



ATLANTIC MEMO #18

EU and Turkey to Mediate Balkan Tensions

Atlantic Community members agree that the increasing confrontations in the countries of the former Yugoslavia pose serious risks to both regional stability and European security. During the Balkan Theme Week they developed the following suggestions to resolve the conflicts in the West Balkans with a special focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Croatia:

1. The EU must curb internal counter-Balkan movements.

On the whole atlantic-community.org members are supportive of Macedonian and Croatian accession to the EU. They criticize Greece and Slovenia for using the EU membership negotiations as leverage in their bilateral conflicts with Macedonia over a name dispute and with Croatia over a border issue respectively (Macdonald). Andreas Raab and other members urge EU leaders to prioritize this European problem, which has led to rising alienation in the West Balkans and ultimately risks instability in the entire region. Wolfgang Stock argues that at present EU members are solely concerned with avoiding internal conflict at the expenses of making progress with the Balkans. The EU must identify protocol and procedures to use against countries that are exploiting their membership for national interests. It is essential that the EU imposes more effective fines on members such as Greece for infringements against European values, the blockade of a legitimate candidate states and denial of ethnic minority rights (Popcan). Our members agree that what is of concern now is the issue of solidarity vis-à-vis the Balkan states and new EU members (Mazzucelli). A solution is that the two issues of border sovereignty as well as the conflict over Macedonia's name should be separated from questions of entitlement to EU membership (Posaner).

2. Brussels should encourage its Macedonian and Croatian A+ students.

Our members agree that Skopje and Zagreb have successfully implemented institutional reforms, thus the EU membership criteria are fulfilled. However, the current stalemate is cause for disillusionment, which could impair former successes. The EU has to keep membership perspectives for Croatia and Macedonia alive, as this incentive serves to unite different political forces in both countries. This holds also true for Bosnia where disillusionment could further weaken the already fragile national identity (Rusila). Gregor Schueler argues that the new veto on Croatian membership is a setback not only for Zagreb, but the entire region. Although the EU's capacity to act quickly and efficiently must remain a priority when considering enlargement (Schueler), our members conclude that Croatia and Macedonia have made important progress and must therefore be rewarded with clear EU membership perspectives (Paet). This way, the European Union will stabilize the Balkan region and expand its zone of peace.

3. Turkey must act as front-row mediator.

Atlantic Community commenters recommend that the EU and UN should not be considered as sole mediators (Kovalenko) because these organizations simply do not possess all the necessary political instruments to solve the Balkan disputes (Olszewski). Regarding the EU's loss of credibility, due to the many accession delays, a middleman with close cultural ties could be better suited (Milunovic). With regard to the possible collapse of Bosnia, atlantic-community.org members suggest that Turkey must be considered as a mediator as Ankara has become a key protagonist in recent Balkan diplomatic and economic developments (Tetenburg). Despite frustration at stalled EU accession talks Turkey should redirect its efforts to implement its own regional policy in ways that promote both national and European interests in the sphere of continental security (Mazzucelli). Thus, Ankara should focus on bilateral conflicts, while the EU concentrates on strengthening stability through enlargement perspectives. Although Bosnian membership currently poses few advantages to the EU, Daniel Korski believes that it must nevertheless remain a concrete goal to include Bosnia in accession talks as well. Only this can effectively persuade local leaders to work together in creating stable state institutions.

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