

Book Reviews

Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton

David Chandler (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 239 pp.

This book examines the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995, which ended the Bosnian civil war, and the manner of its subsequent implementation. Although it is written in a dispassionate style, the cumulative effect of Chandler's analysis is subversive of what he terms 'the ideology of democratisation' and deserves to be taken seriously by policymakers and commentators alike. One doubts, however, to what extent it will be, partly for reasons that the author himself supplies.

The book performs a number of useful functions. First, it may be used as a work of reference, providing a detailed account of the terms of the agreement itself and the related annexes. These annexes provide for a complex system of international administration for post-Dayton Bosnia, assigning control over military activity, for instance, to NATO, regulation of elections to the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and executive and legislative authority to the UN High Representative. The period of international control was initially supposed to be one year, but has since been indefinitely extended, and the temporal extension of the mandate has been accompanied by a proliferation of *ad hoc* bodies whose functions overlap in complex ways.

As is evident from the book's title, however, Chandler is not concerned simply with description of the formal institutional arrangements established by Dayton. The second, and major, accomplishment of his book is a cogent critique of the 'democratization' process these institutions are purported to foster. His analysis here depends on an understanding of 'democratization', as employed by its advocates, as involving not merely democratic institutions, but also the inculcation of civic values deemed necessary to make democracy effective. In other words, the Bosnian people have to be made fit for democracy. As Chandler puts it, the 'moral framework of the nineteenth-century "White Man's Burden" today appears recast in the liberal language of "ethical" foreign policy, rights protection and "civil society"' (p. 3).

In practice, the imposed international authorities have sought to achieve their aims by weakening the popularly supported Croat, Serb and Bosnian Muslim nationalist parties, and trying to promote the growth of cross-ethnic alignments in the name of 'pluralism'. The effects of this have been most marked in the handling of the media and in the application of rules governing elections. With regard to the media, this has meant the enforcement of draconian censorship directed against supposedly 'inflammatory' comment. The extent to which such censorship is taken is illustrated by an example Chandler cites (p. 122). In September 1996 the Serbian Democratic Party, the main Serb-supported party in Bosnia, was fined US\$50,000 for statements said to threaten the territorial integrity of Bosnia. The offending statements, however, did not directly challenge the Dayton Agreement, but rather 'continuously stressed the substantial autonomy' granted to the Serb Republic within Bosnia-Herzegovina, to the exclusion of any reference to the latter's unity.

Similar authoritarian interference has been the pattern in the conduct of elections. In the September 1997 municipal elections, the mass disqualification of candidates deemed unsuitable 'turned the elections in some areas into a farce' (p. 114). Since Chandler wrote his book, his analysis has been reinforced by events. Elections held in September 1998 for the presidency of the Serb Republic saw the defeat of the incumbent, Biljana Plavsic, who was acceptable to the West, and victory for Nikola Poplasen, a Serb nationalist. In March 1999 the UN High Representative, Carlos Westendorp, resolved this difficulty by simply removing Poplasen from office.

From this and similar evidence Chandler concludes that the externally imposed authorities in Bosnia, so far from promoting democratic culture and practices, have performed a disempowering function. Compromise solutions between the Bosnian elites have been precluded by the imposition of a 'finalised external policy agenda' which has in turn reinforced voters' attachments to ethnically based parties, thus setting up a vicious circle.

How is one to explain a process with results so much at odds with its professed rationale? It is here that Chandler offers his third important contribution, though part of what he says here arouses doubts in this reviewer. The explanation lies, he argues, in an 'external dynamic', driven by the need to legitimize the regulatory role of international institutional actors. Bosnia's importance 'has been that in a period of international transition after the Cold War it became a focus for international institutions that could enable them to redefine their political and strategic objectives and transform themselves organizationally in the new post-Cold War environment' (p. 186). Though not elegantly expressed, this seems plausible especially with reference to NATO, an alliance faced with a lack of obvious purpose after the disappearance of the USSR. 'Democratization' became a substitute for anti-communist containment. On the other hand, Chandler's suggestion that, with Bosnia providing a surrogate purpose for a redundant alliance, 'there is less necessity to talk up the problems of other states ... or to intervene more directly in the question of Kosovo' seems implausible in the light of the events of 1999, which obviously occurred after the book was written.

Chandler's overall analysis is compelling, and supported by a mass of detailed evidence, only part of which has been touched on here. It reinforces the scepticism that some feel about the desirability of the allegedly humanitarian interventionist missions that have been so readily undertaken by the American-dominated alliance system over the past decade. It is the more curious, then, that Chandler repeatedly employs, without irony, the cant term 'international community', a phrase generally used to misrepresent Western policies as global ones—a point made particularly clear by the Kosovo conflict of 1999.

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