



During a trip to the northwest town of Sanski Most in 2006, Ismir Harambasic, 21, told me over beers, "Before the war, people weren't that religious. But after the war...well, it's more a part of community life." In subsequent returns to visit with Ismir in 2007 and 2008, we noted the differences in the community, from an increased number of minarets on the local mosque to the fact that our conversations were no longer shared over beer -- Ismir had stopped drinking due to religious observance.

Today in Bosnia there remains both a strong secular base that rejects foreign extremism, along with a pro-reconciliation, pro-Islam caste of Bosnian social workers and peace builders that use the multicultural aspects of Bosnia's history to aid in the healing process.

The huge amounts of Western aid and attention that followed the Dayton Accords played a critical role in cementing the role that the West could play in helping Bosnians of all ethnicities shape their future. Since 1995, USAID has given over \$1 billion to fund economic growth, governance, and security projects within Bosnia.

The aid had a very clear, immediate effect. In order to continue receiving funds, Bosnia's politicians would have to work together to settle some of their most intractable grievances. And the international community's attention would hold them to their public promises, assuring accountability rather than mere rhetoric.

Over the past eight years, however, international attention has shifted away from Bosnia as it struggles to consolidate gains and establish a functioning government. The USAID budget decreased by 23% from 2007 to 2008, from over \$42 million to \$33 million. One expects post-conflict funding to taper off with time, but this decrease in aid has not accompanied conditions-based gains.

Perhaps as a result, ethnic tension is on the rise and many have even forecasted the possibility of renewed violence. The lack of international attention is perhaps most apparent when one leaves the streets of Sarejevo, heading north or east to those communities that were never the main target of international aid. And with Dodik calling for the possible secession of Republika Srpska, my friend Ismir tells me, "People are not afraid yet, but they should be."

In the next few years, the international community once again runs the risk of neglecting Bosnians in a time of need.

The Obama administration need not expend great effort and resources on behalf of Bosnia, but must realize the fantastic return it can get for such a small investment of time and energy. It can ensure that fragile agreements are implemented, that political rhetoric is backed with action on the ground, and that Bosnia's moderate voices are heard.

By keeping Bosnia in the international spotlight, the United States can keep it on a track of development and political progress. And in the greater public relations campaign that Obama is preparing for renewed US engagement in international diplomacy, pointing out an example where the US continues to support its moderate Muslim friends is surely never a bad thing.

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