

Calls for expanded European Union intervention in Bosnia

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The revolt of Bosnian workers and wide layers of the population last week when scores of governmental buildings were torched and ransacked has been followed by further demonstrations this week.

The United States, European Union (EU), local politicians and middle class groups are seeking to channel these protests against austerity, unemployment of 40 percent and rampant poverty behind calls for the restructuring of government institutions and economic “reforms.”

Ever since the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was ended by the 1995 US-brokered Dayton agreement, the country has been divided into two semi-independent entities each with its own president, government, parliament and police. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), which comprises 10 administrative regions called cantons, is inhabited mainly by Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, and the Republika Srpska (RS) is mainly Serb. The country is overseen by an unelected United Nations-appointed High Representative with semi-dictatorial powers, currently the Austrian Valentin Inzko.

Both Inzko and the EU as a whole have come in for increasing criticism from the US for failing to end the deadlock between the two entities and move towards a more unified state.

Shortly after becoming US Assistant Secretary for Europe last October, Victoria Nuland warned Bosnian politicians, “It is well past time for leaders to demonstrate courage and vision, to move past the petty power interests and to build a modern, unified nation worthy of the talents and aspirations of all three communities.

“If these leaders continue to block their country’s path to the EU and to NATO membership, Bosnia’s international partners, the US included, should

seriously re-evaluate our approach.”

One newspaper reported how “officials, diplomats and observers in Sarajevo readily say, US officials—chief among them Nuland—are deeply frustrated with the EU’s diplomacy in Bosnia.”

The protests, nearly all of which occurred in FBiH, have led to the resignation of four cantonal government heads and various other officials, but the FBiH federal government and FBiH Prime Minister Nermin Niksic remain in office despite demands they resign. Niksic announced that elections planned for October will be brought forward.

The FBiH political elite are so badly discredited that the police reportedly cannot even guarantee their safety. FBiH presidency members Zeljko Komsic and Bakir Izetbegovic were advised on Monday morning, when they appeared for work in the badly damaged presidency building in Sarajevo, to return home before the new protest scheduled for noon that day started.

The protests in Bosnia have stunned the EU. Talks between the bloc’s 28 foreign ministers in Brussels on Monday were forced to include them in the discussion, even though it was not on the original agenda.

“What happened in Bosnia is a wake-up call,” British Foreign Secretary William Hague told reporters. “We need to focus more efforts on helping Bosnia towards the EU, towards NATO membership.”

The European Parliament’s lead negotiator on Bosnia and Herzegovina, German Christian Democrat MEP Doris Pack, said the failure of Bosnia to develop a common state had helped fuel unrest. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said, “There are many leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina and it is time that they demonstrate leadership, and we will support them in that.”

An EU political delegation will visit Bosnia within a

week.

High representative Inzko declared, “If it comes to escalation we would have to consider the intervention of EU forces. Currently, we do not have such intention.” He later backtracked, claiming he was speaking hypothetically.

However, Inzko’s outburst suggests this option is being seriously deliberated. Himzo Selimovic, director of Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies, speaking after last Friday’s protests said, “The international community and the EU should consider [deploying] international military forces in BiH if this occurs again.”

Leading Bosnian politicians have claimed that protests were imported and instigated from the outside, and aim to destabilize only the Bosnian Muslim part of the country. Niksic said it was “obvious someone is orchestrating, directing and ordering the demonstrators what to do.”

An announcement by the Association of War Veterans, published and obviously endorsed by Niksic’s Social Democratic Party, declared, “These are no spontaneous protests of socially endangered categories of people, but well-thought-out operations against the BiH state. In this case, the orders come from SANU [Serbian Academy of Science and Arts] and the Serbian government.”

In reply, the RS president said, “It is obvious that the economic and social problems in the Federation were not the only reason the buildings of three cantonal governments were set on fire, but that this is a political project intended to transfer the escalation of events in the Federation to Republika Srpska.”

Protests have continued this week. On Monday, in Sarajevo, demonstrators carried banners that read, “You have been stealing from us for 20 years and now it is over,” “Courts, police, all protecting the gang in power,” “Gang, resign,” and “We want the names of billionaires.” In other cities they declared, “No more luxury at the people’s expense,” “Hooligans are in power,” “Employer – slaveholder, worker – slave.” There are reports of villas and residences of the politicians and the rich having been set fire to.

Middle-class groups with semi-anarchist conceptions and generally reformist agendas are dominating the “citizens’ plenums” that have emerged such as that in Tuzla, the former industrial town in the north where the

protests originated. On February 11, the fifth session of the Tuzla plenum was held in the People’s Theater and was filled to overflowing by workers and youth seeking a political solution to the crisis in Bosnia.

Much as was the case with the Occupy Movement internationally, or the Spanish Indignados, these forums are used to stifle political discussion in order to prevent the working class from turning consciously to socialism. They use the deep hatred of all bourgeois political parties to exclude any political tendency, in effect acting as the last line of defence for capitalist rule. A call for the first meeting of the Sarajevo plenum held on February 12 stated at the outset, “Everyone is welcome, EXCEPT MEMBERS OF POLITICAL PARTIES” (original caps).



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