedback and open discussion, which brought out detailed and sometimes unexpected information. For more detail on the methodology, see annex 1.

- The local security situation is broadly characterised as satisfactory; local petty crime is the main safety concern. Inter-ethnic incidents generally do not cause people concern in their daily lives; and the police are generally seen to be doing their job.
- Many young people and teenagers are seen to reproduce ethno-nationalism and ethnic divisions. The young are harder hit by unemployment and social frustration, and potentially more vulnerable to extremist messages. This was a cause of concern for many respondents.

The political situation

Ongoing political crisis creates concerns for future stability

Confrontational ethno-nationalist rhetoric is causing concerns about whether the high-level political crisis might escalate and provoke violence. This was particularly the case for respondents from returnee communities. One respondent said that the political rhetoric was even driving him to think about buying a gun, and “if they can get me to think that a gun might be a good idea, then they can have that same effect on others” (key informant, Brčko). Some respondents emphasised that there were no guarantees that war would not break out again because many of the current political discussions are reminiscent of the pre-war situation.

Many respondents said while they were used to this ‘verbal political war’, the *persistent* lack of agreement amongst parties on a political solution for BiH was viewed as a potential risk factor that could eventually provoke conflict should politicians start acting on their inflammatory rhetoric. This perception was strongest among Bosniaks in relation to the threat of a referendum on secession in Republika Srpska.

Before the war a referendum happened and it brought us to bloodshed. People are very scared of this talk about referendum in RS. It reminds them of the period right before the war. Even the word referendum makes people disturbed and produces fear.

Focus group participant (male, 56), Brčko

At the same time, Bosniak rhetoric about the centralisation of power in a strong state – at the expense of the entities – also triggered reactions amongst other ethnic groups. One respondent explained: “it is enough to say Republika Srpska will disappear [and] people get really scared that it might. [They] are afraid of this, so they tend to show hard-line behaviour” (key informant, Banja Luka). Many Bosnian Serb respondents said that they would like to see the structure established under Dayton more or less preserved. One civil society representative stated that “a referendum in Republika Srpska would only re-affirm Dayton, and it will give it more legitimacy from the people” (key informant, Banja Luka).

Some respondents also expressed concern about the talk of establishing a Bosnian Croat ‘third entity’. A Bosniak key informant from Mostar noted that “the rhetoric of late, about Mostar being the ‘stolni’ [ancient] city of the Croats, sounds as if they [the politicians] are on their way to creating a third entity with Mostar as its capital”.

Community relations do not always reflect higher-level politics

At the same time, in most cases, inter-ethnic dynamics within communities did not seem to reflect the animosities displayed at a political level. Focus group participants of all ethnic groups reported that (most) people were generally unwilling to act on what their politicians might say: “We citizens live together, and politics at the state level has no influence on us”. Focus group participant (male, 60), Prijedor. Many respondents gave several positive examples of peaceful coexistence, and people in local communities expressed far more willingness to move beyond ethnic divisions than their elected

representatives. Also, the vast majority of people (particularly older respondents) expressed very strongly that they had had enough of conflict and would never want to experience it again. As a former war veteran put it “I would not even wish my enemies to go through what I went through” (key informant, Zvornik).

Ethno-nationalism and fear seen as tools of manipulation

Most respondents recognised ethno-nationalist rhetoric as a driver of fear and source of division, and believed that such methods were being used by politicians to maintain control of their respective ethnic group and win votes. Whilst inflammatory ethno-nationalist rhetoric was a day-to-day occurrence, many felt that it became especially pronounced and targeted in pre-election periods.

(...) politicians use nationalism to create fear among people, and that is how they are getting votes.

Focus group participant (male, 20), Mostar

Respondents believed that ethno-nationalist rhetoric was being used to deliberately sabotage inter-ethnic trust building and coexistence. When asked the question “Is there anything that might cause a return to conflict?” one focus group participant in Tuzla answered: “National issues, which have become so popular in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I expect that this rhetoric will increase in the run-up to the general elections. I am very afraid of it. That could cause conflict because politicians produce and use national hate. There are a lot of illiterate people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is very easy to manipulate them. I expect national intolerance in the forthcoming period” (male, 55).

Consequently, some focus group participants expressed doubts about the true nature of the current political crisis, and suggested it was not actually as deep or as real as it was made to appear, pointing out that many politicians co-operated rather well across ethnic divides when it came to preserving their own interests.

Elections are coming and our politicians are trying to scare us that there will be a conflict. They create an atmosphere of fear of each other [...] Politicians retain their positions by using ‘hate speech’.

Focus group participant (male, 60), Brčko

Some believed that by ‘simulating’ a political crisis, local politicians could avoid taking responsibility and being held accountable for their actions. A human rights activist maintained that political crises were conjured up because the BiH Government was not really interested in EU accession, as this would bring about a system of greater accountability. However, for the political crisis to be motivated by personal interest rather than ethno-nationalist animosity did not rule out or lower the risk of violence for some respondents, who believed that violence could still be orchestrated by political elites should their personal interests become threatened.

For the time being, this is all a verbal war – but should people start acting on this verbal war and start putting into action [the] things they are saying, this is when incidents in this city for example could escalate into violence.

Key informant, Mostar

Lack of coming to terms with the past and the use of war events for political purposes

Although many respondents were keen to stress that in their community, they had returned to a state of relative normality, the research indicated that past events still play

a big role in people's lives. Some Bosnian Serb respondents, notably those in Republika Srpska, appeared to struggle to acknowledge wartime events, particularly crimes committed against the Bosniak population. In Prijedor, which was the site of considerable ethnic cleansing and human rights violations, a respondent even told us that "we did not have ethnic tensions here, even during the war". Focus group participant, Prijedor. Some civil society representatives believed that this kind of denial was encouraged by the political elites. They stressed that while this attitude remains, it is difficult for people to move towards acceptance of what happened during the war.

In addition, the fact that some individuals accused of war crimes have not been prosecuted maintains levels of fear and tension amongst returnee communities. This is not helped by the fact that the transitional justice process is proceeding slowly,⁶² and is perceived by many not to be neutral or fair. A few respondents also felt that because the war was ended by international intervention, the issues that caused it were not resolved, and the conflict could therefore slip back into a violent form: "I don't really feel safe, it is a fake safety. The war never really ended, it was stopped. It's like a football match: I always feel like we're just waiting for the second half" (key informant, Brčko).

The issue of commemorating war events or war victims continues to be sensitive. In Prijedor, respondents told us that locations which were used as detention camps for Bosniak combatants and civilians during the war are now being used for industrial purposes. Ex-detainees and families of those killed in those camps have been prevented from commemorating their suffering with a plaque or monument, but a monument to fallen Serb soldiers has been built in the vicinity. Also, in many places streets, squares and other public spaces have been renamed to celebrate battles or other key events in the war; or after an (in)famous figure from a particular ethnic group. One Bosniak returnee area was renamed 'Milosevo', after the late Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic. Such practice signals the dominance of one ethnic/religious group and the exclusion from public spaces of people from other groups. Some respondents described this as "the last phase of ethnic cleansing" (key informant, Prijedor).

Weak democratic culture and lack of downward accountability

Political elites were seen by almost all respondents as fundamentally unaccountable to their local electorate, mostly corrupt and nepotistic. Respondents felt that ordinary people did not have any influence, and were disillusioned with the democratic process. Many respondents added that despite their frustration, they saw little hope for change in the upcoming elections because they believed that people (including themselves) would probably re-elect the same politicians and parties as before: "We are the guilty ones because we choose who is going to lead the country. (...) we should become smarter and choose new people in October at the general elections. But I am afraid we are going to choose the same people again". Focus group participant (female, 60), Tuzla.

It was widely felt that politicians were completely disinterested in the concerns of ordinary people. For example, politicians were blamed for not paying attention to economic and social problems.

The political scene in RS and in Bosnia throughout is known to be political trouble – no-one thinks of economic development. There are no politicians who think of the running of the economy.

Focus group participant (male, 55), Zvornik

⁶² Individuals are still being arrested for war crimes committed during the war, most recently one police officer in May 2010. *BalkanInsight*, 'Two War Crimes Suspects Arrested in Bosnia', 18 May 2010, www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/28173/, accessed 11 June 2010.

Some respondents believed it was likely that politicians would use the difficult economic situation to further their own goals: “The economic situation is a catastrophe. This is an excellent field for manipulation of ordinary people” (key informant, Stolac). At the local level, people raised complaints about the lack of municipal service provision in their community (such as sanitation, running water and electricity), seeing these problems as clear indications that local politicians were not interested in addressing their problems. In *mjesna zajednicas* (MZs) populated by an ethnic group that constituted a minority in the municipality, the lack of proper services was frequently interpreted as an expression of ethnic prejudice inherent in a municipal system dominated by another (majority) ethnic group.⁶³

Many respondents highlighted the complex and expensive state structures created under Dayton, and some stressed the role this played in hindering accountability. A majority of respondents from the Federation felt that the Dayton system was confusing, in particular criticising the cantonal administrations for being unaccountable and inefficient.

I have no idea what some institutions and levels of government are doing, like the cantonal [ones]. I do not know their job descriptions and how this relates to the community.

Key informant, Mostar

The media is seen as biased and an extension of political parties

Most respondents voiced major concerns about the fact that politics pervades all aspects of society; a commonly heard remark was that ‘everything is political’. There was a sense that ethnic divides were perpetuated not just by the politicians themselves, but by everyone in a position of power.⁶⁴ In particular, such politicisation was common in the media. Almost all respondents highlighted the negative role played by the media, which maintains and perpetuates fear in the way it reports events. Selective and biased reporting was seen as a result of direct political control of the media, which was identified as a vehicle for political messages and a tool perpetuating ethno-nationalism: “The media are oriented towards some political parties. They support them and promote their ideas and policy. They show what suits them and the interests of the political party. Sometimes they take one sentence out of the statement and show it in a completely wrong way. In this way they create tensions among politicians that are passed [on] to citizens”. Focus group participant (male, 35) Banja Luka.

Inter-ethnic incidents in particular tended to be exaggerated by the media in order to perpetuate fear and divisions, while stories and examples of positive inter-ethnic relations were played down.

I cannot think of any big [inter-ethnic] incidents here in the last couple of years. But even if there is something small, it gets blown out of proportion.

Key informant, Stolac

Most respondents agreed that the media plays an important role in influencing security, as expressed by one focus group discussion participant in Sarajevo: “The media are an important factor influencing the appeasement or deterioration of [the] security situation” (male, 55).

⁶³ Some respondents believed that this lack of attention to the community level has been facilitated by new rules introduced in 2003, which changed the legal status of the MZs to voluntary entities. This means that the president of the local MZ no longer receives a public salary but instead must work on a voluntary basis, and that MZs no longer have access to a guaranteed annual budget for local development.

⁶⁴ The situation in the education sector (described in *Politics and ethnicity in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 3) was a particular cause for concern for respondents. This issue is outlined in more detail below, in *Youth perceptions – and youth as a potential risk factor*, p.23.

International engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina

International engagement seen as inconsistent, unreliable and lacking a strategy

The vast majority of respondents were very critical in their assessment of international engagement in BiH: international actors were seen as lacking in vision, uninterested, unco-ordinated, inconsistent, and not very trustworthy. The perception that most international actors had lost interest in BiH dominated among all respondents, regardless of their ethnic affiliation.

What is their strategy for Bosnia-Herzegovina? We don't understand it. We feel like we are [just] "one of the countries where they are implementing democracy".

Key informant, Sarajevo

Communities were disillusioned about the manner in which the international community has been trying to instigate constitutional reforms.⁶⁵ Respondents also criticised the extent to which international actors remained passive in the face of ethno-nationalist rhetoric from the politicians, and there was a feeling that international actors were not holding local political elites accountable for their statements and actions. One key informant felt that "the international community behaves as if they give RS a signal that it is Kosovo. RS is not Kosovo" (Mostar). International actors' perceived lack of political will to intervene, especially when local politicians blocked reforms, was seen to permit more confrontational stances by local politicians. Similarly, there was little confidence that external actors would be willing to get engaged if violence were to break out: "I don't trust the international community to keep us safe. They waited five years last time before they intervened, they would probably do it again" (key informant, Brčko).

Little agreement over the way forward for international engagement

Overall, international engagement was seen as key to facilitating a solution to the political crisis. The majority of respondents agreed that 'something must be done' by the international community, which was viewed by most as still having a significant role to play in BiH. The promise of membership of NATO and the EU was seen by many as the best means of ensuring security and reducing the risk of a future conflict.

However, views on what exactly international actors should do were mixed, ranging from scepticism about the ongoing international executive role in BiH, to a belief that this was a necessity for the foreseeable future. Bosniak respondents in particular would like to see a more engaged and responsive international community, especially as regards constitutional reforms, condemning inflammatory ethno-nationalist rhetoric and helping to develop local economies. Bosnian Serbs were more sceptical about the willingness and ability of international actors to make a positive difference, many seeing international engagement as biased against Bosnian Serb interests.

The European Union: the least co-ordinated and reliable actor

Most respondents felt that the EU lacked the political will to push for a political solution in BiH, and this was blamed on the lack of a common European position. Consequently, the EU was seen as inconsistent and not standing by its own principles: essentially a "shaky coalition – a marriage without commitment" (key informant, Sarajevo).

⁶⁵ In particular, key informants were very critical of the failed 'Butmir process'.

The European Union should define their intentions towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no clear strategy. There are several political trends [with] in the European Union towards Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Focus group participant (male, 45), Prijedor

The OHR was seen as unsupported and weak rather than a necessarily negative actor. In addition, civil society respondents complained that the EU was taking an approach to BiH which was overly influenced by an ‘accession template’ and not sufficiently tailored to the specifics of BiH as a post-conflict country.⁶⁶

International engagement seen as biased

There was a sense amongst many respondents that international actors were not being even-handed in their response to the interests of different constituent groups in BiH and that they pursued certain policies that undermined – or at least failed to support – reconciliation and mutual understanding.

Some Bosnian Serb respondents expressed regret for what they saw as a lack of acceptance by key international actors of the fact that RS had essentially become a state within a state, and should stay that way. In addition, there was a sense amongst some Bosnian Serb respondents that the international community had not sufficiently taken into account the interests of Bosnian Serbs following the war. One lawyer from Banja Luka felt that while past international engagement had been generally positive for BiH, there had not been enough recognition that Bosnian Serbs had also been victims in the war. Some Bosnian Serb focus group participants felt that the international community had discriminated against the Serbs in their support to the internally displaced and refugees.

Most respondents from all ethnic groups were very frustrated that the EU had rejected visa liberalisation for BiH (see *Bosnia and Herzegovina’s current deadlock* p.11), and the vast majority blamed the EU rather than their own politicians: “I am not upset with Zagreb or Belgrade. I am upset with London, Paris and Brussels” (key informant, Mostar). The decision was seen primarily as a political act, not a technical one. Frustration was especially strong among the many Bosniaks who felt that BiH (seen as the victim of the war) had been ‘punished’ while Serbia (seen as the aggressor) was ‘rewarded’ with visa liberalisation. Some key informants believed that the EU risked playing into the hands of radical groups who could exploit this dissatisfaction for their own aims, for example by blaming the EU’s decision on ‘Islamophobia’.

The economic and social situation

Financial insecurity is the biggest concern

The economic situation was the main concern for the vast majority of respondents. There was near unanimous agreement among respondents that the situation had become even worse over the past two or three years, and financial insecurity was the kind of insecurity most keenly felt by most respondents. “I don’t feel safe in the economic sense. There are no jobs, no new investments, and no perspective”. Focus group participant (male, 50), Stolac. Some respondents felt that the current economic situation was so dire that it completely overshadowed any inter-ethnic gripes or frustrations.

The [economic] situation is worse in comparison to the situation 2–3 years ago.

Focus group participant (female, 55), Tuzla

⁶⁶ On paper, the EU recognises that BiH is an accession country ‘with its own unique challenges’ and that ‘a tailor-made strategy’ is needed to keep it on the path to accession. ‘Summary note on the joint report by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the ESDP, and Olli Rehn, EU’s Commissioner for Enlargement, on “EU’s Policy: the Way Ahead”’, 10 November 2008.

Even respondents who were in employment and earning what could be considered a relatively good salary reported difficulties in making ends meet over the past year or two, finding themselves shopping for discounts and postponing spending until absolutely necessary. But the vulnerable were particularly hard hit. Many elderly respondents expressed great concern – even desperation – about how to make ends meet on very low pensions. If they received any extra support, it was often from family members abroad (which meant they were likely to be affected by the drop in remittances, described in the section *The post-war economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina* p.6).

Security can be interpreted in different ways. For us pensioners, security is when we get our pensions on time.

Focus group participant (male, 70), Banja Luka

At the other end of the age spectrum, many young people were graduating straight into unemployment. Respondents described the ‘catch 22’ of employers refusing candidates who had no previous work experience, while others mentioned that young people were forced to leave BiH in order to find work. A further concern, most often expressed by older respondents, was the risk of youth drifting into criminality due to the lack of prospects (see *Youth perceptions – and youth as a potential risk factor* p.23).

The impact of unemployment on all ethnic groups – connections determine access to jobs

Most respondents agreed that no particular ethnic group was more or less affected by the economic downturn and rising unemployment. However, focus group participants everywhere referred to the importance of political membership and personal connections in accessing job opportunities, in particular for jobs in public institutions (which remain an important source of employment). Respondents from all groups expressed great frustration over this practice: without the ‘right’ political relationships, getting a job is very difficult. The ethno-national nature of most political parties in BiH means that the allocation of jobs via such political connections takes place mainly within, rather than across, ethnic groups.

It is all about nepotism, nationalism. I hope there will come a time when people will get a job on the basis of his/her knowledge, not nationalism or affiliation.

Focus group participant (female, 50), Mostar

In addition, many respondents noted the failure of public institutions to live up to their obligation of employing a proportional number of each ethnic group in public administration (see *Politics and ethnicity in Bosnia and Herzegovina* p.3), with a tendency for the majority group in an area to dominate positions within public institutions. Not surprisingly, many – particularly members of groups constituting the relative minority in an area – found this incredibly frustrating and unjust.

It should nonetheless be mentioned that a few respondents also acknowledged what they saw as a tendency to ‘self-segregate’: that people would only seek jobs in areas where their own group constitute the majority, and refrain from applying for jobs in their own community if they belonged to a minority group there (focus group discussion, Prijedor). Such behaviour may be based on the assumption (or on personal experience) that applying to majority-dominated institutions would not be worth the effort, as their application would be automatically rejected. But it also means that public institutions are able to blame the lack of a proportional workforce on difficulties with finding suitable minority candidates for certain vacancies, particularly ones requiring specific qualifications.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The entity-level courts in Banja Luka were mentioned as one such institution (key informant interview, Banja Luka). The fact that many returnee communities consist mainly of older people, while many younger and/or better-qualified people have stayed in the country or area to which they fled during the war, further contributes to this problem.

The security situation

Daily security situation 'satisfactory' – main concern is petty crime

Almost all respondents were relatively content with the day-to-day security situation, which was generally described as 'satisfactory'. Most respondents felt that the security situation in their community had even improved over the past four or five years. Financial insecurity was a far greater concern than physical insecurity for most respondents.

The main challenge to local security was identified as petty crime: small-scale robberies, thefts, burglaries, youth delinquency and drug abuse. In many of the focus MZs, the police confirmed that the local security situation had improved, as crime rates had gone down. But in a few locations, police respondents informed us that small-scale 'enrichment crime' (i.e. involving the theft of items worth less than KM500/€255) had shot up, apparently as a result of the worsening economic situation.

Inter-ethnic incidents are not a significant security concern

When asked about inter-ethnic incidents, most respondents replied that they did not feel these were a threat to their own security, or that it was something that they generally worried about. Inter-ethnic incidents were generally seen as isolated and rare, and when they did happen, they were not perceived as very serious or organised, consisting mainly of vandalism, graffiti or scuffles between teenagers. The main exception was Mostar, where respondents described incidents of harassments and threats when venturing into the 'other' part of town.⁶⁸

The vast majority are not real hate crimes, but more like kids getting drunk and doing silly things. It probably happens every three or four months. (...) But these incidents acquire connotations of something more sinister; the local politicians will cite them as ethnically or religiously motivated.

Key informant, Tuzla

Most respondents did not feel that inter-ethnic incidents had increased over the past three years, and there was also the general sense that inter-ethnic incidents were not as serious as they had been in the past. Returnees tended to compare the current situation with the situation immediately after the war, when violence and harassment against returnees was more commonplace. One conclusion to draw from this is that while the political situation has been steadily deteriorating over the past three years, the use of ethno-nationalist rhetoric has not (yet) had a significant inflammatory impact to the point that people have been incited to act on inter-ethnic hatred. At the same time, while there was a sense that higher-level political rhetoric does not reflect inter-ethnic relations on the ground, many respondents did recognise the potential for such incidents to be exploited by politicians for their own purposes.

It should also be noted that youth focus groups often yielded quite different and less positive pictures of the local-level security situation. For example, participants in youth focus groups gave examples of inter-ethnic incidents which in some cases were rather serious, and generally considered these to have the biggest negative impact on their personal security (see *Youth perceptions – and youth as a potential risk factor* p.23).

Football often mobilises along ethnic lines

An important exception to this picture of limited inter-ethnic incidents was football violence, which in some cases took on an inter-ethnic dimension. Mostar was the

⁶⁸ The 1992–1995 war divided the previously ethnically-mixed city of Mostar into two sides, the eastern side predominantly Bosniak, and the western side mainly Bosnian Croat.

extreme example, with matches between the two local teams Velež and Zrinjski⁶⁹ often bringing about clashes between young men from the two halves of the city, usually curbed by extensive police presence. But elsewhere in BiH, national matches would often raise tensions; a key informant from Stolac gave the example of the match between Croatia and Turkey in 2006: “The game (...) triggered a warlike situation. People here prepared for the match in advance, in terms of showing who could mobilise most fans. (...) Who knows what would have happened without the special police forces from Mostar. Without their interference, there is a real risk that somebody might have been killed”. Many respondents stressed that football hooliganism and sport violence in general was not solely an inter-ethnic issue, but also an expression of social frustration. With high and rising unemployment rates and increased social frustration, some police respondents believed that this type of violence was becoming a more serious problem.

There is this negative energy, this pressure. Young people are full of frustration, and at [football matches], they are trying to show who's boss – they use it as an opportunity to get into a fight, get rid of their frustrations.

Key informant, Stolac

Social unrest is seen as a significant security risk

Many respondents identified social unrest as an increasing problem: without being asked directly about this issue, concerns about increased social unrest were brought up by participants in 12 out of 21 focus group discussions. With the deteriorating economic situation, some locations have seen more of this type of unrest, and some police respondents expected more of it over the coming year. Many respondents believed that spring and summer 2010 would see an increase in demonstrations and social protest, with the potential for unrest if frustrations escalated and the situation was not handled appropriately. Some key informants also pointed to the impending cuts in public spending required for BiH to receive the second tranche of its IMF loan as potentially spelling greater hardship for vulnerable groups, with the war veterans' associations capable of causing significant disruption (see *The post-war economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina* p.6). Most police respondents expressed confidence that they would be able to handle this type of threat to public order, as they had in the past.

I don't think that the conflict we had 18 years ago can be repeated. We all lost in this conflict and that should be a message to all people. Of course, there is the possibility of social unrest caused by social crisis, regardless of ethnic background. If politicians do not start to solve these problems, it could happen.

Focus group participant (male, 45), Prijedor

Political will is seen as key to the security situation

Few respondents believed there was a significant risk of a local-level incident escalating and getting out of control, or sparking retaliation elsewhere. They pointed to a number of factors preventing this from happening: one was that institutions such as the police had got better at handling potentially very sensitive situations. Some police respondents demonstrated a good awareness of their responsibility in this regards. Several respondents also highlighted the positive difference that other individual actors, for example civil society actors and faith leaders, played in diffusing tensions and preventing situations that could have resulted in violence. This indicates that some communities had developed a certain degree of social capital and the capacity to withstand violence.

⁶⁹ The two teams represent the two halves of the city. HŠK Zrinjski Mostar has mainly Bosnian Croat supporters, and FK Velež Mostar has mainly Bosniak supporters.

However, the main reason given by respondents as to why local-level inter-ethnic incidents did not escalate was that there was currently no political will to stir up trouble. Many believed that if the political will were there, events could be turned violent and made to escalate. The events in Široki Brijeg in October 2009⁷⁰ were seen by some respondents as an example of such a situation.

The daily work of the police is seen as 'satisfactory'

A positive finding was that the police were generally viewed with confidence. The daily work of the police was described as 'satisfactory' by most: the general view was that the police come when they are called, and do their job as well as they can. Again it should be noted that younger people tended to be harder in their criticism of the police, with corruption and ineptitude being the main complaints. However, even amongst respondents who had returned to areas where the police were implicated in human rights violations and ethnic cleansing during the war, overall feedback on current police-community relations was positive. Communication and the establishment of an ethnically-mixed police force were seen as key to building trust: "From year to year it [the security situation] is better. We have had monthly meetings with the police; (...) we sought to change the structure of the national police and [replace] the commander [with a Bosniak], we've succeeded. The situation is safe." Focus group participant (male, 55) Prijedor.

However, representatives from returnees' organisations criticised the police: they believed there were still many war criminals working in the police forces; and they feared that the police and the armed forces could fall apart along ethnic lines if enough political pressure was applied. There were also indications that in some places, earlier efforts to establish multi-ethnic police forces were being rolled back: focus group participants in Zvornik complained that the municipality was not replacing Bosniak police officers who had left to pursue careers elsewhere, but either left the positions vacant or filled them with Bosnian Serb officers, thus reducing the proportion of Bosniak officers.

EUFOR a reassuring presence for some but does not improve daily security

Focus group participants were specifically asked about the role of EUFOR and whether they thought the presence of LOT houses contributed to security in the local community. Mostly, the answer was negative: the vast majority of focus group participants felt that while an international security presence had been invaluable immediately after the war, EUFOR's current role in their daily security at a local level was negligible. There were divergent views on whether EUFOR should leave as a result: some felt it was time they went, while others disagreed because of the still unstable political situation. A local faith leader felt that EUFOR was a positive presence in the country, because "incidents that could spill over and have greater consequences could not happen, because we still have the international community" (key informant, Tuzla).

Youth perceptions – and youth as a potential risk factor

Youth respondents were generally more open to discussing problems and frustrations than older respondents, and often gave different and much more negative descriptions of the local situation, particularly in terms of inter-ethnic relations and tensions and local security issues. Older respondents were also asked for their perspectives on the role of youth, in order to identify particular risks and trends.

⁷⁰ On 4 October 2009, a 24-year old football fan was shot dead in the town of Široki Brijeg, apparently by a Bosnian Croat police officer, during violent clashes between rival football fans of Sarajevo's team (mainly Bosniak supporters) and Široki Brijeg's team (mainly Bosnian Croat supporters). *BalkanInsight*, 'Sarajevo Fan Died of Gunshot Wound', www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/22632/, accessed 14 June 2010.

Youth particularly hard hit by unemployment and more vulnerable to delinquency

As indicated in the section *The post-war economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina* p.6, young people have been hit very hard by the economic situation, and are facing particular difficulties finding work. Many young people expressed deep frustration over the current economic situation, and many could see no future for themselves in BiH. Youth seemed particularly frustrated by what they saw as a general apathy and passivity in society, but at the same time felt hopeless about the possibility of changing anything themselves. There was a concern among some respondents that as a result of the difficult social situation, young people were being drawn into criminal environments or turning to drugs. In terms of local petty crime, youth delinquency was often mentioned by all age groups, and many respondents felt that this problem was increasing. Youth gangs, violence and vandalism were causing feelings of insecurity in communities, in particular in larger cities.

Youth seen as more likely to express ethno-nationalist viewpoints and behaviour

Many respondents were concerned – and some were alarmed – to see youth expressing ethno-nationalist views. Respondents identified the most common perpetrators of inter-ethnic incidents as young people and minors. While such incidents generally were not deemed to be a significant security concern, many respondents added that what concerned them most was the fact these incidents were frequently perpetrated by young people or teenagers.

Youth nationalism tends to be less pronounced in big cities such as Sarajevo and more pronounced in the smaller, more isolated communities (...). Poor economic situation and low educational attainment generally increases nationalist tendencies.

Key informant, Sarajevo

One civil society representative working with human rights issues and youth was greatly concerned by the “clear phenomenon of second generation nationalism” (key informant, Sarajevo). While too young to remember the war, many of these teenagers were exhibiting ethno-nationalist behaviour and using slogans and expressions from the past. Almost all focus groups voiced a concern that youth between the ages of 15 and 18 were exhibiting more ethno-nationalist behaviour. The build-up of inter-ethnic tensions between young people made one youth focus group participant remark: “When you are stretching a bow, it only takes a small jerk [by someone] to shoot the arrow” (male, 18), Brčko.

Inheriting and cementing ethnic divisions: the role of parents and the education system

Family influence on youth was reported as the biggest contributing factor in making children and youth susceptible to radicalisation and ethno-nationalism: “Kids listen to their parents. (...) their dad will get drunk and tell them stories from the war” (key informant, Brčko).

We are looking for things that can make us closer; our parents are creating ethnically based divisions between us.

Focus group participant (female, 22), Brčko

What is concerning is that the ethnic prejudices and fears instilled in children and youth in the home are not being challenged by public institutions. On the contrary, many respondents, old and young, expressed deep dissatisfaction with the education

system in BiH, and its role in perpetuating ethnic divisions. In addition, some interviewees gave concrete examples of young children being made to feel different and discouraged by their teachers and peers from developing friendships with children from other ethnic groups.

As is the case with regard to employment, there also seemed to be a significant degree of self-segregation taking place in higher education: “Croat kids will go to study to Zagreb or Osijek, Bosniak kids will go to Sarajevo, and Serb kids will go to Banja Luka, Pale or Belgrade” (key informant, Brčko).

Stronger interaction of young people is essential. I do not like when it is forced, when it comes to establishing relationships between people. The fact is that the whole of Bosnia operates on the principle of divided society, but [the] remedy should be to work with citizens for a long time; allow them a space for dialogue. They have to listen to each other, to hear the truth.

Focus group participant (female, 20), Mostar

Political interference encourages ethnic divisions amongst children and youth

The role of political elites was blamed for many of the education system's problems, but their negative political influence was seen to stretch beyond the education sector. The research yielded many positive examples of young people reaching across inter-ethnic divides, often at their own initiative, and sometimes with the help of youth projects. However, such projects were most often under-funded; and many youth felt these initiatives were actively discouraged by local actors in the community. One youth focus group participant complained that “as soon as we are trying to overcome the divisions among young people, we encounter obstruction by politicians” (male, 17), Sarajevo.

Many were concerned about what ethnically divided youth would mean for the future of BiH. One returnee from Zvornik explained his concerns: “High school kids do not know [the horrors of war], and they are becoming carriers of nationalist ideology – and what could happen in the future? They will end up settling the bill from the war in 1992, just like their parents were settling the bill of 1945”. Focus group participant (male).

3

Analysis: risks to security and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina

THE CAUSES OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS ARE: on the one hand, a lack of clarity over the international engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, both confusion surrounding its future role, and questions around its current credibility and impact; and on the other hand, a belligerent local political leadership which remains unaccountable to voters. In addition, the difficult economic situation is causing social frustration to build, which in turn is increasing the risk of social unrest. However, the research also points to deeper, more fundamental ‘drivers of conflict’⁷¹ which underlie the current situation. These include:

- the unresolved question about what kind of state BiH is/should be
- the lack of dialogue or common understanding of what took place during the war
- deeply institutionalised ethnic divisions
- ethnically divided and potentially radicalised youth
- and a biased and politicised media.

This indicates that the current animosity and discord between political leaders is not just about political positioning around a changing distribution of power, but also reflects much deeper ‘existential’ issues and divisions.

However, it is important to also stress that despite these challenging issues, the security situation currently remains stable. This is largely due to a number of mitigating factors currently preventing a return to violence, which include:

- international and regional pressures to maintain BiH’s unity
- the fact that most politicians currently seem interested in preserving the status quo
- and that most citizens have a deep aversion to violent conflict.

Of additional note is the role of the police, who are generally considered to make a positive contribution to people’s day-to-day security. However, the likelihood of this mitigating factor continuing should the political situation deteriorate is questionable

⁷¹ ‘Drivers of conflict’ means factors that contribute to people’s grievances. In the conflict analysis literature, proximate drivers of conflict are ‘factors contributing to a climate conducive to violent conflict or its further escalation’, while structural drivers of conflict are ‘pervasive factors that have become built into the policies, structures and fabric of a society and may create the pre-conditions for violent conflict’. Saferworld with International Alert, Africa Peace Forum, FEWER, CECORE and Consortium on Humanitarian Agencies, *Conflict-sensitive approaches to development, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. A resource pack*, (London, 2004).

due to the degree of political influence to which the police are subjected, and their actual cohesion and strength as a police force.

The final section outlines possible scenarios for security and stability in BiH in the short, medium and longer term. While in the short term, social unrest appears to be the main security threat, in the medium and long term, there is a risk that the mitigating factors identified above and explained at greater length below will weaken. If the key sources of conflict remain unaddressed, this implies a greater risk of violence.

Many variables can influence developments in BiH, and the scenarios set out below should be viewed as tentative only. However, they highlight the importance of addressing the deeper drivers of conflict now – in an inclusive and sustainable manner – in order to ensure that when the international community relinquishes its executive authority, local actors will be able to focus their attention on moving the country forward rather than on addressing old grievances.

Proximate drivers of conflict: causes of the current crisis

Questions about future and current international engagement

The lack of clarity over the nature and future of international engagement has greatly contributed to creating the current ‘power vacuum’ in which local elites jostle for influence. The two main issues are 1) a lack of clarity over future international engagement in BiH; and 2) a perceived erosion of the international community’s credibility and influence.

First, as detailed in *International engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina* p.8, significant reductions are planned to the international executive authority in BiH. However, the transition from OHR to EUSR has not taken place because the ‘five plus two’ conditions have not yet been met. At the same time, international actors are loath to enforce their authority, significantly curtailing the OHR’s ability to make use of the Bonn Powers.

Respondents expressed their deep frustration with the current situation, which essentially neither maintains credible international authority, nor abolishes it and hands over responsibility to local politicians. In practice, key international actors are attempting to scale down their authority, but without yet having made any changes to the institutions or tools in place – enabling local leaders to dodge responsibility for difficult decisions, while at the same time challenging international authority with relative impunity.

Second, the international community is viewed as divided, disinterested and lacking credibility. The current crisis highlights deep disagreements among international actors and a lack of a common strategy for BiH. While the US and the UK favour strict conditionality, other EU states feel that a swift closure of the OHR and transition to the EUSR is the only means of breaking the deadlock. On the other hand, the use of conditionality has suffered some potentially serious losses in credibility, first during the international attempts at police reform and subsequently, as seemingly fixed conditions have been interpreted less strictly. These divisions in international policy towards BiH, and the doubts surrounding the willingness or ability of international actors to enforce conditionality uniformly, mean that local politicians suspect they can ‘wait it out’ as international actors lose patience and become willing to renegotiate their conditions.

Unaccountable and corrupt local politicians

The crisis also stems from the pressing need to carry out constitutional reform and replace Dayton. However, any power-sharing system – and in particular one which has been in place for 15 years – tends to create its own dynamics and incentives, which over

time limit the political will for change. Respondents saw the slow pace of the reform process in BiH at least partly as a reflection of the contentment of political elites with the status quo, which ensures their positions of power – political and by extension, economic – as well as the relative protection these positions offer from closer scrutiny. Politicians may be reluctant to undertake reforms that might undermine their own positions; and to expend short-term political capital for long-term gains (as the goal of EU membership will not come into fruition for many years).

The research also highlights the underlying reasons that BiH politicians can afford to take this position: their lack of accountability to voters, and a lack of pressure from below. As long as citizens do not punish their leaders for their poor performance in advancing BiH towards the goal of constitutional reform by changing their voting patterns, pressure for reform will have to come from outside the country. Since the end of the war, the main driver of reforms in BiH has been pressure from international actors, but the current question marks surrounding international engagement mean that the effectiveness of this pressure has greatly diminished. If left unchecked and unaccountable, politicians will be able to pursue maximalist ethno-nationalist agendas to further their own positions without being made to negotiate and compromise – to the detriment of progress, and possibly even to the detriment of longer-term stability.

However, the political rhetoric to date does not seem to have had a negative impact on inter-ethnic relations at the local level, or on the number or nature of inter-ethnic incidents, and respondents did not report a feeling of deterioration in their physical security. Rather, the main effect of ethno-nationalist political rhetoric has been to generate insecurity and fear among citizens about the future, with the debate around RS secession and abolishment of the entities currently causing most concern.

A difficult economic situation is increasing the risk of social unrest

The difficult economic situation is having a severe impact on local communities in terms of increased economic insecurity and rising social frustrations. The main security risks at present are isolated events such as football hooliganism or social unrest. Social frustration in itself may not necessarily be only negative: most respondents agreed that unemployment and economic insecurity is generally being felt equally by all ethnic groups (with the significant exception being politically-linked access to jobs). This means that social frustration could become a common, cross-ethnic cause, providing a shared incentive for demanding greater accountability and concrete action from political leaders. However, there is little hope on the part of respondents that any significant political change will arise from the October 2010 general elections. The immense disillusionment with the political system may in fact be so strong that not even a common problem, such as economic deprivation, is enough to bring about significant public demand for change. It is also likely that the ethnic divisions in BiH society are still so great that politicians will manage to exploit them and nip any multi-ethnic activism in the bud – and possibly even attempt to exploit the popular frustration for ethno-nationalist causes.

Structural drivers of conflict: deeper, underlying issues

The fundamental question remains unanswered

A key reason for the intractability of the current crisis is that it brings up the existential question of what kind of state BiH is. In a united BiH without entities, Bosniaks would constitute the largest group, and Bosnian Serbs greatly fear the loss of autonomy this would entail for them. In turn, Bosniak respondents are deeply concerned by the RS leadership's repeatedly stated intentions for RS to secede from BiH. Many respondents and key informants believed that a referendum on secession would result in violence at the local level. Vulnerable areas would include Brčko District (given its geographical

location as the 'binding link' between the two halves of RS), and returnee communities in RS (where memories of ethnic cleansing are still strong), as well as communities living in boundary areas and other strategically important locations. Given the level of fear, the decision to hold a referendum would potentially be enough to result in improvised roadblocks, returnees fleeing their homes and potentially quite serious violent clashes at the local level, between (as yet unorganised or only loosely organised) armed individuals.⁷²

The research demonstrates that the level of centralisation or decentralisation of power between the state, entity and canton levels in BiH is far from an administrative question. It is an issue that is closely linked to inter-ethnic mistrust and fears, and which invokes memories of the war.

Past grievances remain and are passed on

There has been very little facing up to the past in BiH: no official attempts have been made to initiate a broad public reflection or dialogue on wartime events to help communities arrive at a common understanding of what took place.⁷³ As a consequence, there have been no broad efforts to support reconciliation. The lack of awareness of the experiences and suffering of other ethnic groups feeds feelings of victimisation and skews people's perspectives. Many are of the belief that their ethnic group were the one to suffer most, or that members of their ethnic group did not commit aggression against others, as the example from Prijedor shows (*The political situation* p.14). This skewed view also contributes to a sense of injustice, and contributes to explaining why war crime tribunals are broadly viewed with mistrust. While many respondents (particularly of the older generation) made a point of stressing that inter-ethnic relations in their own neighbourhood had 'returned to normal', there is no doubt that the war is still very much a part of many people's lives and continues to shape their views and behaviour. The research also indicates that without efforts to counter this influence it will persist, as stories from the war are passed on from parents to children. As a consequence, there is no shared understanding or common narrative of the war within BiH, which means that war events can easily be invoked and exploited for political aims. Feelings of injustice and fear constitute a powerful 'fuel', which can be used for mobilisation around ethno-nationalist causes.

Public institutions seen to 'continue the war by other means'

The field research confirmed that, as indicated in the section *Politics and ethnicity in Bosnia and Herzegovina* p.3, ethnic divisions remain deeply institutionalised in BiH. This has a number of effects. For example, in many communities, people belonging to the minority ethnic group often feel ignored and excluded by local/municipal authorities dominated by the majority group. This is seen to reflect a desire to 'continue the war by other means', and perpetuates frustration and resentment. When people become disillusioned and disenfranchised with their municipality (or other institution), this erodes faith in the wider public system and nurtures voter apathy – which in turn impedes democratic accountability.

Youth ethnically divided and at risk of radicalisation

Not only does ethnicity permeate every part of the education sector: in many communities, local actors such as parents, faith leaders and teachers do not encourage (or will actively try to hinder) positive inter-ethnic interaction. This means that children and

⁷² Large numbers of illicit small arms and light weapons left over from the war remain in civilian hands in BiH, although exact figures are difficult to determine. UNDP and Centre for Security Studies, *Needs Assessment on small Arms and Light Weapons in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 2003.

⁷³ Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have made several attempts to promote dialogue and reconciliation, mostly at the local level. The most ambitious was a regional commission (REKOM) to establish mutual understanding of wartime events and suffering, but this initiative has run into difficulty due to disagreements between the participating organisations about the scope and nature of the process (key informant, Sarajevo).

young people have little chance to challenge the prejudices, fears and negative attitudes communicated to them by their parents and the mainstream media. Over time, there is a risk that the proportion of citizens who aspire to identify with the country above their own ethnicity (as was the case with people who identified themselves as Yugoslav prior to the war), will become smaller. A propensity to identify first and foremost with an ethnic group is not a problem in itself. However, in the context of recent inter-ethnic violence, unaddressed grievances and widespread prejudice, it can mean that people become more susceptible to mobilisation around ethno-nationalist causes.

Biased and politically controlled media

The research also uncovered a deep frustration with the media, which was characterised as politically biased and overly negative, focusing on examples of inter-ethnic confrontation rather than coexistence. The role of the media in BiH today is certainly nowhere near as inflammatory as it was in the lead-up to the war – regulation and monitoring has been put in place to prevent this. But its influence on conflict dynamics still appears to be largely negative, mainly because the media perpetuates mono-ethnic views and narratives, thereby contributing to maintaining ethnic divides. Politically controlled and ethnically biased media reporting can also increase the risk of an incident in one place causing retaliatory action in another, thereby causing violence to escalate.

Mitigating factors

International and regional pressure to maintain BiH's unity and progress

Despite its apparent lack of a common approach to BiH's current deadlock, the international community is united in its public opposition to any division of the country at the current time. Similarly, BiH's two main neighbours, Serbia and Croatia, have signalled that they will not recognise attempts by RS to secede. Any such attempt would be met with broad condemnation and likely international isolation. And it is unlikely that serious challenges to BiH's territorial integrity will take place while a credible international military presence is maintained in the form of EUFOR. While some key informants expressed serious doubts as to whether – given current troop levels and geographical distribution – EUFOR would be able to prevent bloodshed, its presence still has a broadly stabilising effect.

The double role of politicians

Many respondents put the current low levels of inter-ethnic incidents down to a lack of political will to instigate violence on the part of politicians. This points to the double role played by BiH politicians in terms of security and stability. On the one hand (as explained above), most politicians use their rhetoric and actions to fan ethnic hatred and mistrust – to 'keep the pot boiling' – in order to portray themselves as the protector of their ethnic groups, as this has proven to be a sure way to get re-elected. On the other hand, the same politicians seem (as yet) to have little interest in these tensions spilling over into actual violence, as this risks changing the situation, and potentially threatening their own positions. Hence, maintaining the status quo is negative in that it indicates little will to implement meaningful political reforms, but positive in the sense that it would seem to have a stabilising effect on the local security situation.

No appetite for violence in the population

When we asked respondents whether they were concerned about a return to violent conflict, the vast majority answered that they could not even conceive of it. The ferocity and scale of the 1992–95 war meant that the majority of ordinary Bosnians

were influenced by it in some way, and many saw their families torn apart and neighbourhoods and livelihoods destroyed. Most of those who lived through these years are deeply repulsed by the notion of political violence. However, the mitigating impact of these memories is likely to erode over time, as new generations mature who have little or no first-hand recollection of the terrible impact of war on ordinary people – but whose view of other ethnic groups has been shaped by stories of “what they did to us”.

Police able to address local issues (but still seen to be under political influence)

A positive finding of this research is that the police are a relatively trusted institution in most communities, due to their ability to address some of the immediate causes of physical insecurity which concern people in their daily lives. They are believed to be capable of dealing with smaller scuffles and localised disturbances, and can therefore be seen to play a mitigating role against conflict becoming violent.

However, the enduring levels of direct political influence over the police force – in particular in RS, but also in the Federation – was stressed by several key informants. They would not trust the police to protect them against more serious or organised cases of inter-ethnic violence – i.e. if politicians ever decided to instigate such incidents, then politicians would similarly influence the response of the police. The research returned some positive examples of local police officers intervening to prevent and diffuse ethnic tensions in the community, but the existence of conscientious individuals within the police force might matter less if the atmosphere were to change at the political level.

Scenarios: future risks to stability

Drawing on the identified drivers of conflict and mitigating factors, this section outlines the current political and security situation in BiH, as well as what the situation might look like in the short term (over the next year), as well as the medium (2–3 years) and longer term (4+ years).

Short term: growing social frustration may increase the risk of unrest

In the short term, social frustration is likely to grow, particularly as the effects of the spending cuts put in place by the BiH government to meet IMF loan requirements are increasingly felt by pensioners, war veterans and the unemployed. Even if the economy does manage to pick up again this is expected to happen slowly. Economic insecurity will therefore continue to be keenly felt, and social unrest is likely to continue. This constitutes the greatest risk to security in the short term.

Rising social frustration could potentially result in a ‘powder keg’ of angry (young) men looking for opportunities to vent their anger. This could potentially increase the frequency and seriousness of riots, hooliganism and unrest, and exacerbate the risk of one event sparking retaliatory violence elsewhere (something which is not currently viewed as a risk), particularly given the partial and occasionally incendiary nature of much media reporting in BiH. Social frustration may also begin to have a negative impact on the nature and number of inter-ethnic incidents. This in turn will mean that the ability of local police forces to deal with outbreaks of violence will be further tested.

The political situation is unlikely to change significantly in the short term. Some key informants believed that the RS leadership might seek to push through a referendum on RS secession in order to win votes at the October elections.⁷⁴ However, given the probability of an international backlash, it seems unlikely in the short term that politicians would risk their relatively safe positions on the gamble of a referendum

74 Key informant interview, Sarajevo, December 2009.

on secession. It also does not seem likely that international engagement will change significantly in the short term: the 'five plus two' are unlikely to be fulfilled before the October elections, and barring a change in attitudes among political leaders after the elections, the transition from the OHR to the EUSR is unlikely to take place in the short term.

Medium term: diminishing international influence, with drivers of conflict left unaddressed

After the elections, international pressure for the 'five plus two' to be fulfilled will likely be stepped up, in order to enable a transition from the OHR to a reinforced EUSR. Provided this succeeds, and depending on the exact mandate of the reinforced EUSR, it will likely entail a significant curtailment in the international authority to intervene in BiH, replacing executive authority with the 'soft power' of the EU accession process.⁷⁵ If EUFOR stays in place, its post-OHR role will likely be limited to training and capacity building. It will have little or no military role and will not constitute a significant security deterrent.

Whether the prospect of eventual EU membership is enough to keep reforms in BiH moving forward is a key question. It is likely that the October 2010 elections will not significantly change the political landscape. Once the reform process starts to challenge the rent-seeking behaviour of leading politicians, the risk of BiH falling behind in the accession framework seem high, unless (or until) BiH citizens begin to put pressure on their politicians. The earliest opportunity for this to happen through the ballots is local elections scheduled for late 2012.

For BiH to move towards EU accession, it will be necessary to address a number of contentious issues, chief among which is the issue of constitutional reform. As indicated in *Structural drivers of conflict: deeper, underlying issues* p.28, it is crucial that these sensitive issues are addressed in a manner that commits everyone to the outcome, and it is therefore vital for these processes to be inclusive and comprehensive so that they do not risk alienating actors who may afterwards seek to undermine or undo them.

If international authority is retained, there will be a good deal of leverage to drive these processes forward. The danger here is that international actors, underestimating the sensitivity of these issues and driven by an eagerness to demonstrate progress in BiH, will attempt to push the process faster than may be wise. This could result in agreements on key reforms (such as a reform of the constitution) which are determined more by international considerations than local priorities. On the other hand, if international executive power is relinquished before key reforms take place, the international community's role will be limited to providing facilitation and distant motivation. As mentioned above, the visa liberalisation process provided a certain motivating effect, but if other 'carrots' prove less efficient in getting local leaders around the negotiating table, the results may be too minimal to afford a truly sustainable outcome.

In either case, it is likely that more difficult issues linked to constitutional reform will not be included on the agenda. One example is police reform, which has previously proved to be very thorny. There is therefore a risk that the significant degree of political influence over police operations will persist.

Longer term: stumbling along – or increased risk of violent conflict

In the longer term, there is a risk that many fundamental drivers of conflict will remain. Most importantly, should the constitution be drawn up in a way that alienates certain factions, it is probable that sooner or later it will be challenged. This could potentially

⁷⁵ To what extent the international community lets go of its 'levers of influence' will depend on the exact mandate of the incoming EUSR, which has yet to be announced. However, the change will probably be significant as it is doubtful whether anything like the current Bonn Powers can be maintained under an EUSR.

re-open the Pandora's box of the nature of the BiH state. The RS leadership may pursue their ambition for independence; and the Bosniak leadership may become more radicalised as international executive authority (and its presumably moderating influence) dwindles.

In addition, grievances and inter-ethnic fears will persist unless comprehensive and inclusive efforts are made to deal with the past and establish a common understanding of historical events. The prospect of this happening soon seems small, but even if efforts to face the past and promote inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation are stepped up, these processes will take time. This means that deep ethnic divisions are likely to continue to dominate BiH society for the foreseeable future.

However, it must be noted that the existence of drivers of conflict does not mean violence will return to as long as the mitigating factors identified in this report persist or are replaced with others. With this in mind – and barring coherent efforts to pull BiH out of the current deadlock and tackle the underlying drivers of conflict – two possible longer-term scenarios are proposed:

- I. Mitigating factors continue to prevent a return to violence:** while many fundamental drivers of conflict persist, BiH remains stable and slowly 'stumbles on' towards EU accession. In this scenario:
 - a. Political accountability improves, and voters push politicians to implement the necessary reforms to bring BiH towards EU membership – maybe even voting in new political leaders.
 - b. Gradual approximation to the EU and/or improved economic opportunity means that people feel that their lot is improving, and are less attracted by political radicalism.
 - c. Politicians are convinced their interests are best served in a peaceful BiH, firmly on its way to EU membership.
 - d. The political will for stability means that even if the police remain under political influence, they will continue to provide security to citizens and effectively handle any small-scale incidents of violence.

- II. Mitigating factors weaken, leading to increased risk of violent conflict:** the continued existence of drivers of conflict alongside an erosion of the mitigating factors results in an increasingly tense situation. In this scenario:
 - a. External pressure is significantly reduced with the transition from international executive authority to 'soft power'. An internal democratic culture and downward political accountability take time to develop, leaving a significant 'accountability gap' in which politicians are not under pressure domestically or externally, and are thus free to pursue their own interests.
 - b. Reform processes stall and BiH falls further behind in the EU accession process. Particularly if the economic situation continues to be difficult, social frustration increases.
 - c. Politicians may begin to believe that their own positions can be maintained or strengthened by fomenting violence at the local level or taking actions that have destabilising consequences.
 - d. If no mechanisms are put in place to curb political influence over the police, they will be limited in their ability to provide a stabilising effect should a situation of ethnic unrest arise.
 - e. In addition, the rejection of political violence among the population will diminish with the emergence of a new generation who do not remember the 1992–95 war, who have grown up largely ethnically separated and who are carrying with them ethnic fears and prejudices transferred to them by their parents' generation. These new generations may be more easily mobilised around ethno-nationalist goals, and potentially, violence.

Neither of these two longer-term scenarios can be described as a 'best case'. Based on the preceding analysis of local conflict dynamics, a best-case scenario in which a broad internal consensus develops about the nature of BiH as a state will only result from focused efforts to help BiH out of its current stalemate and tackle the underlying drivers of conflict. The following chapter outlines some recommendations for the international community to help steer BiH towards this aim.

4

Recommendations

THIS CHAPTER OUTLINES A NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS aimed at international actors, and in particular at the EU, with a view to focusing efforts on securing a stable and secure future for Bosnia and Herzegovina. These recommendations are based on an analysis of the research findings, and reflect the concerns and priorities of those who participated in the research process.

The international focus of these recommendations is not intended to overlook the responsibility of BiH's leaders for resolving their political disagreements; this is understood by all these who participated in the research. Rather, this emphasis reflects the deep frustration and anxiety of many citizens over the negative consequences the political impasse may have, and the perceived failure of internationally mandated institutions to execute that mandate and play a truly constructive role in ensuring that stability and peace prevail.

Ending the current deadlock and putting in place the conditions for longer-term stability

The research findings identify two main causes of the current political crisis: on the one hand, a lack of clarity over future international engagement – including questions about the credibility and impact of international actors in BiH today – and on the other hand, belligerent local political leaders who remain unaccountable to voters and largely pursue their own agendas. This positioning around an unclear or changing distribution of power is to the detriment of BiH's progress towards EU accession and, potentially, its future stability.

Recommendation 1: To restore the credibility of the international engagement in BiH, international actors should agree on a revised joint strategy for the country. The strategy should be based on a participatory and in-depth analysis of the context which maps out current and future threats to BiH's stability. It should be clear about the role of all key stakeholders. In addition, international actors should apply a coherent and consistent approach to implementing this strategy. They should insist unequivocally that all conditions must be met in full by local politicians. Lastly, the agreed strategy should be clearly communicated to local citizens and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 2: To ensure the resolution of a number of sensitive issues, international engagement is needed to push forward and facilitate local negotiations. These issues could otherwise re-emerge as drivers of conflict: constitutional reform is a key example. However, it is vital that any agreements reached are sustainable and locally appropriate. To this end, the EU (given its central role) should resist seeing local negotiations purely through the lense of EU accession. While ensuring that outcomes

meet minimum EU accession requirements, the EU must also ensure that processes are locally defined and inclusive, and gain the support of all key stakeholders.

Recommendation 3: To minimise any threats to stability that may arise during the eventual transition from international executive authority to local responsibility, preparedness and contingency planning is key. Specifically, international actors should be ready and able to prevent violent conflict and counter challenges to BiH's security through a range of measures, such as sanctioning behaviour or statements that threaten to undermine stability, and maintaining a military deterrent during this sensitive period.

Supporting civil society to address deeper drivers of conflict

This report has identified a number of deeper, fundamental drivers of conflict, which underlie the current situation. These include: no dialogue or common understanding of what happened during the war; deeply institutionalised ethnic divisions; ethnically divided and potentially radicalised youth; and a biased and politicised media. These are all issues which must be addressed by local actors. CSOs and communities in particular are key to driving these processes forward in a manner that is locally owned, appropriate and participatory. However, civil society is not currently fulfilling its potential: many CSOs are struggling to get support to work on these issues, and compete fiercely for funds. In addition, the sector is subject to intense political pressure at all levels. International actors can make a significant difference by dedicating more appropriate and increased support to these processes.

Recommendation 4: To support the development of a strong, vibrant and independent civil society in BiH, which is able to make a positive difference to BiH's social and political development, any strategy for civil society development must be locally-defined, build on existing initiatives, and be based on two-way communication between CSOs and donors.

Recommendation 5: To ensure local CSOs benefit from the funding increasingly made available under EU instruments, bilateral donors should co-operate with the EC to give local CSOs access to small, flexible grants that do not require co-financing and which are released quickly, while helping them develop their skills in obtaining and managing EU grants.⁷⁶ Donors should encourage local CSOs to co-operate and form consortia to obtain grants, and to facilitate networking, mutual learning and exchange of experiences.

Recommendation 6: To counter ethnic prejudice and minimise opportunities for political manipulation and radicalisation, funding instruments should prioritise support for promoting positive interaction, dialogue and reconciliation among all citizens, and particularly among BiH youth. Donors need to recognise that this is a long-term commitment, and will require funding instruments which are designed to support processes rather than fixed outputs. Initiatives should be locally developed and implemented to ensure local ownership and appropriateness to the local context, with external actors playing a supporting and facilitating role.

⁷⁶ The EU has taken a positive step towards this aim with the recent establishment of Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) offices in several Western Balkan cities (as well as in Turkey). TACSO intends to establish a broad process of dialogue with civil society actors to inform its programming and ensure its activities address their needs. Website: www.tacso.org, accessed 14 May 2010.

'Conflict-sensitive' international programming

The fact that many drivers of conflict remain in BiH, and that the local context is greatly politicised, makes it even more important that the manner in which international actors develop and implement their programmes is 'conflict-sensitive'.⁷⁷ Conflict sensitivity refers to the ability of an actor to understand the context in which it operates; understand the interaction between its intervention and the context; and target its intervention in order to maximise the chances of peace. The EU has adopted several policies and frameworks relating to conflict prevention and conflict sensitivity.⁷⁸ However, the EU Enlargement strategy⁷⁹ does not refer to conflict sensitivity, and our research indicates that international actors generally do not prioritise conflict-sensitivity in their programming. There is therefore a risk that programmes end up being implemented in a manner that does not take into account – and therefore risks exacerbating – local conflict dynamics.

Recommendation 7: To ensure donor support has a positive effect on local conflict dynamics, donor organisations also need to consider the political impact of their support and its effect on conflict dynamics, rather than just its technical purpose. At a minimum, support to a specific sector (such as the media or the education sector) needs to 'do no harm', but such support should also aim to promote positive interaction and mutual understanding.

Recommendation 8: To ensure programming is conflict-sensitive, donors should integrate conflict sensitivity into their recruitment and training practices, and ensure staff is aware of any existing policies and commitments around conflict-sensitive engagement. Donors should develop tools to monitor and evaluate conflict sensitivity alongside other cross-cutting themes (e.g. gender).

Recommendation 9: To ensure that international programming is locally appropriate and builds on local solutions, the EU and all other international actors should substantially improve their consultation mechanisms to ensure regular, two-way consultation with a broad range of local stakeholders. This may include regular outreach meetings in various communities, and/or ongoing strategic engagement with civil society representatives.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Op cit Saferworld with International Alert, Africa Peace Forum, FEWER, CECORE and Consortium on Humanitarian Agencies, 2004.

⁷⁸ Including the EU programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts. More generally, 'The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action' endorsed by the EC and most of the EU member states commits donors to adapting their aid policies and aid delivery to the context when engaging in countries affected by conflict.

⁷⁹ European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009–2010', http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2009/strategy_paper_2009_en.pdf, accessed 14 May 2010.

⁸⁰ While the EU Delegation has improved its efforts to consult with civil society over the past years (for example around IPA programming), these processes could still be more constructive and productive. Giving longer notice periods, improving communication around objectives and (crucially) limitations of the consultation process, implementing measures to address any capacity issues limiting civil society input, and ensuring feedback around the outcomes of the consultation would all be important improvements.

5

Conclusion

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA has come a long way over the past 15 years. The security situation is now broadly ‘satisfactory’, and many important milestones have been reached in BiH’s journey from war to peace. The international community should be encouraged by the significant responsibility it has assumed in helping BiH reach this stage. However, this report demonstrates that communities are still affected by drivers of conflict. Uncertainty surrounding international engagement has been a key trigger of the current political crisis, but underlying it are deeper issues: fundamental disagreements about the nature of the BiH state, but also a lack of open debate about what happened during the war, and the deeply institutionalised ethnic politicisation of public institutions. These issues are direct results of the post-war legacy. They remain unaddressed and, rather than dissipating over time, they are entrenching divisions and shaping a new generation of Bosnians.

Although international actors are currently focused on nudging BiH out of the political deadlock of the last few years, a much longer view is needed: while it is a necessary next step for international actors to change the nature of their engagement and leave greater responsibility in the hands of local decision-makers, the current situation demonstrates that this needs to happen in a much more strategic and carefully thought-through manner. This report outlines why it is imperative that the conditions are put in place now to address key drivers of conflict, so as not to undo years of progress.

Therefore, while the positive daily security situation is a significant achievement, it should not serve as a distraction from BiH’s unique set of challenges, or from the need to address the drivers of conflict which still remain. After years of engagement and billions of Euros, the credibility of international actors and the EU in particular vis-à-vis their investment in BiH is at stake. The challenge is now to put in place a realistic strategy that enables the necessary conditions to ensure a Bosnia and Herzegovina at peace with itself.

Annex 1: Research methodology

This report drew upon a combination of desk research and field research. The desk research took the form of consulting available literature (articles and reports) on the political and economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The field research took place over a period of three weeks from 25 January to 12 February 2010. Supplementary key informant interviews were conducted during trips to Sarajevo throughout autumn and winter 2009/10.

Locations

Field research was carried out in eight locations across BiH: Banja Luka, Brčko, Mostar, Prijedor, Sarajevo, Stolac, Tuzla and Zvornik. These locations were selected on the basis of a combination of factors. Initially, data on the monthly numbers of inter-ethnic incidents suggested that these locations had experienced a relatively high number of inter-ethnic incidents over the past three years. Taking these data as a rough indicator for the presence of inter-ethnic tensions, the assumption was that the security situation in these areas might be at a relatively higher risk of being impacted by inflammatory rhetoric – investigating the link between such rhetoric and inter-ethnic tensions being one aim of the research. In addition, the locations were chosen in order to include both rural and urban areas, and to represent the views of different ethnic groups. We also chose locations which had been affected by the war in different ways (affected to different degrees and in various ways by fighting, ethnic cleansing, physical destruction, flows of displaced persons, etc.).

Focus group discussions

A total of 21 focus group discussions were conducted (two to three in each location), with approximately 10–12 participants in each. In 16 of the discussions, participants were selected so as to reflect as closely as possible the age and ethnic composition of the local community. No specific effort was made to capture gender differences; instead, the research focuses on differences in viewpoints between the different age groups. Five focus group discussions were carried out with young people between the ages of 18 and 30. This was based on an assumption that younger people might be more easily attracted to radical political agendas and potentially to violent means of expression. Also, younger people might have a different experience of the local security situation, and that they might be reluctant to speak about these openly if surrounded by more senior members of the community. All of the discussions were semi-structured around a number of questions, leaving room for interaction between the participants and exploration of emerging issues.

Key informant interviews

Four to seven individual key informant interviews were carried out in each location. One local police officer was interviewed in each location; other interviewees included civil society representatives, teachers, faith leaders, municipal counsellors and others with a good knowledge of the situation in the local community. In addition, staff at international institutions was interviewed to provide information on the overall political and economic situation, and on international engagement in BiH.

Nansen Dialogue Centre Sarajevo is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation that aims to contribute to the development of democratic practices and the prevention and resolution of conflict in Sarajevo and throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina by creating dialogue across ethnic and national divides.

Saferworld works to prevent and reduce violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We work with governments, international organisations and civil society to encourage and support effective policies and practices through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of others.

COVER PHOTO: A game of chess in a public square, Sarajevo. © JÉRÔME MELLON



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