

Draft Article for Istinomjer, October 13, 2011

The best one can say is that it could have been even worse.

On Monday, the EU's Foreign Affairs Committee, composed of the Union's 27 member states and chaired by High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, adopted five conclusions, linked here:

http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/125028.pdf

The first point welcomes the arrival of the new EU Head of Delegation Peter Sorensen and thanks former EU Special Representative and current High Representative Valentin Inzko for his efforts as EUSR. So far, so standard.

The second is a staple of international pronouncements – calling on party leaders to form a state government “as a matter of urgency” to deal with the EU reform agenda.

The fifth point reaffirms the EU's open door as first expressed at Thessaloniki, as well as reaffirming its “unequivocal commitment” to Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity “as a sovereign and unified country.”

But points three and four were the newsworthy bits, undercutting that “unequivocal commitment” above.

I quote point three in its entirety here:

“As regards the EU overall strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council looked forward to the discussion with the international community on the reconfiguration of the international presence, including its downsizing and possible relocation of the OHR, in the appropriate forum.”

Of course, the EU has yet to articulate its overall strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a big part of the problem. But instead of spelling-out how the peace implementation powers of the Office of the High Representative and the integrative agenda of the EU Delegation could work within a common strategic framework, it's clear that clearing OHR out of Bosnia is the *idée fixe* of many major member states and the EU institutions themselves. OHR is already strapped to meet its peace implementation obligations – which the EU pointedly doesn't want to take on. The High Representative is the “final authority in theater” according to Dayton. How many kilometres out of Bosnia is “in theater?” I'm sure lawyers in Brussels and other European capitals are working on it... Luckily, in the “appropriate forum” of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board, this position will likely face stiff opposition from Canada, Japan, Turkey, the United States – and Great Britain. The likely response to this block will be another unilateral attempt to gut OHR's budget.

From the self-absorption of the third point, the conclusions get downright pernicious in the fourth, quoted in its entirety here:

“The Council confirmed the EU's readiness to continue at this stage an executive military role to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to maintain the safe and secure environment under a renewed UN mandate. The main effort of Operation Althea will be on capacity-building and training while maintaining situational awareness and a credible reserve in case called upon to support efforts to maintain or restore the safe and secure environment.

The Operation will be reconfigured with forces based in Bosnia and Herzegovina which will focus on capacity-building and training while also retaining the means to contribute to the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities' deterrence capacity. A reserve force will be based over the horizon with regular in-country reconnaissance and rehearsal. The Council agreed to keep the operation under regular review including on the basis of the situation on the ground.”

First of all, the mission the EU took on with EUFOR in December 2004 and with an executive Chapter 7 mandate was not to “support Bosnia and Herzegovina’s efforts to maintain the safe and secure environment.” It was *EUFOR’s mission* to maintain that environment – and it remains so. So what we’re seeing here is the EU’s attempt to unilaterally renegotiate the terms on which it got that mandate for the UN Security Council. It’s clear that it would rather show the flag in “capacity-building and training” – think “soft power” – than maintain sufficient forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be able to perform the only mission it is mandated by the UNSC to perform.

Point four repeatedly makes clear that the Council sees EUFOR’s role as supporting domestic authorities, not having a role of their own under the terms of Dayton. For example, EUFOR will retain “the means to contribute to the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities’ deterrence capacity.” What domestic “deterrence capacity” is there? If referring to the police, most countries call that simply “law enforcement.” Or is the Council perhaps referring to the BiH Armed Forces, which have no doctrine for dealing with internal disturbances? The whole phraseology is nonsensical from a military or operational perspective. But from the perspective of the EU avoiding responsibilities with which many members have ceased to be interested in upholding, it makes perfect sense. What it doesn’t even consider is that authorities in BiH might be the ones who need to be deterred. That, of course, was what the IFOR-SFOR-EUFOR mission was designed to do in the first place.

While the Council names no numbers – an Austrian-led group of five EU members had hoped to stabilize the force at its current 1300 – unconfirmed reports emerged since that the force is to be cut by more than 50% to 500-600 troops. This new, more threadbare EUFOR would rely on “over the horizon” forces for almost any contingency. It’s worth remembering that when EUFOR drew-down in 2007 its force strength of 2500 troops was considered rock-bottom for deterrence. If the media reports are accurate, the new force will be 30% of that, whatever verbal contortionism they can employ to label it “credible.”

At least the Council stated its readiness to maintain EUFOR’s Chapter 7 executive mandate, though that’s also up to the UN Security Council, which will vote on the matter next month. But in most other aspects, the EU Foreign Affairs Council has shown a lack of “situational awareness,” to use a term it employed in its conclusions, on Bosnia and Herzegovina. By stating outright that it would

expect BiH authorities to take the lead in dealing with threats to a “safe and secure environment” and even reducing further its ability to react quickly to such threats, it broadcasts its unwillingness to deter future violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.