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Romania 2009 – Presidential Elections Reflect a Multiple Crisis

On 22 November 2009 presidential elections took place in Romania. In the second ballot held on 6 December 2009 the acting president Traian Basescu defeated his social democratic challenger Mircea Geoana by a score of 50,44 % to 49,66 %. Parallel to the presidential elections a consultative referendum was held asking voters to voice their opinion on the transformation of Romania's bicameral into a unicameral Parliament as well as on the reduction of the number of parliamentarians from 471 to 300.

The electoral campaign took place in a highly inflamed climate. Urgent political and economic issues were pushed to the background giving way to populist negative campaigning. For the first time in post-1989 Romanian history charges of electoral cheating in the second ballot weighed so heavily that the Constitutional Court had to examine them. In the end, however, the Court rejected the charges confirming the validity of Basescu's victory.

Heinz-Jürgen Axt

Greece beyond Remedy?

Juvenile Protest, Educational Plight and National Debt

Greece is putting the Euro actually under heavy pressure. The budget deficit of the country is mushrooming at 12.7 percent of its GDP and is violating the Euro criteria excessively. The European Commission expresses its mistrust in statistical data submitted by Greek authorities and the Greek Government is faced with severe concerns when asking for international credits. The threat of state bankruptcy is the tip of the iceberg, of a national crisis which is demanding for "catharsis" (κάθαρσις). The other side of the coin are demonstrations of students asking for better education. The weak national education system needs substantial reforms. Comparative statistical data submitted by the OECD make it evident that Greek schools and universities come off badly. Although Greek Governments tried to improve the situation in the last years it must be stated that the education system is underfunded. What makes the situation worse and demonstrators more aggressive is the fact that better educated young people have poor chances on the Greek labour market. Education does not pay in Greece which is quite the opposite in other OECD countries.

The actual situation is depressing: Greece lacks financial resources to improve the education sector. The deep rooted system of clientelism blocks the access to the labour market especially for young people. Urgently needed economic reforms contain a socially explosive mixture.

Thorsten Gromes

Bosnia and Herzegovina: From Crises to War?

In autumn 2009, on the occasion of a deep political crisis, both media and academics not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina discussed whether there could be a new war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Indeed, the situation resembled the circumstances which had led to Yugoslavia's collapse in the early 1990s.

Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that a war similar to that in the years 1992 to 1995 will break out. The potential warring parties lack the weapons for waging such a big war, are supervised by international peacekeeping troops, and have small chances of setting through their political objectives by military means. Moreover, the political elites know that a new war would endanger their wealth and power.

Looking at the destabilization since 2006, however, political violence has become more likely. A plausible scenario is an armed conflict following the patterns of Northern Ireland in the 1970s. Unfortunately, most politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina show no awareness of such a threat.

Oliver Joachim Rolofs

Bosnia-Herzegovina: No Light at the End of the Tunnel

For more than three years, Bosnia and Herzegovina's political situation has been deteriorating. Fears have re-surfaced that the state may violently collapse because Republika Srpska's Prime Minister Milorad Dodik is challenging the EU and the international community by violating the Dayton Agreement. His aggressive splitting-up policy jeopardizes the integrity of the Federal State which is in urgent need of reforms for a deeper Euro-Atlantic integration.

The international community – for years now without a strategy for the Balkans – has responded irresolutely to the current situation and primarily pursues its own exit-strategy from Bosnia-Herzegovina after the achievement of the necessary reform requirements. But Bosnia's politicians have long shown little willingness to expend political capital to meet EU and NATO standards, although the EU took the view that the pull-effect of possible Union membership would prove strong enough to maintain momentum for reform in Bosnia.

The article examines the main domestic conflicts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, traces the attempts and failures of the international community and the EU in solving the political problems of a divided state. Furthermore it shows that a long-term common strategy must be developed immediately and demonstrated as a catalyst for peace and stability in Bosnia and the whole Balkans. Therefore, the international community should remain in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the region for the next decade.

Saša Gavrić / Damir Banović
Constitutional Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Procedures, Challenges, Recommendations

The Dayton Peace Agreement brought peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in 1995, but at the same time, it established one of the most complex states in the world. Due to its federal structure, institutional organization and check-and-balance mechanisms, BiH's efforts to become a functional and self-sustaining state have been blocked. Constitutional reform is without a question something that needs to be accomplished in the coming years. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg demanded a change in favour of the political rights of minorities in BiH Constitution only in December 2009.

The paper presents the normative aspects of the "Dayton" Constitution amendment procedure, and the current process of setting up state institutions being the result of the transfer of competencies from the lower levels to the state. The last two chapters discuss actual debates on future constitutional reform, also providing the authors' critical review of potential reform that could take place before, but also after the general elections in October 2010.

The federal structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, divisions of authority between state and lower levels of the government, institutions and veto-mechanisms must go through a comprehensive reform, which will in turn make BiH a country that is ready to join and equally participate in the European Union.

Sören Keil
Myth and Reality of Ethnic Federalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Generally, federalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is regarded as a mechanism of inter-ethnic power-sharing. It ensures autonomy for the Bosnian Serbs in the Republika Srpska and territorial autonomy for the Bosnian Croats in three of the ten cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Scholars of Bosnia have often blamed the flawed Dayton Constitution for the problems of political deadlock and structural deficits of Bosnia since 1995.

While, however, the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (GFAP) created a highly decentralized federal state, it did not create a pure ethnic federation, in which all political conflict is reduced to inter-ethnic bargaining. Instead, the GFAP created a mixture of ethnic and territorial federalism. However, it is still the practice of the Bosnian parties that reduces "Dayton-Bosnia" to inter-ethnic power-sharing and all political conflict to a conflict between the different Bosnian peoples.

It is also in this context that the international peace and state builders failed in Bosnia, since they did not manage to encourage the development of a party system that offered alternatives to ethnically homogenous parties. This needs to be a key lesson learnt also for international efforts of state-building in Kosovo and elsewhere.