

Enlargement – Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia

Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) were all (along with Croatia and FYR Macedonia) formed as a result of the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. All three countries border each other in the Western Balkans region and are considered 'potential candidate countries' for membership of the European Union. Montenegro and BiH have significant steps to make before concluding *Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs)*, but the initial stages of an SAA was concluded between the Commission and Serbia in September 2007.

Recent History

Bosnia-Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, following a referendum. This break-up sparked conflict among the three large ethnic groups within the federation. Bosniaks and Croats generally favoured independence, whereas Bosnian Serbs, supported by the Serbian government, wished for a union with Serbia. Further conflict later erupted between the Croat statelet of Herzog-Bosnia and the Bosniaks. The wars lasted until the intervention of NATO and the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995, by which time an estimated 100,000 people had been killed, many in acts of ethnic cleansing.

Under the Dayton Accords, BiH was administratively decentralised and divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska. Central government is *consociational*, with three rotating Presidents and set numbers of seats in both Houses of the Parliamentary Assembly for Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs.

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Serbia did maintain a federation with Montenegro. However, this gradually evolved into a looser relationship, and Montenegrins narrowly voted for independence in May 2006. Montenegro is now recognised as a separate nation by both Serbia and the EU. Much more problematic has been Serbia's relationship with Kosovo, which has a majority ethnic Albanian population (90per cent) that favours independence from Serbia. Tensions resulting from Serb attempts to reduce Kosovo's autonomous status within Serbia erupted into violence in 1998, and only ended following a 78-day bombing campaign by NATO in spring 1999. Kosovo is currently under a transitional UN administration (UNMIK).

Issues concerning membership

BiH, Serbia and Montenegro, have all commenced efforts to become members of the EU. The EU began talks with BiH at the Zagreb Summit in 2000, when a Road Map for reform was agreed. The EU subsequently agreed to open SAA talks in 1995; the same year it opened them with Serbia. Montenegro is now also due to open SAA talks after agreeing a pre-entry deal in March 2007. BiH, Serbia and Montenegro still fall short of the *Copenhagen Criteria* on most measures.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's government is currently restricted by the terms of the Dayton Accords. Although it is slowly taking on more responsibility, the national government remains fractured and reform has recently stagnated. In March 2007, the EU Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, stated the EU would not consider closer ties with Bosnia unless it takes steps to reform the police and judicial system, and cooperate with the UN War Crimes Tribunal.

Serbia has faced similar problems over its failure to arrest suspected war criminal General Ratko Mladić; an issue that led to the suspension of its SAA negotiations in May 2006. More problematic has been Serbia's opposition to UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari's plan for Kosovo, which calls for a form of internationally supervised statehood for the enclave. This is supported by the EU, which is trying to put pressure on Serbia to accept the plan. Nevertheless, SAA talks were restarted in May 2007 and it has been estimated that an agreement with Serbia will be signed by the end of 2007.

Facts and Figures

- The EU currently has a 6,500 strong peacekeeping force (Eufor) in BiH, and has plans for a 1,500 strong police mission in Kosovo.
- The EU has donated €6.8 billion in aid to the Western Balkans region since 1991.

Quotes

'You [Serbia-Montenegro] are a European country, you should have a European future.' – Jose Manuel Barroso, EU Commission President, Belgrade, 2006

"If the UN Security Council fails to pass a resolution [on Kosovo], we risk instability and even chaos in the Balkans." – Olli Rehn, EU Enlargement Commissioner, March 2007

Technical Terms

Consociation: Arrangement in which various groups within a country or region, share power according to an agreed formula or mechanism.

Stabilisation and Association Agreement: A strategy to prepare countries for membership negotiations with the EU. SAAs typically offer the incentive of free trade in exchange for commitments to political, economic, trade or human rights reform.

Copenhagen Criteria: Rules set down in the 2002 Copenhagen Accords that must be met before a country can join the EU.

Links

- http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/index_en.htm
- <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/country_profiles/default.stm