

BALKANS

## **Social revolt in Bosnia and Herzegovina - “Whoever sows poverty will reap anger”**

Wednesday 19 February 2014, by [SAMARY Catherine](#) (Date first published: 12 February 2014).

Spring is in advance of the prevailing cold. Nobody knows how far the social and democratic explosion will go. But now, already, we know that it will leave deep scars and that it could spread like wildfire: the peoples of the region are beginning to see “what makes the system tick” in both the protests and the aspirations that are expressed. From the denunciation of “criminal privatizations” there could emerge a denunciation of the Euro-Atlantic institutions that have fostered them.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, a real mini-Yugoslavia, was particularly torn apart and destroyed by the decomposition of the former Federation, something which has not erased close regional (and even family and national) relations. To the 1990s of “war-ravaged transition” - three years of ethnic cleansing and some 100,000 dead - have been added the disasters of the “peaceful transition” - close dependence on foreign capital, with the new private banks - but also a Euro-Atlanticist control that is more visible than elsewhere.

Between 2003 and 2008, the growing dependence of the Western Balkans on the EU could be seen as beneficial. But in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was not even a state capable of claiming legitimacy on nationalist bases. The unity of the country was maintained with forceps. Its constitution, written in Dayton (USA) in 1995 is still in force, reflecting the ethnic division by war. The state is stuck in a pseudo “sovereignty” under international domination, especially embodied by the “High Representative” of the UN, who is today a European, a real “proconsul.” Croatian and Serbian nationalists periodically threaten secession and block any overcoming of ethnic divisions, which also results in discrimination against citizens ( including Roma and Jews) , who are not part of the three peoples recognized by the Constitution (Bosno-Serbs, Bosno-Croats and Muslims, who are called Bosniaks - all of them are Bosnian citizens).

### **Towards overcoming national divisions**

However, last year, the first source of massive mobilizations went beyond national divisions: the “babies revolution” set citizens of all the “entities” against the negligence of the ruling parties, which were unable to agree on personal registration papers, in particular preventing a little girl, six months old, from getting medical treatment abroad.

At the same time, the country has over 40 per cent unemployment (more than 60 per cent for young people). There is massive poverty, in the face of endemic corruption. After a deep recession in 2009, it experienced only stagnation and setbacks until 2013, echoing the difficulties of its neighbours and major trading partners - Slovenia, Italy and Croatia. The IMF, which had conditioned its “aid” on the resolution of a government crisis that lasted for 15 months, went back on the attack in September 2012, demanding structural reforms, austerity and privatizations, particularly in the areas of health insurance and pensions.

These attacks come on top of years of privatizations, today denounced as “criminal” - especially in

the most industrial region of Tuzla, where the social explosion started: between 2000 and 2010, former state-owned enterprises, which employed the majority of the population, were sold to private owners who stopped paying workers, filed for bankruptcy and sold off assets - under the control of the Cantonal Agency for Privatization. As result, a large number of workers no longer benefited from social security contributions. They are now deprived of social rights, including being able to retire, because they do not have the minimum number of years of contributions that are required.

### **Politicization of the revolt**

From the third day of the “revolt”, political slogans appeared. From Tuzla, the movement has spread to Sarajevo, Bihac, and other cities. A growing number of assemblies are working out platforms of demands. This exercise in direct democracy is expressed on social networks and also encourages the creation other assemblies that bring together young and old - the oldest are not the least determined: the press has sought to discredit the movement, speaking of hooliganism and agitators from outside. The response of the “Front”, which has established itself independently of all political parties, was clear: “whoever sows poverty will reap anger.” And it is being transformed into a self-organized force.

*“We who took to the streets express our regret for the injuries and damage caused, but we also express our regret concerning the factories, public spaces, scientific and cultural institutions and human lives destroyed by the actions of those who have been in power for twenty years.”*

“The workers and citizens of Tuzla call for:

- Maintaining public order and peace through cooperation between citizens , the police and civil protection, so as to avoid the criminalization, the politicization and the manipulation of demonstrations;
- The establishment of a technical government, composed of apolitical experts, never having held a government post, [ in] the Canton of Tuzla, until the next elections (...) . [It] will submit weekly reports on its work and proposals. All interested citizens can follow [its] work;
- [Concerning privatizations ] (...) The government will be able to confiscate property acquired fraudulently, decree the annulation of privatization agreements, give the factories back to the workers and restart production as soon as possible;
- Equalization of salaries of government officials with those of workers in the public and private sector, a stop to the payment of bonuses of all kinds and to the payment of the salaries of ministers and other representatives whose term has ended.”

**Catherine Samary**

---

---

**P.S.**

\* Translation International Viewpoint. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

\* Catherine Samary teaches economics at the University of Paris-Dauphine and at the Institute of European Studies of the University of Paris-8. She was a co-editor the recent Le Monde Diplomatique Atlas. She is a member of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France and of the

Fourth International. She has written extensively on Eastern Europe and in particular, Yugoslavia. Among her publications in English are *Plan, market and democracy: the experience of the so-called socialist countries* (Amsterdam, International Institute for Research and Education, Notebook No. 7/8, 1988); *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia; an overview* (Amsterdam, International Institute for Research and Education, Notebook No. 19/20 1993) and *Yugoslavia Dismembered* (translated by Peter Drucker, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1995).