



Europe attacked over Balkans failure

Report calls for abolition of Ashdown role in Bosnia and radical change of regional policy that has 'reached a dead end'

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Ten years of international policy and peacekeeping in former Yugoslavia have reached a dead-end in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Serbia, with the region threatening to turn into a "marginalised black hole", a panel of senior politicians and experts have concluded.

Urging a radical overhaul of international and EU policy in the Balkans, the damning indictment calls for the abolition of Lord Ashdown's office of high representative in Bosnia, a post with dictatorial powers now seen to be hampering rather than helping Bosnia's democratic development.

The report denounces the UN administration of the southern province of Kosovo, calling for the Albanian majority territory to be granted a form of independence. The loose union of Serbia and Montenegro in the common state helped into being two years ago by EU policy-makers, is also deemed a failure and should be scrapped, the report says.

Criticising most of the pillars of international policy in former Yugoslavia since the end of the Bosnia and Kosovo wars, the report calls on Brussels to come up with a strategy to bring all the countries into the EU within a decade.

"The international community and the EU in particular have been engaged in the Balkans to an extent which is unprecedented," says the report, by the International Commission on the Balkans. "But despite the scale of the assistance effort, the international community has failed to offer a convincing political perspective to the societies in the region.

"The future of Kosovo is undecided, the future of Macedonia is uncertain, and the future of Serbia is unclear. We run the real risk of an explosion of Kosovo, an implosion of Serbia and new fractures in the foundations of Bosnia and Macedonia."

The 65-page report is based on a 12-month study by the panel of Balkan experts and politicians including six former prime ministers headed by Giuliano Amato of Italy.

The emphasis is on urging the EU to provide persuasive promises of EU membership to Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia.

Despite ploughing billions into the region and Europe dispatching "almost half of its deployable forces" to the Balkans, the medium-term returns have been meagre - "a mixture of weak states and international protectorates", zero growth, pervasive corruption, high unemployment, and public disaffection.

Although the report says that "a shift in international and Brussels thinking" is needed to break the impasse, Mr Amato sounds pessimistic that Europe is up to the challenge. "Enlargement fatigue hovers over the European capitals these days," he said.

But if Brussels fails, the EU will become bogged down as a "neo-colonial power" in Kosovo and Bosnia, the report warns. "The real choice the EU is facing in the Balkans is: enlargement or empire."

Lord Ashdown's absolute powers in Bosnia should be scrapped and his role should be taken by Brussels officials in charge of EU enlargement.

The most volatile flashpoint in the Balkans, however, is Kosovo, the status of which remains open six years after Nato drove Serb forces out of the province. The UN mission "bears a substantial share of the blame for the failure in Kosovo _ a failure which can be explained but should not be tolerated."

The report says Kosovo should be made independent by next year, albeit with international officials still empowered to enforce minority and human rights. The expected fierce Serbian resistance to such proposals should be bought off with EU promises of membership for Belgrade.

The report calls for an EU-Balkan summit next year aimed at producing "road maps" for each of the countries joining the EU.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1458895,00.html>