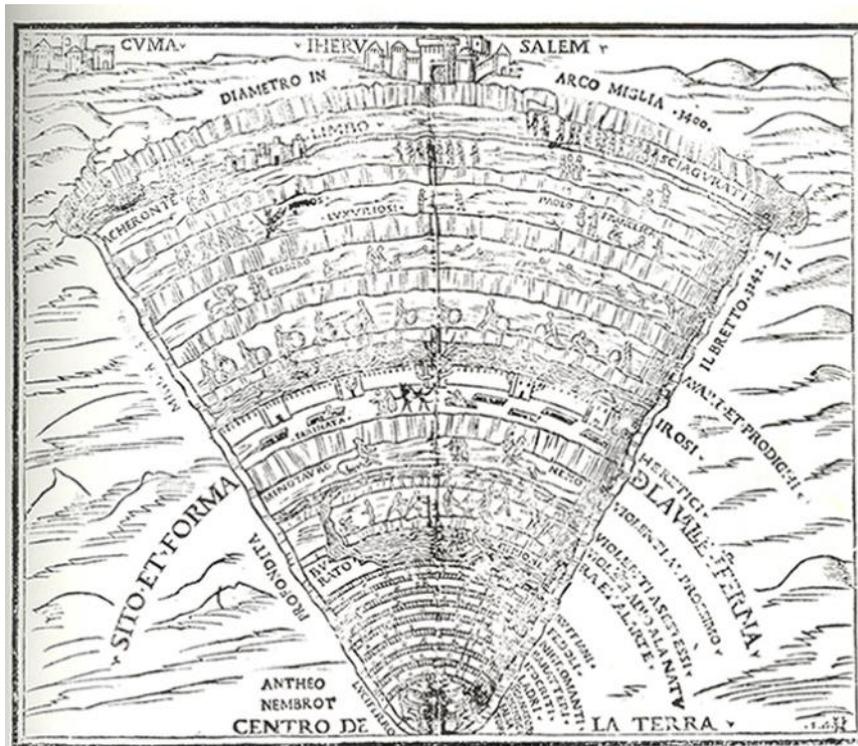


ESCAPING THE FIRST CIRCLE OF HELL

or

The secret behind Bosnian reforms



Dante's circles of hell – for the guilty and the innocent

ESI Report
Berlin – Istanbul – Sarajevo
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Executive Summary

One popular idea about Bosnia and Herzegovina among European observers is that Newton's first law of motion applies to its politics: this law says that an object at rest will stay at rest unless acted upon by an outside force. For Bosnian politics, that outside force has to be the international community.

In February 2016, this logic was upended. The chairman of the Bosnian presidency, Dragan Covic, submitted his country's EU membership application, demonstrating that Bosnian leaders had their own will, determination and the ability to agree amongst themselves to push for something that they considered to be in the best interest of their country. In Brussels, European Commissioner Johannes Hahn praised the Bosnian government for having undertaken "a lot of work in order to submit a credible application." And following the Brussels ceremony, Bosnian leaders from different ethnic groups and various political parties vowed to do whatever is necessary to obtain official EU candidate status by the end of 2017.

This objective is ambitious, but it is achievable. The next step in the process would be a decision by the 28 EU member states to ask the European Commission to prepare an opinion (*avis*) on the Bosnian application. In the case of Croatia in 2003, it took two months for EU member states to ask the Commission to do this.

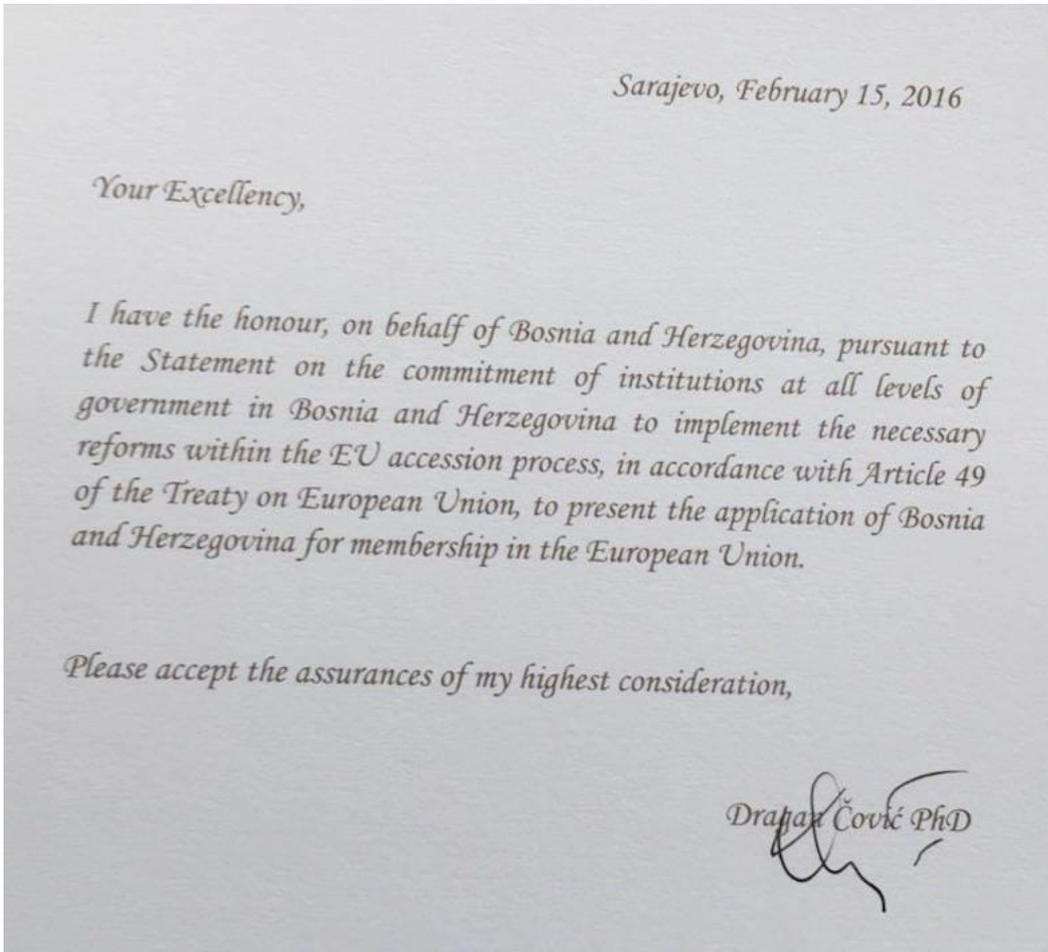
One debate in EU capitals today is whether Bosnia is "ready for the next step." Now that Bosnians have applied for accession, the EU has an obvious way to find out: to give Bosnia a questionnaire, the first step towards preparing an opinion, without delay. The conventional wisdom that Bosnians cannot coordinate when it comes to EU matters is wrong. The history of relations between Bosnia and the EU since 2000 shows that whenever Bosnian institutions were seriously challenged by the EU to co-ordinate, they were able to do so – to the surprise of their European counterparts, who sometimes acted as though Bosnia was expected to fail. This report explores this history and sets the record straight.

Receiving a questionnaire is *not* a reward for political leaders that they should be made to earn. It is like a voucher for three months in a boot camp for civil servants, with a program designed by ex-Royal Marines: the equivalent of circuit training, obstacle courses, swimming and boxing. You put yourself through this only if you are highly motivated and believe in the process. Bosnia's Europeanisers in the public administration do not need more carrots and sticks to work on Bosnia's EU agenda. They need to be taken seriously. Then they and their colleagues will respond to challenges professionally.

It is high time for the EU to treat Bosnia as a normal candidate: strict but fair. The sooner the Bosnian civil service at all levels of the state can get to work on answering the questionnaire to obtain candidate status, the better for Bosnian citizens, state institutions and for the EU itself. The EU should encourage the ambition of the Bosnian presidency, not thwart it. This is a bet that the EU should be willing to make now, in its own interest. It is high time.

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A theory of Bosnian motion

One popular idea about Bosnia and Herzegovina (here: Bosnia) among European observers is that Newton's first law of motion applies to its politics: this law says that an object at rest will stay at rest, unless acted upon by an outside force. For Bosnian politics, that outside force has to be the international community. For anything to happen in Bosnia, outsiders need to use a bunch of carrots or wield sticks, since Bosnian leaders and civil servants lack any intrinsic motivation to carry out reforms.

In February 2016, this logic was upended when the chairman of the Bosnian presidency, Dragan Covic, submitted his country's EU membership application to the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU.¹ No outsider had asked for this. On the contrary: when the three members of the presidency decided to submit a membership application in summer 2015, this triggered many warnings.² EU foreign ministers and diplomats cautioned that it would be too early. Some Bosnian intellectuals considered the very idea of Bosnia applying farcical, painting a picture of Bosnia as a hopeless and doomed place, and a society "where ethnic tensions seem to be even greater than 20 years ago".³ The Bosnian presidency stuck to its goal, however, and Bosnia's foreign minister and his deputy took to the road to argue in favor of the application.⁴ It was as if Newton's law no longer applied: Bosnian leaders had their own will, determination and the ability to agree amongst themselves to push for something that they considered to be in the best interest of their country.

The ceremony, which took place in Brussels on 15 February, lasted thirteen minutes.⁵ And the letter which Covic handed to the Dutch foreign minister Bert Koenders contained only a single paragraph:

"Your Excellency,

I have the honour, on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, pursuant to the Statement on the commitment of institutions at all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement the necessary reforms within the EU accession process, in accordance with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, to present the application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for membership in the European Union.

*Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration,
Dragan Covic"*

The letter referred to article 49 of the EU treaty, one of the most important commitments the EU has ever made:

¹ Presidency of BiH, ["Predsjedavajući Predsjedništva BiH predao zahtjev za članstvo u EU"](#), 15 February 2016.

² Presidency of BiH, ["Održana 10. redovna sjednica Predsjedništva BiH"](#), 23 July 2015; ATV, ["1 na 1"](#), 14 February 2016.

³ *Klix*, ["EU u kiln, bh. vlasti u plocu: Jasno poruceno da je rano za podnosenje aplikacije za članstvo u EU"](#) 1 February 2016; *Mreza mira*, ["Bosnia's Intellectuals, Activists Call on Politicians, EU to Act up"](#), 15 February 2016.

⁴ *Nezavisne novine*, ["Crnadak: BiH zeli da bude dio evropskog rjesenja"](#), 8 October 2015; *Dnevni avaz*, ["Crnadak u Londonu razgovarao s ministrom Hammondom"](#), 11 January 2016; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of BiH, ["Saopštenja"](#).

⁵ EU Delegation to BiH, YouTube channel, ["Ceremonija podnosenja zahtjeva BiH za članstvo u EU"](#), 15 February 2016.

“Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union.”⁶

The effort paid off. In Brussels, European Commissioner Johannes Hahn praised the Bosnian government for having undertaken “a lot of work in order to submit a credible application.”⁷ And in a joint letter, Federica Mogherini and Hahn noted:

“The achievements of this past year on a broad reform agenda are impressive. In fact, we would not be here today if it were not for the country’s leadership.”⁸

Following the Brussels ceremony, Bosnian leaders from different ethnic groups and various political parties vowed to do whatever is necessary to obtain official EU candidate status by the end of 2017.⁹ This objective is ambitious but achievable. Neighboring Croatia went from its application to candidate status in sixteen months. For Montenegro it took two years. Why should Bosnia not aim to do better?

This paper argues that it would be both fair and wise for the European Union to take Bosnian leaders at their word. It urges EU member states to take seriously Bosnia’s commitment to move forward, and to proceed to the next step in the process without delays. This next step in the process would be a unanimous decision by the Council of the EU (the 28 EU member states) to ask the European Commission to prepare an opinion (in French: *avis*) on the application. In the case of Croatia in 2003, it took two months for EU member states to ask the Commission to do this.¹⁰ There is no good reason for this to take any longer in the case of Bosnia in 2016.

Following the Council’s decision, the European Commission will present a long list of detailed questions related to all segments of EU accession to the Bosnian government. This is the best possible test of the credibility of Bosnia’s commitment. It will also test the ability of Bosnian institutions to cooperate. The ceremony in Brussels put the ball of Bosnia’s European progress in the EU court. The sooner the ball is returned to Bosnian leaders, the better for the country, the EU and the credibility of the enlargement process as both strict and fair.



What really happened?
Handing over Bosnia’s EU membership application

⁶ Lisbon Treaty, [Article 49](#).

⁷ EU Delegation to BiH, You Tube channel, “[Ceremonija podnošenja zahtjeva BiH za članstvo u EU](#)”, 15 February 2016.

⁸ European Commission, “[Joint Statement by High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn on the occasion of Bosnia and Herzegovina submitting membership application](#)”, 15 February 2016.

⁹ Mreza mira, “[Bosnia’s Intellectuals, Activists Call on Politicians, EU to Act Up](#)”, 15 February 2016; Democratization Policy Council, Kurt Bassuener, “[The Application Shakedown](#)”, 9 February 2016; *Glas Srpske*, “[Covic: Kandidatsko status 2017.](#)”, 15 February 2016.

¹⁰ EU Delegation to Montenegro, “[The EU in Montenegro](#)”.

Civil servant boot camp

Receiving a questionnaire is not a reward for political leaders. It is more like a voucher for three months in a boot camp on the island of St. Vincent in the Caribbean.¹¹ You have to pay your own way to get there. Once you arrive you take part in a program designed by ex-Royal Marines: circuit training, obstacle courses, swimming and boxing. But you do this because you are motivated, you have an objective, and you think it will help you.

Macedonia received its questionnaire in October 2004 (1,900 questions). Radmila Sekerinska was then deputy prime minister in charge for European integration:

“The questionnaire is an x-ray. It asks basic and sophisticated questions about the country, its structure, its laws, its problems, its people, its statistics, everything. But it is not a solely technical exercise. It makes you see your weaknesses and to come up with your view on how to fix them. So, it’s diagnosis and cure ... a combination of fact finding, political planning and strategy.”¹²

Later, Sekerinska recalled:

“This exercise exposed all the problems that Macedonia has swept under the carpet for some time because they were not very popular to deal with ... I don’t know whether it was three or four thousand people that worked all together, but the number was really big.

Every question had several people in charge and the responsibility was personal, it was not just the anonymous ministry or the anonymous civil servant from ministry X. It was a person with a name and a background and they felt that they are part of an important puzzle, that they are not anonymous and that their effort will be visible. So at the end there was a strong team spirit among people who didn’t know each other, but who communicated all the time via Internet, email and telephone.”¹³



Radmila Sekerinska (Macedonia’s deputy PM for European integration 2002-2006) and Gordana Djurovic (Montenegro’s deputy PM and then minister for European integration 2006-2010)

Montenegro received its questionnaire (2,800 questions) in July 2009.¹⁴ Gordana Djurovic, the minister for European integration in charge of coordinating the responses, looked back at an experience very similar to that of Macedonia five years before:

¹¹ Reuters, “[Top ten Fitness Boot Camps in the world](#)”, 18 January 2013.

¹² ESI, “[Radmila Sekerinska – earning EU candidate status for Macedonia](#)”, 28 July 2010.

¹³ ESI, “[Radmila Sekerinska – earning EU candidate status for Macedonia](#)”, 28 July 2010.

¹⁴ European Commission, “[European Commission presents questionnaire to assess the country’s application to join the EU](#)”, 22 July 2009.

“We began working on the questionnaire on the 1st of August. It meant no holiday and whole days of work in 40 degree temperatures. We completed it as planned, in four months. But then we received additional questions and sent answers in April 2010. We responded in three cycles, almost 6,000 pages, with 11,000 pages of annexes, so the whole package was about 17,000 pages.

For us it was a very difficult period, because the questions were very demanding. It was the biggest administrative project ever organised by the Montenegrin administration. We are very proud of how we managed to do it, given that our administration is the smallest in the region.”¹⁵

Again, the questionnaire forced the administration to look into every corner of Montenegrin public policy. Concerning environmental policy alone, the European Commission asked 94 questions.¹⁶ Questions such as:

“Please provide basic information about facts and figures on waste generation and management: a) quantity, type and origin of waste generated per year, b) number and performance of waste treatment facilities, c) figures on export and import of waste (quality, type)”

“What arrangements are in place to monitor the quality and life-cycle greenhouse gas impact of petrol, diesel, other gas oil and heavy fuel oil?”

To answer another question, on water quality, Montenegro had to provide details on legislation, standards and how they ensure quality control.¹⁷ In response to questions about communicable diseases, the European Commission demanded details on how the system for monitoring diseases in Montenegro operates.¹⁸ There were 28 questions about food safety, requiring Montenegro to describe the structure and organization of all institutions and agencies in charge of food safety, and their plans for improvements.¹⁹ Montenegro was asked to describe the process of recruitment of civil servants,²⁰ to provide statistics on all training civil servants received in three years and on how many women were in which positions in the public administration.²¹ Handling this amount of information is challenging. Gordana Djurovic recalled:

“IT support was crucial. We created a specific portal as a sharing point for all line ministries. I was “Big Brother” and monitored everybody’s results daily on an internal government portal. They had authorised access from their offices – about 800 authorised addresses in our Montenegrin administration – so every day they could enter and answer questions or, based on group work, write replies. Then it would be checked and sent to the verification commission and then finally to the government.”²²

There was also the problem of translation:

“Translation was a major issue. We organised a public tender, an invitation for all local translators. Then, based on EC criteria, we tested them, and we selected 200 translators that

¹⁵ ESI, [“Gordana Djurovic – independently towards the EU”](#), 30 July 2010.

¹⁶ Government of Montenegro, [“Questionnaire: 27 Environment”](#), December 2009.

¹⁷ Government of Montenegro, [“Questionnaire: 27 Environment”](#), December 2009.

¹⁸ Government of Montenegro, [“Questionnaire: 28 Consumer and health protection”](#), December 2009.

¹⁹ Government of Montenegro, [“Questionnaire: 12 Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy”](#), December 2009.

²⁰ Government of Montenegro, [“Questionnaire: 1 Democracy and the rule of law”](#), December 2009.

²¹ Government of Montenegro, [“Questionnaire: 26 Education and culture”](#), December 2009.

²² ESI, [“Gordana Djurovic – independently towards the EU”](#), 30 July 2010.

would be involved in the process of translation. A translation centre, which was open 24/7. We adopted a manual for translation where the translators agreed how they would translate specific EU words or names of institutions and laws to have unified translations.”²³

Everything that happened in Macedonia and Montenegro (and before that in Croatia) when answering the questionnaire would be a huge boost to the capacity of Bosnian reformers: to do an x-ray of various policy fields in light of European standards; to have a thorough diagnosis of administrative shortcomings; to expose problems in cooperation and information sharing between different levels of the state involved in the same sectors; to strengthen the team spirit among civil servants.

This is a challenge, and it is work: no Bosnian leader will gain votes because of it, and no political party will run on a platform of having participated in “drafting answers” for the EU. And yet, this exercise is likely to be a transformative experience for a young administration. It is the kind of challenge that brings out the best in any civil service; and it allows civil servants to prove wrong those who doubt its ability to perform. Which, it turns out, Bosnian civil servants have already done repeatedly over the years.

Can Bosnians coordinate? Yes (Part one)

One debate in the corridors of Brussels and EU capitals today is whether Bosnia is “ready for the next step.” Now that Bosnians have applied for accession, should the EU not dampen their newly-found enthusiasm, and insist that, well, while it took only two months in the case of Croatia to get from the application to the Council requesting a questionnaire, Bosnia is “not Croatia”. To begin with, everybody assumes that its leaders are incapable of cooperation. Should Bosnians not prove first – before receiving their questions – that they are serious?

The idea that Bosnians cannot coordinate when it comes to EU matters is a stubborn and widely spread conventional wisdom. It is also wrong. The history of relations between Bosnia and the EU since 2000 provides a simple and clear answer to the question of whether Bosnians can coordinate: *whenever Bosnian institutions were seriously challenged by the EU to co-ordinate, they were able to do so and surprised their European counterparts.*

Bosnians did so in 2003 when they answered their first ever EU questionnaire under prime minister Adnan Terzic. From the moment he became prime minister, in December 2002, Terzic had urged the European Commission to let Bosnia move towards negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA):

“I insisted on getting the questionnaire for a feasibility study for negotiating the SAA. I travelled and spoke to other prime ministers. Their argument was that *we were still not ready*. I insisted with Paddy Ashdown [High Representative in Bosnia 2002-2006]. I met with [Romano] Prodi, at the time the Commission president, and asked for the questionnaire.”²⁴

Terzic, a member of the main Bosniak party SDA (Party for Democratic Action), was born in 1960 and grew up in Travnik, a town in the mountainous Lasva valley of Central Bosnia. His son was born in December 1992, on the eve of the outbreak of fighting in Central Bosnia. He later remembered having “no electricity, no water, not enough food, and a small baby at

²³ ESI, [“Gordana Djurovic – independently towards the EU”](#), 30 July 2010.

²⁴ ESI, [“Adnan Terzic – a unifying goal for Bosnia”](#), 31 July 2010.

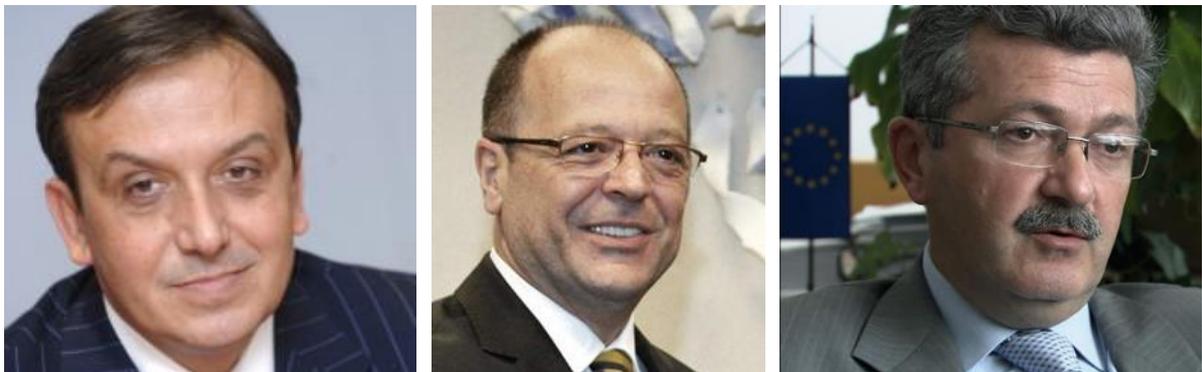
home.”²⁵ When the fighting ended in 1995, Terzic went into politics, became the mayor of Travnik and in 1996 one of two co-governors of the Central Bosnian Canton. As prime minister Terzic was convinced that the EU perspective offered the best way forward for Bosnia. He was a believer in the cause:

“During the 2002 pre-election campaign, all the parties had campaigned on integration into the EU, even the [ultra-nationalist] Serb Radical Party did. So I said, ‘Ok, let’s offer our citizens that we energetically go towards Europe by reforming society and introducing European standards.’

I was trying to find a goal that no ethnic group in Bosnia would have a problem with. At the time I did not know much about Copenhagen criteria and the enlargement process. I know that the EU has never had, and might never have, a better political instrument than enlargement. I am not sure how many EU officials are aware of how powerful an instrument this is. I don’t know how they developed it, but it has made the democratisation of the former Communist block a surprisingly resolvable issue. And I saw a chance for Bosnia in it.”²⁶

Not everyone in the international community agreed at the time, Terzic noticed:

“It took a bit of time for the OHR [Office of the High Representative, then Paddy Ashdown] and other international institutions to accept this, because the elections had been won by the so-called national parties [including his SDA] and expectations were that we would ruin Bosnia.”²⁷



Adnan Terzic (Bosnian PM 2002-2007), Igor Davidovic (Bosnian SAA negotiator 2005-2008) and Osman Topcagic (DEI director 2003-2008)

Terzic assembled a team committed to moving the country closer to the EU. Many of them continued to be central to this effort for years: Osman Topcagic (a Bosniak), Lidija Topic (a Croat), Igor Davidovic (a Serb). Terzic’s foreign minister was Mladen Ivanic, today the Serb member of the Bosnian presidency.

In February 2003 Osman Topcagic became the first director of Bosnia’s new Directorate for European Integration (DEI) and a key player in the story of Bosnian EU reforms. Like Terzic, he believed in the European destiny of his country. His second daughter was born in 1984, the year Sarajevo hosted the Winter Olympics. During the war, when Topcagic became general

²⁵ ESI, [“Adnan Terzic – a unifying goal for Bosnia”](#), 31 July 2010.

²⁶ ESI, [“Adnan Terzic – a unifying goal for Bosnia”](#), 31 July 2010.

²⁷ ESI, [“Adnan Terzic – a unifying goal for Bosnia”](#), 31 July 2010.

secretary at the ministry of foreign affairs, he lost his sister, who was killed by shell fire, and two cousins. After the war he served as Bosnian ambassador to the UK and as a diplomat in the Bosnian mission to NATO. The experience of the war turned him into a fervent supporter of Bosnian membership of the EU. Accession, he hoped, would calm ethnic tensions and improve the economy:

“The principles on which the EU is built and established are, I think, very deeply understood and accepted by Bosnians. Peace, stability, economic prosperity. With the experience of the war, of suffering going on for so long, we embraced this idea wholeheartedly.”²⁸

Osman Topcagic remembered how inspiring this was to the government in early 2003:

“This was a period of great enthusiasm. During my visit in Brussels in March 2003, I was given a questionnaire with 346 questions. It took us two weeks to translate them and decide which institutions should prepare the answers.”²⁹

The 346 questions were meant to assess whether Bosnia was prepared for negotiations of a Stabilisation and Accession Agreement (SAA):

“Some institutions were reluctant to take on this duty. They were asking, ‘How shall we do it? Can we do it?’ We had been given quite a short time to prepare the answers, but we did it. I also remember: the whole Council of Ministers went to Neum [on the Adriatic coast] for a weekend to review the first set of 70 or 80 answers.”³⁰

Adnan Terzic, the prime minister, emphasised team building:

“I assembled all the responsible ministers and the head of the Directorate for European Integration [Topcagic], and we went to Neum and sat down for three days, taking a close look at what we had and unifying the answers.

We wanted to show that we were aware of the meaning of this process, that this was not just the polite and mindless completion of a crossword puzzle, but that it was a preparation for the government to become aware of the inevitability of reforms. For us, this was a great experience and perfect preparation to design a strategy towards Europe.”³¹

Topcagic and this team also saw this task as an opportunity:

“We wanted to do a good job. At the end we wanted to present it properly, so we bound the answers and found very good editors, native English speakers. I think this was positively noted by the Commission.”³²

Answering questions on many different aspects of public policy required coordination between the central government and other levels of government. Terzic remembered how this was made possible:

“The two entity prime ministers [the late Ahmed Hadzipasic, a Bosniak and Dragan Mikerevic, a Serb] were very good. The three of us worked together. I took time to talk to

²⁸ ESI, [“Osman Topcagic – from war to European integration in Bosnia”](#), 22 February 2010.

²⁹ ESI, [“Osman Topcagic – from war to European integration in Bosnia”](#), 22 February 2010.

³⁰ ESI, [“Osman Topcagic – from war to European integration in Bosnia”](#), 22 February 2010.

³¹ ESI, [“Adnan Terzic – a unifying goal for Bosnia”](#), 31 July 2010.

³² ESI, [“Osman Topcagic – from war to European integration in Bosnia”](#), 22 February 2010.

them and to their ministers. I had regular meetings with the ministers at state-level and with the entity governments. We analysed the problems and discussed them. I understood their problems, fears and capacities.

We also had meetings on Mrakovica [at the Kozara National Park in Republika Srpska]. Sometimes we sat there for seven, eight hours. But we always finished these meetings, irrespective of how difficult and dramatic they were, with a new strategy how to improve the situation in Bosnia.”³³

Within only three months Bosnians collected all answers and sent them to the European Commission.³⁴

Shortly afterwards, Bosnia surprised the EU a second time. In November 2003 the European Commission presented a feasibility study which listed 16 areas where progress was needed before negotiations for a Stabilisation Agreement could be opened.³⁵ The study noted that Bosnia was expected “to implement these on schedule during the course of 2004.”³⁶ Adnan Terzic recalled the low expectations European leaders had about Bosnia:

“I heard that they were making bets in Brussels that we would not be able to meet the requirements in five years. And so we got organised.

I piled enormous pressure on all the ministers that had to do something, in particular those that had to draft a law. We managed to achieve progress in half a year. I think we proved that our wish for European integration was not just rhetoric, but the essence of our work. Our intention was to show that we were aware that we needed to work to reach a position where we would become a serious partner for the EU.”³⁷

Osman Topcagic remembered how this challenge energized his team of civil servants:

“The EU came with a list of 16 priority areas where significant progress was required before we could open SAA negotiations. And that was really the signal for an unprecedented mobilisation of resources in Bosnia. We arrived at a list of 45 or 46 laws that needed to be adopted, as well as some 27 institutions that needed to be established, upgraded or modified. It was a big reform effort.”³⁸

The areas where reforms were needed were clearly defined. Discussing the need for an “effective judiciary”, for instance, the EU demanded that Bosnia:

“adopt legislation establishing a single High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council for BiH with the aim of consolidating appointment authority over the Entity judiciaries and

³³ ESI, [“Adnan Terzic – a unifying goal for Bosnia”](#), 31 July 2010.

³⁴ Directorate for EU Integration of BiH, [“Pregled aktivnosti Direkcije za evropske integracije 2003. – 2006.”](#), January 2007.

³⁵ European Commission, [“Report from the Commission to the Council on the preparedness of Bosnia and Herzegovina to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union”](#), 18 November 2003.

³⁶ European Commission, [“Report from the Commission to the Council on the preparedness of Bosnia and Herzegovina to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union”](#), 18 November 2003.

³⁷ ESI, [“Adnan Terzic – a unifying goal for Bosnia”](#), 31 July 2010.

³⁸ ESI, [“Osman Topcagic – from war to European integration in Bosnia”](#), 22 February 2010.

strengthening the independence of the judiciary throughout BiH. Provide appropriate staff and funding for the State Court.”³⁹

In March 2004, the two entity prime ministers and ministers of justice agreed on the transfer of some entity competences to the state level. Two months later, in June, the parliament adopted legislation establishing a single High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council.⁴⁰

All of this required a major effort of coordination. On 3 December 2003, the Bosnian government adopted a “decision on methods for realization of coordination in the process of EU accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”⁴¹ It established a network of EU coordinators in state institutions, in the entities and in the Brcko district. EU coordinators then met on average twice a month, setting priorities, following up on implementation and preparing meetings with the EU.⁴² The state level DEI under Osman Topcagic was the main coordinator. It explained priorities, forwarded EU documents, asked for information and proposed common positions. Topcagic later explained:

“One of our first decisions in 2003 was to establish a coordination mechanism. Because we alone, without the European Commission, realised that we need something like this.”⁴³

On 21 October 2005, the Commission assessed what Bosnia had done. It listed many concrete achievements:

“The Directorate for European Integration is now operational.”

“Co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has seen important progress.”

“New State-level Ministries and institutions have been established.”

“Bosnia and Herzegovina has made considerable progress in building up State-level law enforcement capacity.”

“The Indirect Tax Authority is now operational, as well as the new Customs Authority.”⁴⁴

The Commission concluded that “the perspective to negotiate an SAA has acted as a powerful catalyser to implement reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina” and recommended the opening of SAA negotiations.⁴⁵

³⁹ European Commission, [“Report from the Commission to the Council on the preparedness of Bosnia and Herzegovina to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union”](#), 18 November 2003.

⁴⁰ *Pravnik.ba*, [“Historijat VSTV-a”](#), undated.

⁴¹ Official Gazette of BiH, [“Odluka o nacinu ostvarivanja koordinacije u procesu priključenja Bosne i Hercegovine Evropskoj uniji”](#), 3 December 2003.

⁴² Directorate for EU Integration of BiH, [“Pregled aktivnosti Direkcije za evropske integracije 2003. – 2006.”](#), January 2007.

⁴³ *BHRT*, [“Novi ugao”](#), 12 February 2016.

⁴⁴ European Commission, [“Communication from the Commission to the Council on the progress achieved by Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing the priorities identified in the ‘Feasibility Study on the preparedness of Bosnia and Herzegovina to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union’”](#), 21 October 2005.

⁴⁵ European Commission, [“Communication from the Commission to the Council on the progress achieved by Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing the priorities identified in the ‘Feasibility Study on the preparedness of Bosnia and Herzegovina to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union’”](#), 21 October 2005.

In 2005, Bosnians had a third opportunity to surprise the EU. On 25 November 2005, the SAA negotiations with Bosnia were launched in Sarajevo.⁴⁶ Osman Topcagic described the hopes that this evoked:

“Olli Rehn came, the commissioner for enlargement. We had invited the Philharmonic Orchestra, and there were speeches. The ceremony took place in the biggest room of our parliament building. It was filled with people with smiles on their faces, a very nice and good atmosphere.”⁴⁷

Adnan Terzic was also thrilled to declare that “today we are celebrating our exit from a tunnel with no perspective.”⁴⁸ The Bosnian government appointed Igor Davidovic, a Serb, as Bosnia’s chief negotiator. Davidovic was born in 1960 in Tuzla. He then spent most of his life in Banja Luka where he obtained a law degree in 1982. As war broke out, Davidovic’s second daughter was born. In the first years after the war Davidovic was a director of a Banja Luka based company for international transport. In January 1998, he was asked to serve as Milorad Dodik’s (then RS prime minister, now RS president) chief of cabinet. From 2000 to 2005, Davidovic was the Bosnian ambassador in Washington. Returning to Bosnia, Davidovic believed in EU integration as the way forward for his country:

“That was the time of great expectations and hope. A decade after the war we believed that the SAA and EU accession process would help us reform and transform into a prosperous European country. I expected Bosnia to quickly receive candidate status and to open negotiations.

In those days everyone, and I underline everyone, from the municipal level to the council of ministers, believed that the SAA negotiations and the EU path are the most important task. We got support whenever we asked for any information. And everyone was interested in learning about the EU. I remember visiting municipalities and universities to talk about the SAA and the EU.

It was not because someone from Brussels asked us to do this. It was because there was genuine interest and enthusiasm around this topic. And the media were more interested in the SAA negotiations than in any other topic.”⁴⁹

Davidovic expanded his multi-ethnic negotiating team:

“Some were already experts but many of us developed and became EU experts as we negotiated. We were all dedicated and we were praised for what we were doing. Not only by our politicians, but also by the EU, the European Commission and member states. Despite some initial scepticism by the Commission we were treated as equal partners. Obviously we lacked knowledge and experience on EU affairs, but we were able to compensate for this by learning hard and being professional.”⁵⁰

At the time, in 2005, the young Bosnian Croat diplomat Lidija Topic went to Brussels as the head of Bosnia’s mission to the EU:

⁴⁶ Delegation of the EU to BiH, “[Key Dates](#)”, undated.

⁴⁷ ESI, “[Osman Topcagic – from war to European integration in Bosnia](#)”, 22 February 2010.

⁴⁸ Council of Ministers of BiH, “[U Sarajevu zvanično otvoreni pregovori o Sporazumu o stabilizaciji i pridruivanju BiH sa Europskom unijom](#)”, 25 November 2005.

⁴⁹ ESI interview with Igor Davidovic, 29 May 2015.

⁵⁰ ESI interview with Igor Davidovic, 29 May 2015.

“The SAA negotiations were great. Of course, they were a lot of work, but we could show that we could move in a positive direction. There was huge doubt whether we in Bosnia and Herzegovina had the capacity to do this. It was a success for us to show that we did.”⁵¹

By February 2006, the then European enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn commented that the talks “went very well. Our Bosnian partners had prepared thoroughly.”⁵² On 8 November 2006, the Commission wrote that “negotiations have progressed well from a technical point of view and a substantial part of the text of the future SAA has been agreed.”⁵³ The same day Rehn told journalists that “the negotiating team is competent and professional.”⁵⁴ Negotiations were concluded in December 2006.

Can Bosnians coordinate? Yes (Part two)

Bosnian efforts to coordinate reforms did not stop then. In 2008, the five Western Balkan countries that were invited to meet a long list of difficult conditions to qualify for visa-free travel to the EU.⁵⁵ In May 2009, after Albania, Bosnia was assessed as performing worst on those conditions. The European Commission duly decided not to offer visa free travel to Bosnia.

This triggered dramatic progress from May to September 2009; by which time Bosnia had caught up with its more successful neighbors (Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia). It required a summer of hard work on the part of its leaders, to hammer out a series of compromises in the sensitive area of security policy – precisely the kinds of compromise that outsiders routinely say Bosnian politicians are incapable of. It required successful coordination across multiple institutions.

The progress was remarkable. In May 2009, when the Commission first issued its assessments of conditions for visa liberalisation, many important laws had not been adopted: on border control, control of weapons and military equipment, international legal aid in criminal matters, prevention of money laundering and financing of terrorist activities. Two of these laws had been before parliament for over a year. In June 2009, the Bosnian parliament adopted all four, in urgent procedure.

In May 2009, data on lost and stolen Bosnian passports was still uploaded into Interpol’s database manually and was often incomplete. By September 2009, a new automated system had been put in place to forward this information immediately to Interpol, once a theft or loss was reported. On 23 September 2009, nine institutions involved in the integrated management of Bosnia’s borders, from the border police to the phyto-sanitary service, signed an agreement on mutual cooperation. For years, police work in Bosnia was hampered by inadequate exchange of data, such as of criminal records, fingerprints and registered firearms. By September 2009 there was agreement on which types of data to exchange. An *exchange server* connected all police stations to enable instant access to the information.

Finally, the longest and most impressive exercise in Bosnian reform coordination across different levels of government lasted from 2004 until 2012. In June 2004, the EU adopted a so-

⁵¹ ESI, [“Lidija Topic – a Bosnian sculptor in Brussels”](#), 7 February 2011.

⁵² EU Delegation to the OUN, [“Perspectives for Bosnia and Herzegovina – Speech by EU Commissioner Rehn”](#), 17 February 2006.

⁵³ European Commission, [“Bosnia and Herzegovina 2006 Progress Report”](#), 8 November 2006.

⁵⁴ SEETV, [“Interview with Olli Rehn”](#), 8 November 2006.

⁵⁵ ESI, [“Bosnia’s visa breakthrough and the power of Europe”](#), 29 September 2009. Kosovo was not offered to participate in this process at the time.

called “European Partnership” with Bosnia. This was, according to the European Commission at the time:

“the *main instrument* for assisting the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in realising their country’s European perspective ... Its aim is to identify priority areas where further efforts and reforms are required.”⁵⁶

The 2004 partnership had 53 priorities. In 2006, it increased to 103 priorities. It grew further in 2008 to a list of 177 priorities.⁵⁷ To meet these, Bosnia was asked to develop “a timetable and specific measures.”⁵⁸ In 2007, the Bosnian Directorate for European Integration (DEI) wrote that the “implementation of priorities from European Partnership determines the speed of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s progress towards the final goal, candidate status and full membership in the EU.”⁵⁹ In April 2008, the Council called on all political forces in Bosnia “to unite their efforts to pursue with strong determination” the priorities set out in the European Partnership.⁶⁰ Annual EU progress reports were meant to review reforms in light of this partnership.⁶¹

Again, Bosnian institutions responded. On 6 October 2008, the Bosnian government under prime minister Nikola Spiric (a Bosnian Serb) adopted a “2008 to 2012 action plan for the implementation of priorities.”⁶² In 2010, the government, still led by Spiric, adopted a revised version of the action plan.⁶³

Bosnian institutions structured their work around the goals in the European Partnership. The DEI divided the 177 priorities into 1,072 specific measures. It identified a state, entity or cantonal institution responsible for each.⁶⁴

This involved a lot of coordination. DEI consulted cantonal, entity and state levels. There were EU coordinators at all levels of government who were involved.⁶⁵ DEI also developed an IT database for all 1,072 measures and for follow-up activities. Srdjan Cvijetic, the head of the division for strategy and integration policies, told ESI:

“Negotiating all this with institutions took a lot of time and energy, explaining to all of them what was expected. Developing our internal database, I would say, was our biggest priority at that time.”⁶⁶

Around 150 institutions at all levels of government were to inform DEI every six months on any progress achieved. Cvijetic’s role was to follow up. DEI reported on the implementation of

⁵⁶ European Commission, “[European Partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)”, undated.

⁵⁷ Council of the EU, “[Council Decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)”, 18 February 2008.

⁵⁸ Council of the EU, “[Council Decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)”, 18 February 2008.

⁵⁹ Directorate for European Integration of BiH, “[Pregled aktivnosti Direkcije za evropske integracije 2003. – 2006.](#)”, January 2007.

⁶⁰ European Commission, “[General Affairs and Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions](#)”, 29 April 2008.

⁶¹ European Commission, “[Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012 Progress Report](#)”, 10 October 2012.

⁶² Council of Ministers of BiH, “[Izvjessce o provedbi mjera Akcijskog plana za realizaciju prioriteta iz dokumenta Evropsko partnerstvo s BiH 2008. – 2012.](#)”, 2012.

⁶³ European Commission, “[Bosnia and Herzegovina 2010 Progress Report](#)”, 9 November 2010.

⁶⁴ Council of Ministers of BiH, “[Akcioni plan za realizaciju prioriteta iz dokumenta Evropsko partnerstvo sa Bosnom i Hercegovinom](#)”, 2008.

⁶⁵ Council of Ministers of BiH, “[Izvjessce o provedbi mjera Akcijskog plana za realizaciju prioriteta iz dokumenta Evropsko partnerstvo s BiH 2008. – 2012.](#)”, 2012.

⁶⁶ ESI interview with Srdjan Cvijetic, 31 March 2015.

the action plan to the Bosnian government, the state parliament and the entity and cantonal governments every six months. Darija Ramljak, the deputy director at DEI, remembered:

“For us the European Partnership was a fuel to start the motor of reforms and to keep it running for years. This was the basis to push for reforms and changes. We invested a lot of our credibility to push for these reforms at all levels.”⁶⁷

Then something strange happened. The European Partnership effort – the longest and most intense period of Bosnian reform coordination – died from European indifference.

In late 2009, DEI turned to the European Commission and asked when it could expect the next update of the European Partnership. There was no response. By the end of 2010, DEI realized that something was wrong. DEI staff later told ESI that they “had to intercept one person from the Commission in the corridors” to find out that “the European Partnership is over and that there will be no new European Partnership.” The DEI was dumbfounded. Ramljak noted:

“The way the European Partnership ended, with no official reaction or explanation from the European Commission, was a big blow to us in DEI. We invested a lot of our credibility with Bosnian and Herzegovinian institutions. We were telling them that it was important to do this. But then *in the end it did not matter*. It has certainly damaged our credibility.”⁶⁸

DEI reported for another year every six months to the Council of Ministers on these reforms. Then it gave up. In May 2012, DEI published its final report on the implementation of the European Partnership. It noted that of 1,072 measures 671 had been fully implemented, 375 partly implemented and 26 not implemented.⁶⁹ But by then, the European Commission had lost interest. The 2012 EU Progress Report made no reference to the European Partnership reforms.⁷⁰ It was as if this key, EU-inspired reform coordination mechanism had never existed.

Given this history, stretching over more than a decade, and covering a number of questionnaires, reform coordination between many levels of governments, and negotiations for the SAA, it is not clear why so many officials in the EU continue to believe that Bosnia will not be able to coordinate and will not be able to answer a questionnaire in 2016.

But will the EU take this experience into account? The myth of Bosnian intractability is remarkably persistent. In 2011, Council conclusions called upon Bosnia to adopt a “coordination mechanism”.⁷¹ In June 2012, EU enlargement commissioner Stefan Füle repeated this call.⁷² In February 2015, Federica Mogherini told Bosnian parliamentarians in Sarajevo that their priority should be “the establishment of a well-functioning coordination mechanism on EU matters ... necessary for any successful interaction with the EU.”⁷³ On 26 January 2016, the Bosnian state government adopted a decision to settle how various levels of

⁶⁷ ESI interview with Darija Ramljak, 31 March 2015.

⁶⁸ ESI interview with Darija Ramljak, 31 March 2015.

⁶⁹ Council of Ministers of BiH, [“Izvjessce o provedbi mjera Akcijskog plana za realizaciju prioriteta iz dokumenta Evropsko partnerstvo s BiH 2008. – 2012.”](#), 2012.

⁷⁰ European Commission, [“Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012 Progress Report”](#), 12 October 2012.

⁷¹ European Commission, [Bosnia and Herzegovina 2011 Progress Report](#), 12 October 2011.

⁷² European Commission, [Joint Conclusions from the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Road Map for BiH’s EU membership application](#), 27 June 2012.

⁷³ EU Delegation to Bosnia, [Speech by HR/VP Federica Mogherini at the BiH Parliamentary Assembly following the adoption of joint statement on reform commitment in the the EU accession process](#), 23 February 2015.

government would coordinate, by consensus, on all EU affairs.⁷⁴ On 15 February, commissioner Hahn noted, “we have to see how it is implemented and how it is working.”⁷⁵

In fact, the obvious lesson from Bosnia’s recent history is that this is an administration that is waiting to be challenged by the EU. Hand over the questionnaire and see what happens. Then the Commission will be able to say, based on solid evidence, if “coordination is working.”

Coordination in a federal state

It is not only in the EU, however, that the lessons of more than a decade of coordination have been forgotten. After the Bosnian state government adopted a coordination mechanism on 26 January 2016, some objected to it in Bosnia too.⁷⁶ They did so in ways that revealed a profound misunderstanding over the very purpose of coordination in a federal state.

In Bosnia, different levels of government have different competences, defined in the various constitutions. For example, the state level has exclusive competence for foreign trade. Republika Srpska has exclusive competence for agriculture. Both entities have exclusive competence for energy policy. The ten cantons in the Federation are responsible for education policy. Sometimes there are also shared competences: the Federation and cantons share competences for health care.

The decision adopted on 26 January 2016 foresees participation of representatives of all these different levels in the coordination bodies that deal with European integration.⁷⁷ It also foresees that decisions will be made “with the consensus of those present at the meetings.”⁷⁸ Representatives of different levels of government have a vote when decisions concern areas for which they have legal and constitutional competences.⁷⁹

Strangely, this decision has been criticized both by those who favour a more decentralized Bosnia and those who favour a centralized state. For Milorad Dodik, president of Republika Srpska, “it is unacceptable that decisions are made by consensus of only those present at the meeting.”⁸⁰ The government of RS even warned that it might not take part in coordination on the basis of this decision. For the Sarajevo-based Social Democratic Party, on the other hand, the decision is problematic for diametrically opposite reasons. According to SDP party chairman Nermin Niksic it amounts to a defeat of the Bosnian state (although it was drafted and accepted by the state government):

“With the inclusion of entities and cantons in EU coordination, these are being officially recognized as international actors. This decision completely undermines the state level and jeopardizes the EU path.”⁸¹

Both of these positions misunderstand the purpose of coordination.

⁷⁴ Official Gazette of BiH, “[Broj 8](#)”, 9 February 2016.

⁷⁵ EU Delegation to BiH, You Tube channel, “[Ceremonija podnosenja zahtjeva BiH za clanstvo u EU](#)”, 15 February 2016.

⁷⁶ Official Gazette of BiH, “[Broj 8](#)”, 9 February 2016.

⁷⁷ Official Gazette of BiH, “[Broj 8](#)”, 9 February 2016.

⁷⁸ Official Gazette of BiH, “[Broj 8](#)”, 9 February 2016.

⁷⁹ Official Gazette of BiH, “[Broj 8](#)”, 9 February 2016.

⁸⁰ *Nezavisne novine*, “[Dodik: Za RS ovakav mehanizam koordinacije neprihvatljiv](#)”, 22 February 2016.

⁸¹ *Nezavisne novine*, “[Niksic: Mehanizam koordinacije je jos jedan poraz drzave](#)”, 15 February 2016.

To illustrate this, take the case of the EU questionnaire. In the end, one set of answers will have to be sent to Brussels by the Bosnian state institutions. In order to produce these answers, however, input will be needed from all levels of government. In order to answer thousands of questions, there is a need for a lot of coordination between many independent institutions. There is no way the state level could even begin to answer questions concerning policy fields that fall under other level's jurisdiction, or without the support and help of these other institutions. It is essential that a coordination mechanism brings everyone to the table. If a canton (such as Sarajevo) or an entity (such as RS) would not share information, then there would be no level of government in a position to force them to do so. Answering the questionnaire requires all competent levels and institutions to provide the information that is relevant and only in their possession.

EU reforms go far beyond answering questions, of course; and soon these same institutions will also have to align their legislation with the EU acquis and adopt and implement EU-compatible policies. This is not a hierarchical relationship: the coordination mechanism does not change any of the existing constitutional realities. It is precisely *because Bosnia is a federal state* that it needs the input and support and effort of every level. Call this the search for consensus, the need to coordinate, the pressure to cooperate, or common sense: the practical challenge is obvious. Only if RS sees an interest in implementing reforms in the sectors which fall under its constitutional responsibilities will Bosnia as a whole make progress towards the EU. The same is true for cantons in the areas where they have responsibilities. The same is true for many independent agencies. It would be foolish and damaging not to involve everyone who is needed for the process to work. It is not a privilege to sit on that table, but a responsibility.

None of this is new for Bosnians, however. They have done it all before, more than once. The best way to conclude this abstract debate on "how to coordinate" is to start with a concrete task. Coordination is not an end in itself; it is a tool to reach ends which different parties desire for their own reasons. And once they work with each other, it will be obvious that a coordination mechanism is not about shifting responsibilities, but about exercising them effectively.

Escaping from limbo

In the first half of the 1990s, Bosnians found themselves in the deepest circles of hell, in a world of war, genocide and ethnic cleansing. Following the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 Bosnians were able to escape war, but have since remained trapped in a different European underworld: isolated, looked down upon, seen as hopeless and treated as such. In *Inferno*, the first book of his *Divine Comedy*, Dante describes his journey through nine circles of hell. The Bosnian predicament brings to mind the first circle of Dante's *inferno*, Limbo, which hosts "virtuous pagans struck with grief from a lack of God's presence." Pagans had the misfortune to be born at the wrong time and in the wrong place. They might be good people but, unbaptized, they could not enter purgatory. Paradise is forever closed, not because of their deeds, but because of who they are. It is time for Bosnia to be allowed to escape from Limbo.

It was high time for Bosnia to submit an application for the EU membership. It is high time for the EU to treat Bosnia as a normal candidate: strict but fair. The sooner the Bosnian civil service at all levels of the state can work on answering the questionnaire to obtain candidate status, the better for Bosnian citizens, for the EU and for the cause of reforms. The EU should encourage the ambition of the Bosnian presidency, not thwart it.

In 2012, there was already a test of how Bosnians performed in a trial run for the accession questionnaire. In late June 2012, during a so-called EU-Bosnia High Level Dialogue on Accession in Brussels, Stefan Fule, a former Czech European affairs minister and then European commissioner for enlargement, presented the Bosnian side with two lists of questions.⁸² One set – a total of 26 questions on 4 pages – concerned public procurement. (Chapter 5). Another – 129 questions on 13 pages – was about environmental policy (Chapter 27).⁸³ The point of this exercise was to:

“ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina coordinates well and replies no later than 31 October 2012 to the list of questions on selected chapters.”⁸⁴

The Directorate for European integration (DEI) in Sarajevo, the main institution in charge of EU matters, set out to coordinate providing answers. Officials at different levels of government collected the information during the summer months. On 29 October 2012, the Bosnian state government discussed and adopted the official answers.⁸⁵ It then handed them 60 pages (public procurement) and 358 pages (environment) to the European Commission.⁸⁶

Almost two years later, one European Commission official intimately involved in this effort told ESI that the Bosnian responses “were surprisingly good.” In April 2013, DEI organised a two-day workshop to reflect on how the answers had been prepared.⁸⁷ The workshop was attended by those who had worked on answering the questionnaires. Feedback was given by independent EU experts and civil servants of neighbouring countries.

However, the European Commission never provided a written response to the Bosnian answers. They were not discussed at annual committee meetings between the EU and Bosnian officials when environment and procurement were on the agenda. The 2013 progress report, presented by the Commission, only noted in passing:

“The country’s authorities delivered replies to two lists of questions on public procurement and the environment.”⁸⁸

The Bosnian civil servants who had worked on these questions, coordinating the answers to these responses with other levels of government, felt let down.

The conventional wisdom today is that Bosnia is stuck because its leaders and divided administrations are unable to coordinate and unwilling to reform. In reality, for far too long, the EU has acted like a school teacher telling her pupils how lucky they are to be allowed into the cellar of an elite school by the backdoor, despite being corrupt, lazy and incompetent. It is a narrative that falsely credits foreigners with every achievement and every reform – a narrative that the institutions of the Bosnian protectorate had a strong interest in perpetuating. This self-

⁸² European Commission, “[Joint conclusions from the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Road Map for BiH’s EU membership application](#)”, 27 June 2012.

⁸³ Directorate for European Integration of BiH, “[Lista pitanja EU-a iz Poglavlja 5 – Javne nabavke i Poglavlja 27 – Okolis/zivotna sredina](#)”, 27 June 2012.

⁸⁴ European Commission, “[Joint Conclusions from the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Road Map for BiH’s EU membership application](#)”, 27 June 2012.

⁸⁵ Council of Ministers of BiH, “[Zakljucci 25. sjednice Vijeca ministara Bosne i Hercegovine](#)”, 29 October 2012.

⁸⁶ Directorate for European Integration of BiH, “[Odgovori na listu pitanja EU – Poglavlje 5 javne nabavke](#)” and “[Answers to the list of EU questions on chapter 27 environment](#)”, October 2012.

⁸⁷ Directorate for European Integration of BiH, “[Odrzana radionica “Analiza procesa pripreme odgovora na Listu pitanja EU za poglavlja 5. i 27. acquis-a”](#)”, 16 April 2013.

⁸⁸ European Commission, “[Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013 Progress Report](#)”, 16 October 2013.

serving mythology is today widely believed and contributes to a vicious circle where the EU treats Bosnia differently from all of its neighbours, constantly shifting the finishing line and forcing Bosnia to fail, then interpreting this as evidence that Bosnia *had* to be treated differently.

It is time to exit from this limbo. Bosnia's membership application, and the challenge of convincing a sceptical European public, is a golden opportunity to move to a different mindset. In George Bernard Shaw's play "Pygmalion", the protagonist, a professor of phonetics, makes a bet that he can train a flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, to pass for a duchess at an ambassador's garden party by teaching her to assume a veneer of gentility, the most important element of which, he believes, is impeccable speech. The play makes fun of the rigid British class system. It also gives rise to the idea of the "Pygmalion effect": if you expect more from somebody, you are likely to elicit more efforts in response. And if you expect more from yourself, you are also more likely to succeed.

This matters hugely. EU accession is not a routine, mechanical task: it requires creativity and drive. The civil servants responsible for the process cannot be motivated by sticks and carrots wielded by outsiders. They need a genuine belief that the goal matters, and that they are capable of achieving it. It is this that will inspire Bosnia's civil servants to put in the long hours required without extra pay. The rewards are intrinsic: the opportunity to work on a meaningful project, that matters for themselves and their country, and the ability to gain the respect of peers around Europe. To support Bosnia's 'Europeanisers', we need to offer them a level playing field, direct but unbiased feedback on their work and professional respect for their achievements.

Lidija Topic is one of these Europeanisers. She recently became Bosnia's ambassador to the EU for the second time, a post she first held a decade ago. Born in Sarajevo in 1967, Topic obtained a degree in sculpture from Sarajevo's academy of fine arts. She studied for one year in the United States and completed post-graduate studies in international politics in Brussels. When the war erupted she fled to Zagreb. In September 1996 she moved back to Sarajevo and joined the ministry of foreign affairs, one of the three ministries that were set up at the state level. She was among the first Croats who joined the foreign ministry. In 2000, when the Ministry for European Integration was established, Topic became its first deputy minister. In 2003, when the Terzic government took office she became deputy minister for foreign affairs. An EU summit in summer 2003 in Thessaloniki gave the signal that she had been waiting for:

"Thessaloniki gave us confirmation that the whole process was real and that Bosnia and Herzegovina could take its own seat as an EU member *sooner rather than later* ...

We were a team that shared optimism and enthusiasm. Of course we had lots of problems that we were dealing with in the Council of Ministers, but we didn't need to be taught that consensus mattered in Bosnia and Herzegovina."⁸⁹

It is this spirit that Bosnia needs to recapture. And it is this that the EU handing over a questionnaire soon would most likely achieve. People like Lidija Topic, Adnan Terzic, Osman Topcagic, Igor Davidovic, Darija Ramljak and many others in the team that supported the European Partnership reform effort in the Directorate for European Integration do not need to earn the right to work on Bosnia's EU agenda. They need the opportunity to show what they are capable of. Then they and their colleagues will respond to professional challenges professionally. This is a bet that the EU should be willing to make now, in its own interest. It is high time.

⁸⁹ ESI, "[Lidija Topic – a Bosnian sculptor in Brussels](#)", 7 February 2011.

ANNEX: THINK AGAIN
ESI on Bosnia and EU accession

ESI presentation in the European Parliament– how Bosnia fell 7 years behind Montenegro since 2006, and why this is not the fault of Bosnian leaders:

[“European future of Bosnia and Herzegovina – 20 years after Dayton-Paris Peace Agreement”](#), 9 December 2015.

How Bosnia lost a decade – illusions and the legacy of Yugo-nostalgia in Bosnian politics:

[“Protests and Illusions – How Bosnia lost a decade”](#), 23 December 2014.

The main development challenge in Bosnia is how to deal with massive deindustrialisation while creating a functioning welfare system under conditions of devastatingly low employment. And how to attract investments that lead to jobs.

Conditionality – learning from experience

EU conditionality going wrong, costing Bosnia dearly:

[“Discussion paper: The worst in class. How the international protectorate hurts the European future of Bosnia and Herzegovina”](#), 8 November 2007.

This is where Bosnia first fell behind Montenegro after 2006.

EU conditionality going wrong in Bosnia, again:

[“Houdini in Bosnia. How to unlock the EU accession process”](#); 17 October 2013; [“Lost in Bosnian labyrinth. Why the Sejdic-Finci case should not block an EU application”](#), 7 October 2013.

EU conditionality working in Bosnia:

[“Analysis: Bosnian Visa Breakthrough. Detailed Scorecard of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s results in meeting the EU Schengen White List Conditions”](#), 16 October 2009.

A lot can be learnt from this experience.

Measuring progress – rankings, good and bad

How *not* to measure progress in Bosnia:

[“Rankings that fail: Bosnia, Macedonia and Doing Business 2015”](#), 9 November 2015.

Statistics and what needs to change for Bosnian numbers to be reliable:

[“Draft: Sectoral statistics – scorecard 2014”](#), May 2015.

Without credible statistics, how can policy making be serious?

How to measure corruption in Bosnia and across the Balkans:

[“Measuring corruption – The case for deep analysis and a simple proposal”](#), 19 March 2015.

Never rely on impressions when judging how corrupt a country is; there is a need for solid evidence to design policies.

A concrete list of suggestions for Bosnia to improve its business climate (a little) and its image (a lot more):

[“Bosnia as Wunderkind of Doing Business. Outline of 14 steps to take – A proposal to the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina”](#), 19 March 2015.

How to improve the EU accession methodology in the interests of countries such as Bosnia:

[“Paris paper – Enlargement and Impact – Twelve ideas – Dummy Report”](#), 28 January 2015.

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