

INTRODUCTION

For the European Union (EU) the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia presented a double challenge – in part strategic, in part existential. The strategic challenge was how to organize and lead an international response to a crisis in its own back yard. The existential challenge was that events in the Balkans, and the political culture from which they flowed, seemed the antithesis of everything the EU stood for, namely a prosperous, secure and integrated Europe. In the first half of the 1990s Brussels largely failed to meet the strategic challenge, particularly with respect to the war in Bosnia. Since the signing, at Dayton in late 1995, of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP) in Bosnia, which marked the nadir of Europe's influence in the region, it has, however, gradually begun to fashion a more coherent and effective response and to reassert the leadership it had so boldly and – as it turned out – prematurely, proclaimed a decade earlier.

This story can be told as a classic narrative of hubris, humiliation and hope of redemption. It shows the EC in 1991 asserting and being granted leadership in the Balkan crisis and then conducting a reactive policy in the absence of a coherent strategy and bereft of the tools to impose it. It shows the EU drifting to the periphery of international action as the crisis intensifies in Bosnia, and remaining frustrated in the wings as the US belatedly but forcefully imposes its will and negotiates a peace at Dayton. It shows the EU assuming a modest, low-profile role in the first three years of the international protectorate for Bosnia but then, after the Kosovo campaign in 1999, re-emerging with a comprehensive vision for the Balkans and a renewed claim to leadership.

There is, however, a darker, more nuanced subtext to this tale, which speaks to the deeper existential challenge. Questions that were raised a decade ago about the EU's ability to manage conflict in its neighbourhood remain unanswered. Is the EU equipped, not just in the institutions, processes and instruments of its common foreign and security policy, but in its way of thinking, to deal with ethnic and sectarian conflict? Should it be aspiring to an increased presence in the "high politics" of security in the Balkans, or sticking to what it knows and does best – trade and aid? Will a regional policy based on international protectorates and political and economic conditionality serve to bring the Balkans to Brussels or, in perpetuating dependency, does it risk keeping Brussels in the Balkans for longer than is good for anyone? And in the mix of motives driving the EU and its member-states, what is the balance between making the Balkans safe for democracy, markets and human rights, and the new Europe's search for coherence, power and status in the post-Cold War world.

These questions are of interest not just to Europeans but to their friends and allies across the Atlantic. Canada's involvement in southeastern Europe – first as a peacekeeper in the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution, subsequently as part of the post-Dayton international presence – is as long as that of the EU. It has shared many of Europe's assumptions and illusions about how to manage ethnic conflict, having its own aversion to the prospect of a world where ethnicity trumps civil nationalism. Like the EU, too, Canada has found itself struggling to define the right mix of hard and