



Bosnia & Herzegovina: a new CSDP contributor?

by Pierre Minard

On 15 September 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the EU signed a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA), making it the last Balkan country to do so. This is the result of a long negotiation process which kicked off in 2010 after then-HR/VP Catherine Ashton called for Mediterranean and Balkan partners to partake in CSDP operations and missions.

FPAs lay down the rules and modalities for a third country to participate in CSDP missions and operations and foster greater security cooperation. To date, the EU has signed similar agreements with either traditional NATO allies (such as the US, Canada or Norway), like-minded partners (such as South Korea, New Zealand, or Australia), or neighbours (such as Georgia or Ukraine).

20 years after the Dayton Agreement ended the 1992-1995 war, BiH still hosts a large EU operation which was launched in 2004 (EUFOR *Althea*). It also suffers from high levels of unemployment and corruption, as well as chronic political and institutional paralysis. Moreover, in the wake of the Paris attacks, Bosnian authorities are increasingly worried about the threat posed by jihadists – around 330 Bosnians have already travelled to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Given the fragility of the country's security, economic and political situation, why have both sides stepped up their security cooperation through an FPA?

Odd CSDP partners

The dividing line between CSDP recipient and contributor is actually rather thin, and BiH is not an isolated case. Other third countries which have hosted or are now hosting a CSDP mission/operation have also signed FPAs with the EU: Ukraine (in 2005), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (in 2012), and Georgia (in 2013).

Georgia, which has been hosting EUMM since 2008, made an essential contribution to EUFOR RCA, and without Tbilisi's help, the force generation process would have taken much longer (or even failed). In the case of Ukraine, EUAM (2014) was launched after the country had already contributed to several missions and operations: EUPOL *Proxima* and EUPM Bosnia in 2003 and 2004, respectively, as well as *Atalanta* in 2014. Finally, after the end of EUFOR *Concordia* in 2003 and EUPOL *Proxima* in 2005, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took part in EUFOR *Althea* in 2006.

Meanwhile, BiH has already gained some peacekeeping experience which could be of use in the framework of CSDP. Although its participation in UN missions such as MINUSMA, MONUSCO or UNFICYP has been minimal, BiH has been more active within NATO. Since 2009, the country had contributed to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan and now has around 150 personnel deployed on its follow-up operation, *Resolute Support*. Before that, BiH had already taken part in

the US-led coalition in Iraq (*Enduring Freedom*) from 2005 to 2008 with some 340 troops.

From the EU perspective, one practical reason for signing an FPA is to speed up the process of force generation, which allows the EU to integrate specific skillsets and fill gaps. Here, Bosnian forces have placed an emphasis on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) as a core speciality, and successfully put it to the test as part of ISAF – although on a fairly limited scale. Given this experience, BiH could, for example, participate in a CSDP military training mission with a specific EOD module.

That said, BiH is likely to provide only very modest support – if any at all – due to its limited and shrinking defence budget. In previous involvements, BiH benefited from the financial support of other partners (such as the US) to sustain its presence on the ground. However, in the context of CSDP, it is more complicated since countries assume most deployment costs themselves.

Furthermore, although BiH passed a Defence Law in 2005 which successfully created a single chain of command (no easy task for an army which maintains the ethnic divisions of a former war-torn country), more general attempts at consolidating the defence institutions of the country continue to be hampered by internal political tensions, especially with the administrative entity of Republika Srpska (RS).

Pushing for EU accession?

The FPA is part of a drive to put BiH back on the accession track, with the EU creating as many venues for cooperation as possible – including in the domain of security – with a potential future member state.

On 15 February 2016, BiH officially submitted its EU membership application. This comes after 15 months of renewed momentum for the EU agenda, which began with the German-British Initiative for BiH back in November 2014. The long-awaited Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) was finally adopted through a Council Decision in April 2015 and entered into force last June. This was followed in July by the adoption of a Bosnian Reform Agenda which covers a set of reforms required to comply with the status of an EU membership applicant.

However, there is still a long way to go for the country, particularly as political tensions between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and RS continue to simmer. In one recent example, RS President Dodik attempted to challenge the state judiciary by advocating a controversial referendum on the authority of the Office of the High Representative and

Bosnia's State Court (this was, however, indefinitely postponed in early February). These tensions have also had repercussions for the FPA: its 'imminent signature', which was announced in October 2013, was delayed for two years.

Looking for international recognition?

Over recent years, the overarching aim of Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy has been to increase its international and regional presence and achieve recognition as an autonomous actor. After its first ever experience as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2010-2011, BiH took over the chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers from May to November 2015. The country also remains active in the Regional Cooperation Council, based in Sarajevo, and other regional initiatives (such as the 'Western Balkans Six') in order to ease tensions and foster dialogue among neighbours.

In terms of security partnerships, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace since 2006 and an official candidate for full NATO membership since 2010, thus pursuing a goal now enshrined in its 2005 Defence Law. BiH has also strengthened its ties with Turkey by signing an agreement on military financial cooperation which was ratified in June 2015. A privileged partner since the early 1990s, Ankara has strongly supported Sarajevo in its quest to obtain NATO membership.

It can be argued that BiH has met a perfect match in the EU, as the Union's approach towards partnerships is also characterised by a quest for recognition as an international security provider, notably through the signing of FPAs. Multilateral security is pursued through the establishment of a 'network of cooperation' with partners – of which BiH is now one. FPAs are not only a proof of the attractiveness of the EU as a viable crisis management partner, but also a way to integrate third states into a particular European approach to security.

This new FPA should therefore be seen as another step on the path of 'EU normalisation' for Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as another step for the EU on its quest for security recognition. It also highlights the renewed desire (on both sides) to integrate the Western Balkans despite the deadlock of recent years and the current refugee crisis.

Pierre Minard is an Executive Research Assistant at the EUISS.

