

# The American Conservative

## Partitioning Bosnia

Posted By [Daniel Larison](#) On July 20, 2011 @ 8:00 am In

The EU deserves the chance to help make Bosnia a real country. But that will depend less on persuasion and the promise of EU membership than on fortitude in controlling Bosnia's ethnic tensions, determined management of Serbia's EU membership process (once they grant Belgrade accession status in the near future) and avoidance of land mines in the continuing Serbia-Kosovo negotiations that have borne a few modest administrative agreements. ~[Morton Abramowitz and James Hooper](#)<sup>[1]</sup>

As the authors suggest earlier in the article, the partition of Serbia with formal Kosovo independence in 2008 has made the disintegration of Bosnia that much more likely. Bosnia is not and never has been a "real" country as far as a majority of its population is concerned, and the EU has had more than a decade to try to make this cobbled-together political fiction into a state to which its constituent parts might feel some loyalty. In short, they have had their chance and failed. The Republika Srpska's current position in Bosnia seems untenable, and there is no incentive for its inhabitants "to join together in a workable central state." Most of them don't want the central to exist. Earlier this year, Ted Galen Carpenter [reviewed](#)<sup>[2]</sup> the history of Bosnia over the last fifteen years in his article on partitioning Bosnia:

The bottom line is that Bosnia seems no closer politically to being a viable country now than it was fifteen years ago when the U.S.-brokered (and largely U.S.-imposed) Dayton accords ended the civil war that had cost more than 100,000 lives. Extinguishing that bloody conflict was no minor achievement, but it did not alter the reality that Bosnia and Herzegovina remained an unstable political amalgam of three mutually hostile ethnic groups. The country was politically dysfunctional from the moment it seceded from the disintegrating Yugoslav federation, and the Dayton Accords did not solve that problem.

The United States and its European allies used Dayton as the launching pad for the most ambitious nation-building mission since the rehabilitation of Germany and Japan following World War II. But continuous frustration has dogged the effort in Bosnia, and political paralysis has been the defining characteristic over the past fifteen years. To the extent that the country has functioned at all politically, it has been at the subnational level, that is, the Republika Srpska and the Muslim-Croat Federation. The national government has remained weak to the point of impotence.

Abramowitz and Hooper write:

The Office of the High Representative (OHR), once the Western oversight mechanism to prevent ethnic backsliding and hopefully reduce Dayton's structural separatism, is widely perceived to have frittered away its influence.

Yes, and how did it fritter away its influence? It managed this by acting as if it were colonial administrative authority imposing the political outcomes that it wanted. As Carpenter explained:

Indeed, most real political power has resided with the UN high representative, an official who has often ruled like a colonial governor. Over the years, high representatives have repeatedly disqualified candidates for elections, removed elected officials from office, and imposed various policies by decree.

This has naturally bred resentment and helped to discredit and delegitimize the project of creating a unified Bosnian state in the eyes of many of the people subjected to this rule. Carpenter acknowledged that partition is not a panacea, but persisting in a failed policy of trying to create a Bosnian state where most of the people

living in Bosnia don't accept it makes no sense. Instead of seeing this as a cause for despair, the U.S. and EU should be willing to give up on the fiction of a unified Bosnia that has kept most of its inhabitants trapped in a political arrangement they don't want and won't support in the future. This is more likely to prevent a worse conflict down the road.

URL to article: <http://www.amconmag.com/larison/2011/07/20/partitioning-bosnia/>

**Enjoy The American Conservative delivered to your mailbox every month -- visit [www.amconmag.com/subscribe/](http://www.amconmag.com/subscribe/) today!**

---

Article printed from Eunomia: <http://www.amconmag.com/larison>

URLs in this post:

[1] Morton Abramowitz and James Hooper: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/the-death-the-bosnian-state-5631>

[2] reviewed: [http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=12800](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=12800)

Copyright © 2011 Eunomia. All rights reserved.