

## (de)Constructing Bosnia

We're forty-five minutes south of Sarajevo, racing along the new EU-funded highway. A concrete median splits the six lanes, and every fifty meters a lamppost arcs over the road. Someday this stretch will carry trucks traveling to Athens and points further east, but for now we share the road with Bosnians in aging Japanese imports, NATO vehicles of all types, and the occasional ox-cart.

"There it is." Hazim spots the charred Russian troop carrier that marks our exit. A Yugoslav army depot was located near here, and the combination of war and NATO airstrikes left a landscape littered with wrecks. These carcasses were sold as scrap; most were shipped to China for salvaging, but this one remains.

The road we turn onto was, until recently, little more than a gravel path. The passage of heavy equipment has turned it into a muddy mess, and several of the potholes threaten to swallow us whole. Despite these obstacles, we continue at highway speed; the forest that surrounds us is home to numerous snipers still angry with Europe's decision to side with Bosnia's Moslems over the Christian Serbs.

This strategy has its own disadvantages. The uneven ground repeatedly launches us beyond the bright red minefield markers lining the roadside. Each time this happens I gasp and grab the door handle—I read somewhere that you should immediately exit a vehicle that finds itself in a minefield—but Hazim always puts us back on the road before I can bail out.

The forest is thick and green, and its uniformity is a reminder that the Nazis and their Croat allies burned down every tree in the region in an effort to flush out the ancestors of the snipers we now hope to evade. The Nazis later regretted this action; once the forests were gone, the Serbs took to the mountains, and that's when they really started killing fascists.

After fifteen minutes of this mad race we leave the forest behind and descend into a valley. The terraced hillsides are planted with grapes, and we pass several laborers, rakes in hand, walking to their plots. Below us, curving roads snake between spacious homes, and on some of the rooftops I see workmen in white t-shirts.

The Italian '80s station we've been listening to for the past three days breaks up in static. This is a problem: the tape player is broken, and it took Hazim and I several hours to find a mutually acceptable soundtrack for our travels. His hand beats mine to the tuner, and he smiles—but just for an instant.

"No country," I warn. Hazim is a big fan of the country station out of Belgrade. If it were up to him, our days would be a blur of Patsy Cline and Hank Williams. He turns the knob in a slow, practiced manner, one that maximizes the reception possibilities, but it's no use: the terrain blocks everything but accordion music from Bulgaria and an Albanian talk radio station.

The talk jock mentions the Chicago Bulls, then Hazim mutters something and turns it off.

We reach the valley floor and come to a gatehouse, its candy-striped arm blocking any further advance. Hazim leans on the horn, first a short beep, then three longer ones, then a long, loud blast. I wonder whether horn-honking patterns are unique to each individual, or if they are culturally determined.

"Must be at lunch," he says, and we exit the car.

I hear the sounds of construction: hammering and saws and shouting. The gatehouse is empty, but the portable TV inside is still tuned to Jerry Springer. We duck beneath the gate, then Hazim continues ahead while I stop to study a sign welcoming us to Century 21's contribution to a new Europe.

"Why did the European Union choose Century 21? That's easy: our proven track record, especially in post-conflict regions; our years of experience operating in Southern Europe, and sensitivity to the region's cultural idiosyncrasies; and our close relationship with Bechtel, the tier-one contractor for this project."

I'm sitting in the office of Esad Delalic, Century 21's regional manager for Bosnia. He is well into his pitch.

"...And we provide the construction, financing, and sales expertise needed to rebuild Bosnia's housing stock."

His English is almost accent-free, which isn't surprising given what Hazim told me. The two of them were colleagues at the university before the war. Delalic joined a militia when the fighting began, and now Bosnia is filled with men just like him, individuals who made a winning bet and are now reaping the rewards. Manager for a well-connected multinational is a step up from history professor.

"I see." There's no point in trying to derail his monologue, so I take a sip of coffee as he continues.

"...Of course, making a profit is important, too. We have an obligation to our shareholders to make a profit, but we are also very much aware of the role we can play in the rebuilding of this society."

"Of course."

"...And we are proud to be the first full service home construction and financing firm to return to Bosnia."

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Delalic leans back in the chair, satisfied with his performance. He's a burly guy, and it's easier to picture him wearing fatigues and toting a gun, than standing in front of a lecture hall.

My Sony DAT recorder is sitting on the leather armrest beside me; I notice that the "guaranteed silent" drive mechanism is no longer silent.

"So..." I begin. The first question is an obvious one, and Delalic's pleased expression suggests he's ready with the answer. "So... how do you convince people it's safe to live here?"

He shifts forward and rests his hands on the edge of the desk. I catch a glimpse of gold on his wrist. "All of the project participants recognize the importance of security—not just physical security, but the importance of the perception of security—and we are working to ensure a comprehensive security envelope is put in place. The implementation details are being handled by the EU and SFOR, in consultation with the contractors."

I nod. I'm meeting with the NATO stabilization force commander tomorrow.

"...And as a private contractor, our responsibility is to provide defensible communities and to manage the onsite security staff."

His phone buzzes and he looks at the message display. "Sorry, I have to take this." He answers it in Bosnian, and I walk to the window. Down on the street I see the guards I passed earlier; they continue to trace the slow ellipses that indicate professional security training, their pace ensuring that that the two of them are always facing different directions. A block away sits a halftrack with a gunner manning the fifty caliber atop it, and beyond that is the Toyota in which, I assume, Hazim continues to read the newspaper.

Delalic barks something and hangs up. I glance back in time to see his anger.

"Sorry about that. It was one of the local contractors." He has reassumed the corporate mask.

"Problems?"

He shrugs and snorts, a frustrated gesture familiar to anyone who has traveled outside the first world, then takes a document from the desk drawer and unrolls it. "Here, look at this." It's a topographical map of Sarajevo and its surroundings.

His finger traces a ring around the city. "In time this will all be residential. Here, here, and here: that's 800 units by winter. And in the spring we'll start 1500 here," he pokes another point. I nod and steal a glance at his computer screen: his email is open, and there's a stock ticker in the menu bar.

"...And within three years we'll have 11000 more units here." he draws an arc encompassing much of the flat country to the west and south of the city.

"Are these zoned locals only, or mixed use?" I've read the prospectus: 60% of the homes are reserved for locals, with subsidized mortgages available through an EU-financed consolidator; anything not occupied within a year will be put on the open market. The other 40% are available for immediate purchase by EU nationals.

"They're all mixed use. That was something everyone agreed on right from the start: we wanted to integrate non-Bosnians into Bosnian communities, to act as a counterweight to any lingering issues."

"So you believe the presence of non-Bosnians will curb the violence?"

"That's the plan."

Hazim returns with the foreman, and then joins the crew on break. Alija learned English while working as a facilities engineer at a BP-owned petrochemical plant before the war. He resembles a lumberjack in a Grimm fairy tale, and like many Bosnian males his beard is large and disheveled.

The two of us set off on a tour of the subdivision. I bring up the war, but he won't talk about it, except to say that he doesn't hold a grudge against anyone. Instead, he explains the difficulties encountered in a construction project of this scope. The houses are being built to Anglo-Saxon standards, so the plumbing and electrical components are imported from overseas. This means frequent shortages of key components due to customs delays, greater likelihood of injury, especially among the electricians, and a need to translate much of the product documentation into Bosnian.

I feel an eerie familiarity as we walk the unpaved streets, and then I realize: their layout is an almost perfect reproduction of the Palo Alto suburb where I grew up. Only the street names differ; back home we had a Native American theme, but here the names are intentionally generic. "Shady Pines Lane," "Mountain View Boulevard," and such, all carefully vetted, I'm sure, so as not to offend anyone. And another difference: all of the street signs are in English, French, and Bosnian, which makes for crowded sign posts.

We stop to watch a crane place a roof atop a house. I'm surprised to see several workmen riding the roof as it's being moved; while I know nothing about the rules governing construction sites in America, I'm sure this would be a no-no. The crane operator gets it perfect on the first try, and within a few seconds of touchdown the workmen are hammering the roof onto the frame.

"What do you think of the houses?" I ask Alija when he returns from speak-

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ing with the crane operator.

"They're big, bigger than mine," he's watching the workmen atop the roof.  
"But I'm not sure about the location."

"The EU is committed to Bosnia's normalization. This means rebuilding its civil society, something that won't happen overnight, but we're off to a good start."

I'm talking to Jan Scheffer, the European Commissioner for Economic Development in Bosnia. The Dutch fill many of the key economic posts within the EU bureaucracy, as the selection of a Brit, Frenchman, or German would be too politically sensitive. Scheffer and his staff occupy the top three floors of the university of Sarajevo's administration building—not that this space accommodates the entire EU delegation: a growing number of functionaries work in the mobile offices parked on the school's soccer field. I passed these units while walking across campus; many of them are connected by covered walkways, and in the middle of the lot sits a semi cab with an enormous NATO command and control rig still attached. C&C rigs are to land warfare what the AWACS is to air combat.

"It's going to take several ingredients. We need capital investment, and we need the infrastructure to handle that capital. And most importantly, we need a critical mass of individuals committed to changing things, to making this vision a reality."

Scheffer's office overlooks Sarajevo. From it you can see all the way to the stadium at the eastern edge the city.

"By 'capital investment' I assume you mean jobs?"

"Jobs, that's right. That's why Bosnia has been zoned for significant targeted subsidies, and there's even talk of a limited corporate tax exemption to encourage firms in sectors like biotech and software development—tomorrow's industries—to locate here. I think everyone realizes there's no point in building a couple of cement factories; we all know where those jobs will be in twenty years."

He peers over his glasses with the knowing look favored by Western policymakers when alluding to the growing Chinese economy.

"What about education? Who's going to train people to work at these biotech companies?" I've met very few microbiologists while traveling in the former Yugoslavia.

"Education and training are key to the success of this effort, and we're mak-

ing them a priority. The university is on track to reopen next fall, and 75% of the elementary and secondary schools have already reopened. Training is an ongoing process, obviously, and our efforts in this area will be closely coordinated with the needs of the industries that locate here." He smiles at this. From the sound of it, the EU has everything under control.

One of his assistants steps into the office and asks a question in French. He responds in kind, and they both laugh.

"Parlez-vous Français?" Scheffer asks.

"No," I reply, suddenly embarrassed.

"Ahhh," he laughs, "you Americans." I laugh, too.

"How long does the EU plan on being here?"

His expression turns serious. "Brussels realizes that this kind of nation building requires an extended timetable, certainly more than five years. Ten years is a much more realistic assessment, and I firmly believe that the political will exists to sustain a fifteen year presence, if it comes to that. What's important is that the people of Bosnia understand that the EU is in this for the long haul. Our commitment is visible all over town," he looks towards the city, where several skeletons are rising on the skyline, office space earmarked for EU bureaucrats.

We enter the house at 1230 Mountain View. It's almost finished: the windows and doors are installed, but the carpet remains in rolls and the stairways are without banisters.

"You're laying carpet?" I ask. In this part of Europe, most families bring their own carpets when occupying a new residence.

"And appliances. Stoves, dishwashers, everything." Alija doesn't appear to be surprised by this.

We tour the house, with Alija pointing out the amenities not typical to Bosnian homes. I ask about the possibility of blackouts; he tells me that the house is wired to take a backup diesel generator, and buyers can have one installed as a purchase option. Later, he points out a concrete slab behind the garage, ready to seat a generator.

The toilet looks just like mine back home, so I assume Anglo-Saxon plumbing means flush handles instead of chains, buttons, or any of the other devices one encounters in European bathrooms. The faucet runs both hot and cold water, a change from most sinks in this part of the world, where the second handle does nothing more than double the flow of tepid fluid.

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Despite my thirst, I'm still not willing to drink it. In addition to the usual toxins that pollute much of southern Europe's drinking water, Bosnia has the added problem of massive and ongoing lead seepage into the reservoirs, the lead coming from the millions of rounds of ammunition that fell to earth over the past decade.

The kitchen is a shining marvel of Formica and stainless steel, with ample countertop and cupboard space, and several hanging compartments ready to accept any of a number of devices offered as move-in incentives. The refrigerator and the stove are sitting near their respective alcoves, waiting to be installed. I notice that the fridge includes a water purifier and dispenser; it seems the future residents won't be drinking the water, either.

It's a two-and-a-half stall garage, meant to accommodate his-and-her vehicles and the multiple scooters owned by every upper-income European family. The vehicles in question are the smaller European models, so it's maybe a one-and-a-half, by American standards. An automatic garage door leans against the wall, awaiting installation.

The backyard is a mess, piled with pieces of scrap wood, bits of broken dry board, and crushed boxes. I'm willing to bet the shit work of picking this stuff up falls to the Albanian members of the crew. Small stakes with orange tape attached mark the property line. That's another option for buyers: a fence, available in chain link or wooden picket. A few recently transplanted trees, scraggly and leafless, complete the unhappy scene. Alija and I stand among the litter, looking up at the house.

"Would you live here?" I ask.

"The space would be nice," he replies, "but the mortgage would kill me."

On our way back to the worksite we hear gunfire in the hills.

"The situation requires us to recognize that a traditional approach to security, one emphasizing an extended military presence, may not be the best long-term solution."

Colonel Charles Cochrane has the smooth tone of the professional soldier accustomed to highly political postings. He is trim and tidy, with his golf shirt tucked into his khakis, and the only indicator of his military employment is a nametag pinned beneath the Polo logo.

"NATO understands that this is an entirely new kind of mission, qualitatively different from the sort we trained for during the Cold War. And NATO and the EU both understand that the nature of this mission—nation building in the aftermath of a civil war—requires what could be termed a more holistic approach to security, one that recognizes the reasons for the violence."

NATO's SFOR command post is a former elementary school located in a quiet, tree-lined neighborhood. After the war, rumors circulated that atrocities—mass rapes in one account, torture in another—had occurred here, and parents refused to allow their children to return when the school reopened for classes. Eventually NATO agreed to purchase the site from the municipality, and a new school is being constructed nearby.

Cochrane's office was a classroom. It's been bisected by a floor to ceiling partition, and his staff occupies the other half of the room. His desk sits close to where (I'm guessing) the teacher's desk once stood. The partition wall is covered with framed photos of the colonel and his underlings, a survey of international humanitarian efforts in the 1990s. Several of them are from Somalia, and in these photos he looks much older than he does today. A chalkboard still hangs on the wall, and is covered with what appears to be a duty roster: colored tags mark elements of a grid plotting the names of individuals against the days of the week.

"How long do you envision being here?"

"Ten, maybe twelve years. Not the military, of course. We'll draw down to a tripwire presence within five, but the economic and administrative units will remain."

"Five years? That soon?" I can't hide my skepticism.

"It's an aggressive timeframe, but we believe it's possible. There's a balance that has to be struck: initially our presence deters hostilities, but after a point it's counterproductive, and we become everyone's favorite target of opportunity."

"Aren't you afraid the fighting will resume when you leave? Five years isn't enough time for everyone to forget everything that happened."

"It won't be a problem, if the economic program takes hold. We have to establish a community of stakeholders, people with a vested interest in the region's social and political stability. Their presence will be more of a deterrent than anything we can do." I'm reminded that senior military types throughout the western world now routinely take graduate level courses in political science.

"How involved is NATO in planning this... this economic offensive?"

He doesn't flinch at the phrase. "Obviously it's not our role to set economic and fiscal targets, but we are deeply involved in the details of implementation. Here..." Cochrane leads me to a table on which a map of Sarajevo sits beneath a plastic sheet covered with grease pencil markings. I point to an area enclosed in a green box. "That's housing, right?"



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"Right. Have you seen this before?"

"Mister Delalic showed me something like it. And the yellow zones are..."

"Commercial parks, light industrial, that sort of thing: job sites."

"And the blue?" Blue lines connect the green and yellow areas.

"Those are security corridors. Dark blue are guaranteed 24/7, light blue are dawn to dusk, and the dashed lines are security caravans and escorts on an as needed basis." All of the corridors fork off the thick white line of the new EU highway.

"Is this confidential?" I always ask for clarification when reviewing security details.

"Just the opposite: we need to publicize this information. This is the sort of thing it takes to restore confidence in the authorities. Honestly, no one expects any more trouble, not like we had, and certainly not after the jobs start arriving. The war is over, these people are tired of fighting—that's the only thing that ends a civil war, when the people fighting it grow tired."

"...Or when one side is wiped out," I think.

"The challenge we now face is one of perception: we have to change the perception people have about living here. But you can't just tell them the war is over; they need to see—and feel—the return of authority, meaning the symbols and structures of authority, the things that mean safety."

"Does this include the perceptions held by other Europeans?"

"Them too, but chiefly locals, especially the local opinion makers. These people are the key to capital formation and retention in the region, and everything depends on ensuring this group feels comfortable in their homes. And this is something we intend to do."

Pausing to digest this, I glance out the window. In the field beside the school I see several groups of kneeling individuals, all of them wearing bright orange vests.

"What's happening over there?"

The colonel turns to look. "Ahh, that's the mine-clearing class. They're learning how to defuse mines and other small munitions."

"Are those local employees?" I note that a number of them have blonde ponytails.

"Some, but the majority are Scandinavian volunteers, believe it or not. It's become a popular summer vacation. It makes them feel useful."

I find Hazim sitting at a picnic table, resting his head in his arms.

"Did you hear the shooting?" I ask.

He stands and stretches. "Yeah, it was that way." I'm relieved when he points away from the direction we came.

"Serbs?"

"It was an automatic, sounded like an M16—NATO, probably. Maybe they're training."

"Ahh." The ability to discern the type of gun by its sound is one of the first skills people acquire when living in a war zone.

We walk back to the car. The gatehouse is still unattended. As we pull away, I ask Hazim, "What do you think?"

He pauses. "They're nice houses."

"I know, but what do think? Is it going to work?"

Hazim watches something off in the grape fields. Seconds pass, and then he says, "Maybe. We'll see. I'm sure the people living here will do fine."

A few minutes later we reach the forest. Hazim turns on the country station; "Your Cheating Heart," is playing. He sings along, and I watch the trees for snipers.