

Select Committee on International Relations

Corrected oral evidence: Beyond Brexit: the UK and the Balkans

Wednesday 6 September 2017

10.55 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lord Howell of Guildford (The Chairman); Lord Balfe; Baroness Coussins; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Jopling; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 15

Witnesses

I: General Sir Michael Rose KCB, CBE, DSO, QGM, Former Commander of the UN Protection Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

II: The Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon GCMG, KBE, CH, Former High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.
2. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that neither Members nor witnesses have had the opportunity to correct the record. If in doubt as to the propriety of using the transcript, please contact the Clerk of the Committee.

Examination of witness

General Sir Michael Rose.

- Q1 **The Chairman:** General Rose, good morning and welcome to this Committee. Thank you for agreeing to come and talk to us. Our minds are on our current inquiry, which is just beginning and is on the situation

in the west Balkans and the UK's involvement in it now, drawing heavily of course on the history of the area, which dominates so much, and trying to look forward to the next stage of developments. We are trying to stand aside from the eternal, ubiquitous issue of Brexit and the future of the European Union, but obviously these things will become entangled with our studies in one way or another. You were commander of UNPROFOR from 1994 to 1995. I also believe that you are a colonel of my regiment, the Coldstream Guards.

General Sir Michael Rose: I was for 10 years, but handed over to someone more suitably equipped than I was at my age.

Q2 The Chairman: I am very glad about that. It is a very superior regiment. Altogether, you have been involved, as almost no other person has, in the affairs of the region. We will ask you a number of questions. I will start straightaway with the opening question. Is the apparent peace that followed those rifts and fractures of the 1990s fragile, or is it real? Is the interstate conflict about to explode again, or can we look forward to a reasonably stable future? Start with your general judgment on the region and where we have got to.

General Sir Michael Rose: It might be helpful if I made a short statement, which I prepared beforehand to cover those points. That will lead on to the various subsidiary questions that I was posed prior to coming here today.

While it is clear that the Bosnian war was the most violent of all the conflicts in the Balkans at that time, I do not think it is still fully appreciated by the international community, including us. The linkage between that war and the problems facing the western Balkans today is close. Many of the problems today were generated by the way that war was ended. If we accept the many reports that we can read, such as a recent report of the Senate committee on foreign affairs in May, our own parliamentary inquiries and the European Union stabilisation reports, I think we would all agree that we see today in Bosnia a rising trend of xenophobia, racial tensions, continuing corruption, little evidence of the standards of good governance required by the European Union and a rising element of radicalisation, particularly among Muslim communities.

Given the reluctance of the Bosnian Serbs to sign up to the dream of Dayton, which was of a single nation, the country is as fragmented as ever and is at risk of being a failed state. Much of this tension and unhappiness in the region stems from the Dayton peace accord, which in my view was built on a lie and has therefore led to injustices that still reverberate today. The common view of what happened in Bosnia is that the UN mission failed and that the people of Bosnia were saved by military intervention and NATO bombing, which forced the Serbs to the peace table in Dayton, Ohio. As my good friend David Harland, who was the original author of the UN inquiry into the massacre at Srebrenica, put it, "the 1995 military intervention, the Dayton agreement, and the NATO-led Implementation Force ... are seen as redemptive examples of the

potential of military intervention under American leadership". So nothing could be further from the truth.

What actually happened when the Bosnian war came to an end—it is important for the communities to understand this—is that the UN was succeeding remarkably well in its desired objectives, which of course were delivering humanitarian aid to a population that was caught up in a three-sided civil war. Looking back, Bosnia remains one of the few major conflicts of our time where no one died, or very few people died, either of cold or hunger. However, a peacekeeping force such as UNPROFOR was neither mandated nor equipped to impose peace by force of arms, which of course are war-fighting objectives. NATO had calculated that it would take more than 400,000 soldiers to bring peace to Bosnia by force alone. Of course, NATO had already turned down an invitation from President Izetbegović in 1992 to stop the war spreading from Croatia.

If NATO, the most powerful military alliance in the world, was not prepared to go war-fighting in Bosnia, it defies all logic to expect a lightly armed UN force to do so, yet that was often the expectation. Nevertheless, by its very presence, the UN was able to bring about the necessary conditions in which some peaceful resolution would have been possible.

I commanded UNPROFOR in 1994. We halted the fighting between the Serbs, the Croats and the Muslims, ending up in the Washington accords. We raised the siege around Sarajevo. We brought about a four-month cessation of hostilities. What happened to derail this process? Sadly, our efforts at peacekeeping were already being fatally undermined by NATO's and America's reluctance to accept that illegal arms were being smuggled into Bosnia from Iran by Croatia. Indeed, the United States lost patience with the peace process and started illegally to arm the Muslims, against their own signed-up-to United Nations resolutions, and despite the fact that they were responsible for implementing those resolutions under Operation Deny Flight and Operation Sharp Guard.

The end result, of course, was that the UN mission as a neutral peacekeeping force was destroyed. All UN attempts at peace brokering, such as those organised by Lord Owen, Cyrus Vance and Lord Carrington, failed. NATO and the United States came to the realisation too late that although they had destroyed the UN peacekeeping mission they could not replace it, as their presence in the region was limited to air. The war was therefore unnecessarily prolonged and the suffering of the people continued, including the terrible massacre of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica in 1995. The irony of course is that the weapons being delivered into Bosnia, then mainly by the Americans, were going to radical elements including Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda fighters and many other foreign fighters who were going at that time into Bosnia.

Of course, the modern radicalisation of the people of Bosnia stems from this unhappy history. The war finally came to an end in 1995, not because of the NATO bombing but because in August 1995 a Croatian-led force under Operation Storm invaded Bosnia from the west and took

much of the land which the Serbs were hoping to trade for peace on their terms. Even that does not give a full account of the story, for Operation Storm was merely a stage-managed event that had been pre-arranged by Milošević and Tuđman, who had already agreed in 1994 to end the war between those two countries.

The price of peace demanded by Tudjman was the return of Krajina to Croatia. I was given a map in August 1994, one year before Operation Storm, showing me the line where the Serb regular forces would withdraw to and where the Croatian forces would attack a year later and then halt. The whole episode was a grim charade that resulted in the highest incidence of ethnic cleansing of the entire war. Nearly 200,000 Serbs were driven from their historic lands in Krajina, some 21,000 Muslims were driven out of western Bosnia and another 22,000 Muslims and Croats were driven out of Republika Srpska. Those people today remain displaced from their homes, which again is a source of enormous grievance and instability in the region.

In summary, the Dayton peace agreement can be described, once again quoting David Harland, as, "an elite deal between the same three ethno-national elites that had started the war in the first place, and was brokered by the US without the endorsement of the people whose fate it determined. It cemented a ceasefire that had already been put in place by the UN before the negotiations began, and confirmed the results of ethnic cleansing, mainly to the benefit of the Serbs. Quite unnecessarily, it created enduring constitutional arrangements that which were both unworkable and discriminatory, and which have prevented the emergence of moderate and pragmatic political forces"—and, one might therefore add, good governance.

It is more difficult to find a recent example from history of where propaganda and rhetoric replaced reality in decision-making. There was a determination at the time by NATO and the Americans to prove that the bombing and the military force worked. At the 50th anniversary of the NATO conference held here in London in 1999, Prime Minister Blair attempted to reinvent this lie by stating, "We tried to bring peace to Bosnia through the UN and with political good offices but without the willingness to use force which we now know was necessary ... we will not repeat those early mistakes in Bosnia. We will not allow war to devastate a part of our continent, bringing untold death, suffering and homelessness". In saying that, of course, he was clearly paving the way for the forthcoming war in Kosovo, which of course led into the war in Iraq, where indeed we saw untold suffering, devastation and homelessness.

By exporting the flawed logic that had started in the Balkans through Kosovo into the Middle East, of course, we have visited on those millions of people the awful situation that we see today. That should be the enduring lesson of Bosnia. I will halt there.

The Chairman: That is a very full summary of your assessment and a very strong censure of parts of American policy, the Dayton agreement

and the work of people such as Richard Holbrooke.

I will ask Lord Hannay to ask you what you think the consequences and the lessons are for the moment.

Q3 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Thank you very much. It is nice to see you again, Michael. I do not entirely share your analysis, but I think it would be more useful now to look to the future than to the present and the past and to look wider than just Bosnia, because the former Yugoslavia is a lot more than just Bosnia, although Bosnia is at the heart of some of the problems.

On the basis of your experience, what ought the international community to have learnt now, and how best could it apply those lessons to what I think is a fairly uncontroversial view that it is in our interests in the national community to sustain peace and security in the region and to avoid deterioration into hostilities. Drawing on the lessons from your time there, and looking at the wider former Yugoslavia, what do you think the way ahead should be?

General Sir Michael Rose: Britain clearly has a major interest in what is going to happen in the west Balkans, and I do not think anyone would sign up to Disraeli's famous quote that no sane man ever involved himself in the Balkans; it is too late for that. Also, some 72 Britons, mainly soldiers, have died in the western Balkans since the early 1990s, so we have a great interest in making sure that their lives were not sacrificed for nothing.

My own view on how we should proceed is that of course Britain must continue outside the European Union to play a major part. We should support the European Union in its attempt to persuade the countries to join not only the European Union but NATO. We should insist on the technical, moral and judicial standards that are required for membership of both the European Union and indeed NATO being met. Therefore, I believe that we have a full part to play. My worry at the moment is that President Trump's isolationist policies and decision to reduce the budgets that are being employed in the western Balkans at the moment will leave a vacuum that might well be filled by the Russians.

Lord Jopling: I think your presentation, which, forgive me, is mostly history, has been enormously helpful to us, but may I bring you back to the Chairman's first question about how you assess the current situation, and whether all this could bubble up again and we could find ourselves back where we were?

General Sir Michael Rose: The situation may well bubble up again. Going back in history, I think it was Winston Churchill who said that the Balkans have too much history. It is very difficult to separate the present day from history, because the people who are responding to those events are always going back into history to determine their own responses. It is not what you see on the surface that counts in the Balkans, it is what is going on under the surface, and old grievances and old alliances are being formed, reformed and reshaped. The dangers of Bosnia becoming a

failed state are quite great, particularly with the reluctance of the Bosnian Serbs to sign up to the idea of having a single entity in that country. Of course, in a way the Dayton peace accords enable them to flex their muscles, which they have been doing for 20 years and should never have been allowed to do in the first place. That is a serious danger.

Added on top of that you have jihadists coming through and being exported and the collapsing economy in Bosnia. I read a statistic showing that Bosnia has the highest youth unemployment rate of anywhere in the world. Some 60% to 70% of that section of the population are unemployed. Of course, that is the very section of the population where you would expect the jihadists to make the most ground. So I fear that the dangers are considerable, without going into what is happening in Macedonia and the minority Albanian population there or what is happening in Serbia itself.

The Chairman: Sticking with Dayton, Lord Wood has a question.

Q4 **Lord Wood of Anfield:** May I ask you to go back to what you said about British engagement and ask you a very basic question? Is there an identifiable British strategy towards the region, not just at the moment but over the last few years?

To add to that, you mentioned very interestingly that our main contribution could be to urge continuation of the process for membership of the EU and NATO. Obviously our voice on EU membership may be slightly weaker, or less heard, now that we are going through Brexit. More broadly, are there other things that we should do, other than urging membership of these two organisations, that we can have an impact with?

General Sir Michael Rose: As I said, the continued support of those two major aims should be our primary way of expressing ourselves, but if there are other elements where we can also help, such as at the economic level or in military training teams, we should continue to do that. That might well be quite separate from what the Americans and NATO are doing, or what the European Union is doing. There is certainly a requirement for continuing military engagement in the form of training teams, and obviously anything that we do to help to get the economies of those countries going, the better.

Lord Wood of Anfield: On the first part of the question, is there an identifiable British strategy at the moment?

General Sir Michael Rose: Not particularly, no. At the moment we are still working our way through to the position that we should take, and I hope this Committee will come up with a sensible and productive view at the end.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: I think you said that much of the unhappiness at the moment dates back to Dayton, in your view. Is your assessment that the unhappiness will simply be the continuation or the development of the failed states, as you mentioned, or are there other grounds for

further interstate clash? If Dayton succeeded in one thing, it might be that it was very hard for there to be state-to-state conflict. What is your assessment?

General Sir Michael Rose: I cannot see any grounds for worrying about an interstate clash in the Balkans. There are too many outside players involved there, and such a clash just would not be possible.

Lord Grocott: My question is related to that. If you are identifying the countries that are likely to become failed states, at least one of the ingredients, if not the principal ingredient, is the position of Serbia and the Serbian minority in the state. What, in practical terms, can be done to prevent at least the possibility or even the probability of it becoming a failed state? It seems to me that these tensions have been there for so long that it is almost impossible to see the Serbian part of Kosovo, leaving aside the rights and wrongs, becoming reconciled to the status quo.

General Sir Michael Rose: I do not think that one should totally despair. There is obviously a lot of feeling, especially among the displaced Serbs who live in Republika Srpska, who have come not only from Krajina but from Kosovo. However, as long as we can persuade Serbia through the leverage that we exercise with it in its wish to accede to the European Union, that is a greater gain for the people of Serbia a generation or two on than taking on some extremely unhappy people from Republika Srpska and creating trouble next door.

There is game-playing going on. One lesson I learnt in the Balkans very early on is that what you see is not what you get. The other rule is that if they are talking they are generally lying and have another agenda to pursue. There is an awful lot of game-playing going on and I do not think that we need to overreact to it. We have very strong levers that we can use to prevent Bosnia-Herzegovina breaking up. The consequences of that, as you suggest, would be unthinkable. We would end up with the Croatian element moving across and joining Croatia, and Europe having to sustain a tiny, unworkable Muslim state in the middle. I do not think that could happen as long as we keep faith with our ideals and our policies.

Baroness Helic: General Rose, I probably share the sentiments of Lord Hannay in looking back at the past. I would probably not agree with everything, but it is really interesting to hear how you see it 25 years or so later and the lessons that you have drawn from your experience of your deployment and command of UNPROFOR.

I was very interested and encouraged to hear that you think that, in the post-Brexit era, there will still be British interest in sustaining the peace and stability of the Balkans. In Bosnia, this process is run through the EUFOR mandate under Chapter VII, which enables the outside force to keep this peace and stability. Each year, the mandate comes up for renewal—I expect it will be around the end of September or early October this year—and, each time, I see it slightly watered down to accommodate

mainly Russian concerns that there has been a NATO and EU military presence in Bosnia for too long.

In your experience, having seen how it works when troops are on the ground and do not have a sufficient mandate, do you think the British Government should ensure that the mandate is not watered down further, or that, in the worst-case scenario, it is not abandoned? We may never be able to have such a mandate if Bosnia generally disintegrates as you have just tried to describe to us.

General Sir Michael Rose: It is terribly important that we keep a military presence and that, when it is there, it has a meaningful mandate, because that sends a signal not only internally to the people of Bosnia but externally, including to the Russians. I am of the view that NATO is the prime defender of Europe and therefore that it should maintain its interest there. Whether we are doing that as part of NATO or independently, it does not really matter; we are still being seen by the outside world as doing it as a part of a great alliance. That will also send signals to the Russians, who are being opportunistic. I do not have any grand strategy for making the western Balkans part of a post-Warsaw Pact alliance of any sort, but I think that the Russians like to cause mischief. They like the fact that the mafia can go on running guns, people and what-have-you through the Balkans, and they like to keep the area destabilised because it worries the Americans and us. I do not think that we should necessarily overreact to that—again, we have levers on the Russians as well.

Q5 Lord Reid of Cardowan: On this very point about NATO, what is your assessment of the level of integration of the region within NATO and what strategic benefits do you see for the countries in the region of membership of NATO? To what extent are they integrated within what you could call the Euro-Atlantic framework and NATO specifically?

General Sir Michael Rose: I have no current experience of how the people actually think, but my instinct is that they all lean towards Europe and towards America and therefore the West. Again, the people who wish to maintain poor governance and the corruption that goes on in all those countries will go on playing the game that we are playing with the Russians in order to worry the West and stop us getting too strenuous about them meeting the standards and joining Europe. That is the game-playing that is going on at the moment. As long as we maintain the high standards that we require them to achieve before they join either NATO or the European Union and do not allow ourselves to get watered down in the way we discussed in respect of the military arrangements, people will have to respond to the position that we take. It has to be a firm position, because a lot of parties out there are trying to undermine it. The people of that region are the victims of what is going on. I know perfectly well that they wish to be part of the West and not part of the East, despite the fact that the Serbs have the historic and religious connections.

Lord Jopling: Coming back to my earlier question about the potential powder keg in that part of the world, I hope to meet the SACEUR in two

weeks' time. What should I suggest to him that NATO should do now to deal with the evolving situation in the western Balkans?

General Sir Michael Rose: I would encourage him to continue with the engagement that is already going on. For example, Serbia has run some 22 exercises with NATO in the past year or two but only two with Russia—a sort of symbolic counterbalance. That sends a message in itself. NATO's engagement, which I do not think you will have much trouble in persuading it to continue in the western Balkans, through exercising, through helping to rebuild armed forces and through allowing Kosovo, for example, to have its own army, is all terribly important. It will help to cement our relations and make sure that the area becomes stable and that peace in the region is not threatened.

The Chairman: Let us move on to the external side. I want to put in one question. This conflict was 25 years ago, since when we have had two huge technological revolutions in the world: a vast energy revolution—conditions are totally different from anything that existed even 10 years ago—and I imagine that, as in almost every other corner of the planet, most people in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the whole region have their mobile telephones, their iPads and their systems. Kosovo is even advertising itself as a hub of electronic communication development. This is a language that would not even have been recognised 10 years ago. Has this vast set of world changes impacted on the region sufficiently to remove some of the pressures that you encountered all that time ago and to change people's attitudes?

General Sir Michael Rose: In some ways, it obviously has, because everyone has the same social media and is aware of what is happening in the world. Everyone is aware of the possibilities, particularly young people. As you know, there has been a massive brain drain out of Bosnia, because they can see a better world outside, and that better world is always in the West and not in the East. Therefore, the use of social media and technology has had its benefits in showing people what the possibilities are. It has also had its disadvantages in that it has allowed people to leave the country and thereby make it even more difficult for us to stabilise the region.

Q6 **Baroness Coussins:** I want to come back to Russia and ask you to develop the remarks that you made earlier. Russia's influence in the region has traditionally been relatively weak, with most states in the region having ambitions in the direction of the EU. Is your assessment that this might be changing, especially in the light of Russia being the supplier of most of the energy to many of the states in the region? Would you say that Russia is in a position to be able to offer alternative military partnerships and to challenge NATO?

General Sir Michael Rose: You are right. Obviously they have some leverage with their gas supplies into the western Balkans, but one can overplay that. As you know, other initiatives are now being developed to make sure that energy can come from across the Aegean Sea et cetera. I think we can quite easily overreact to the Russian influence. As I said, I

do not think that the army in Serbia is particularly interested in becoming part of a Russian military alliance; it is much more interested in becoming a part of NATO. As long as we keep faith with that and do not allow all these bumps in the road ahead to knock us off course, I think we will succeed in that mission. It would be insane for Serbia to think that it could create a little post-Warsaw Pact alliance.

On the economy, there is talk about having some sort of post-Yugoslavia customs union in the region. Again, any discussion like that should be encouraged, because that puts fences up and makes it more difficult for the Russians to intervene.

The Chairman: What about Turkey? We have just heard Mrs Merkel's view that Turkey should give up its aspirations to join the EU, which seemed to be greeted with an odd mixture of relief and fury from Ankara. However, the Turks seem to be involving themselves in the area. Are they doing damage to the present situation and stirring it up?

General Sir Michael Rose: I do not know. I think they would love to invent the old Ottoman Empire and have the same sort of influence in their old region, but that is just wishful thinking. Again, they are using the western Balkans as a pawn in the game that is going on between the European Union and Turkey. Turkey is failing dismally to meet any of the standards required by the European Union on transparency, good governance, freedom of the media and all the other things. Angela Merkel is quite right to say that there is no hope of it joining in the foreseeable future.

Turkey's response may be to try to cause trouble in the Balkans, but my experience of the Muslims in the Balkans is different. I once had a discussion with a Saudi Arabian prince on the subject. He had been responsible for sending a mission there at the start of the Balkan wars to find out about these European Muslims, of whom they had never heard. Some imams came from Mecca and spent six weeks in Bosnia. They came back saying, "These Muslims are not Muslims. They don't pray five times a day, they eat pork and they drink like fishes". That might not be the case today because, as we know, Saudi Arabia has put quite a lot of effort into investing in madrassahs and other institutions in that country, as has Turkey, but I do not think that will have much impact on people who are probably European in blood anyway and do not have the same instincts.

Lord Grocott: I do not want to misrepresent you, but what comes over to me is the view that any involvement of any sort from Russia is either mischievous or malign, or both, whereas the truth is surely slightly more complicated, not least because, as you said in your opening statement, the involvement of the West—I am using the word "West" in very broad terms—has not exactly been a triumphant conclusion to settling the difficulties of the Balkans. Is it not at least true to say that we have a common interest with the Russians in that neither of us particularly wants to see failed states anywhere? Is that not a factor that suggests that we might have some things in common and that it is not just goodies versus

baddies?

General Sir Michael Rose: You are absolutely right. There is enormous mileage in developing the western Balkans as common ground between us and the Russians. Even during the Balkan wars, I often used Russia to try to modify the pressure that was being put on me by NATO to use more force against the Serbs, because I knew that if we went beyond a certain level of force, that would crash the peace mission. I very often used the Russians in the Security Council—Lord Hannay will no doubt confirm this—to try to maintain a minimum level of force and not to maximise it.

The Russians at the time were very amenable and understood instinctively what we were trying to do. It was curious that a NATO soldier should be using the Russians against NATO within five years of the end of the Cold War, but that is how it worked out. In a way, that set a trend that today we can use with the Russians. Putin is an opportunist. He is causing mischief wherever he can. That is to do with the way in which we humiliated Russia at the end of the Cold War, particularly at the conference that I spoke about in the year of the 50th anniversary of NATO, when the Russian delegation effectively got up and walked out because we were being so rude about them. They have been doing pushback ever since. However, given the trouble that they have in Syria, where they need to come to a resolution, I think that the Balkans, as a counterbalance, would be a very useful area about which we could talk with them in objective and neutral terms.

Lord Reid of Cardowan: This is a non-sequitur, because I am going back to Turkey. You said in relation to Turkey's influence, benign or malign, that you did not see it as great, other than there being some vague notion of re-establishing a framework of the old Ottoman Empire and so on. Part of the reason you gave for that was the particular nature of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is a very moderate form. However, you talked earlier about radicalisation and polarisation inside Bosnia-Herzegovina. In that context, is there a greater degree of Turkish influence than there might have been from the starting point of when you were there?

General Sir Michael Rose: That is absolutely right. The vacuum that in a way we have allowed to occur in Bosnia in particular has allowed the radicalisation of the younger element in particular. As you know, Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo produce more foreign fighters in Syria than the rest of Europe put together, so there is an element of that, but we should counter strenuously with our own I would not say propaganda but information policy, because of course they are subject through social media to enormous propaganda from ISIS, as well as all the injuries and grievances that go back to the Balkan wars. We should take an active part in that, surely, but it does not alter my overall view that the instinctive nature of the Bosnian Muslims is not exactly the same as the Wahhabis, for example.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I was a little sceptical about what you said

about working with the Russians, because I am not sure that you have taken sufficiently into account that the Russia of the 1990s, which was indeed sometimes reasonably helpful, is not Mr Putin's Russia—

General Sir Michael Rose: That is true.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: —and I am not sure that Putin's objectives are the same as, say, Yeltsin's were when Yeltsin gave very high priority to working with the West on a whole range of international problems, of which this was one. I would be sceptical, frankly, because I think that the Putin policy, as you described earlier, is one of troublemaking, of basically destabilising, of making life difficult for NATO, the Americans, us, the other Europeans et cetera. I do not quite see the scope for co-operation myself, but perhaps you do.

General Sir Michael Rose: I think, Lord Hannay, that I am probably slightly more optimistic than you are. You and I dealt often with Sergei Lavrov, who is still in business.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Yes, exactly.

General Sir Michael Rose: He in a way represents the continuity between Yeltsin and Putin. I think Putin is a realist, and if we suggested to him, as somebody on your Committee previously said, that an unstable, fragmented and possibly violent western Balkans would not be in Russia's interest, I am sure he would have to agree with you. One could try a démarche with him and see how it went. Sergei Lavrov in particular would be a very interesting person to talk to on that basis.

The Chairman: A final question on the other enigma, which is of course Washington and not Moscow.

Q7 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** You mentioned the reduced budget from the US in the region and you said that it could leave a vacuum that could be filled by Russia. Will this be a bump in the road? Will our strategic interests continue to be aligned with the United States, or are you detecting quite a shift from the US and that we will have to have a clearer separation from our position with the US?

General Sir Michael Rose: I lend myself to your latter position. As long as President Trump remains in power there will be a definite shift. He is, by instinct, an isolationist who responds to external issues such as North Korea, but his main ambition is to disengage and "make America great again" from within before he starts to get involved in foreign expeditions again. So I fear that we may have to pick up the tab—or fill the vacuum, to change the metaphor—that is left by President Trump and the new Administration.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: Would the priority for that lie within the NATO community, or would it be in some form of post-Brexit new relationship with the EU?

General Sir Michael Rose: I think it should be both, I am afraid. We should support the EU in its initiatives. As somebody said, Brussels cannot go it alone. Therefore it needs every help it can get, and in the same way NATO needs our support and encouragement.

The Chairman: That it is not a conclusion, of course, but it is an end point when you talk of picking tabs and filling in vacuums. That is where our work starts: where the possibilities are.

Sir Michael, it was fascinating to hear your wisdom on the whole scene, and we are very grateful to you. You have been an introduction to it for us, and we thank you very much for coming before us.

General Sir Michael Rose: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to express the position that I have been harbouring for many, many years, and I wish you every good fortune in your endeavours, because this is extremely important.

The Chairman: I think we are going to need it. Thank you very much indeed.

Examination of witness

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon.

Q8 **The Chairman:** Lord Ashdown, welcome. Thank you for sparing time to come before the Committee as we try to grapple with this long-standing question of the Balkans. We have labelled our study "Beyond Brexit: the UK and the Balkans". You were high representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina for four years, I think, which is a long stretch. You have at your fingertips more knowledge, understanding and sensitivity of what is happening there now than many people and we would like to hear your views. Let me start with the obvious and main question: what about the Balkans and the UK today? Is there sufficient interest here? Do we understand what is happening and what all the dangers are? How can we make good and be effective in that area? If you could start on that aspect of the overall theme, that would be very helpful.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Thank you, Lord Chairman, for inviting me here. You say that I have more understanding, but I suspect that I have slightly less than Arminka Helic, who has been a great adviser and helper to me. I suspect that you will want to listen to her judgments in these things. I know that she is very close to the situation and I believe that in her time with the last Foreign Secretary—or the Foreign Secretary before that; I lose touch—she did a great deal of work there. It is a pleasure to be here. I may disagree with some of the things that Sir Michael Rose said, but he is absolutely right that this is a most timely inquiry. I think that it is extremely important.

As for the United Kingdom, the straight answer to your question is no—I do not think that there is huge engagement with the Balkans in the United Kingdom. I do not think that the situation is widely known about, and given the other problems facing the world, why should it be? It was

very much at the forefront of everybody's mind throughout the 1990s. I remember visiting Bosnia and Sarajevo during the war and later as a high representative. Whenever I went to a foreign capital and spoke to Foreign Secretaries, I would mention Banja Luka or Sanski Most and they would know exactly where they were, because that had been part of their upbringing, as it were. I suppose that has now slightly—with the exception of Mr Lavrov—worked its way out of the system.

I was very conscious when I was there that Bosnia was if not at the top of the agenda then close to it. You saw that in the seniority of the diplomats and representatives of the various Peace Implementation Council members who would turn up to regular meetings in Sarajevo. By the time I left, the posts that had started off being filled by senior people in the Foreign Office had diminished down to being filled by much more junior ones, which is a fair indication of how this has gone off the boil. Certainly, when William Hague was Foreign Secretary, this was one of the key features of foreign policy to concentrate on—indeed, I think that it featured in the coalition agreement. In the end, I suspect that we could not develop the kind of policies that Foreign Secretary Hague would like to have followed because our European neighbours and perhaps especially at that time Berlin and Paris would not provide the energy behind it; I suspect the calculation was made that it was not worth the expenditure of political capital to move them off other issues in order to devote to this one. That gives you another indication. It was off the boil, not of great interest and low down on the international agenda.

Should it be? No, it certainly should not. Bismarck famously said that the Balkans were not worth the bones of a Pomeranian grenadier. I think we have proved that that was not true in the 20th century and presently. Bosnia remains the interface on that crucial fault-line between what we used to call Christendom and the Muslim world. It remains a potential bridge. Alija Izetbegović, the leader of Bosnian Muslims during the Balkan war, used to say, "I'm a European and a Muslim and I see no contradiction between the two". That is true, as Michael Rose mentioned. Therefore, its capacity to act as an essential bridge, both adhering to European values and being a Muslim nation, is of crucial strategic importance to us.

You should also look at the downside. If Bosnia breaks up—for lack of political will to do anything else, in effect as a result of what happens through amnesia, apathy or lack of attention—whether legally or not, and we are left with the European Union being the unwitting deliverer of the policies of Karadžić and Mladić, with the Bosnian enclave having 40% of the population cut off from the Republika Srpska, we would be in a very difficult position. If you look at the recruiting sergeants for ISIS, for instance, you will still find that Bosnia and the Bosnian war are high up the agenda among them. This is important to them and it ought to be more important to us.

My final point before we get on to your questions, Lord Chairman, is that one mistake that we made is that, although we invested political will,

treasure and forces in Bosnia to bring it to the point where I think it could make a track towards becoming an accession country to the European Union, the job was unfinished and remains unfinished business. Broadly speaking, this coincided with when I left in 2006—I do not think that the two are necessarily connected—when we sort of left it there.

One mistake that we made was to lack the strategic patience to see it through to a proper, stable conclusion. The second occurred under Solana in particular, with my successor, Miroslav Lajčák, who was then high representative. Javier Solana took the view that Kosovo was the central problem: sort out Kosovo and the rest of the Balkans would be all right. That is a fundamental misunderstanding. Basically, the policy followed by the European Union in 2006-07, from which I think the current difficulties stem, was to pay any price to keep Bosnia quiet—in that case, it was police reform—so that we could sort out Kosovo. I do not believe that Kosovo is the fuse that leads to the Balkans bomb; I think that Kosovo is a bit like Schleswig-Holstein—time will sort it out. You remember that Gladstone was once asked, “What is the answer to the Schleswig-Holstein question?” His answer was, “Three people know, but one is dead, the other is mad and I’m the third and I’ve forgotten”. It was time that sorted it out. However, if Bosnia goes bad, the rest of the Balkans goes bad. For that reason, I think that the lack of attention to this problem is dangerous.

I finish by saying this. Do I therefore mean that I think that Bosnia will go back to war? No. I do not think that is the most likely outcome. There is not the will for it, although there are rumours of people training in the forest, as there were in 1992. The fact that there is now a state army—a professional army—responsible to the presidency is a bulwark against it. I do not think that anyone wants to go back to war. The mood may be quite nervous, as it was in 1992, but I do not think that the intention or the desire to go to war, which was certainly evident in 1992, is there now.

However, the situation is so febrile that I cannot tell you with confidence that conflict and violence would not be the outcome if, for instance, a hand grenade were thrown into the mosque in Doboj at Friday prayers. The consequence of that, I think, would be unpleasant. The most likely outcome from the present policy is that Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a sort of black hole of corruption, a dystopia, lacking the ability to govern itself properly, a sort of festering pit that which we have not the energy to put right and which we are prepared to tolerate the consequences of in the centre of what is one of Europe’s most unstable regions.

The Chairman: That is very full of insights and reflection. On this question of how febrile it is, as you have said it is very hard to assess whether it will go back to something in the nature of an explosion or merely continue to be a festering sore, in your words. Lord Balfe wants to pursue this issue.

Q9 **Lord Balfe:** You described the Dayton peace accord as “a superb agreement to end a war but a very bad agreement to make a state”.

Much later in the summer of this year, David Harland wrote of it that, “the machinery of government established at Dayton is cumbersome and remains unreformed and financed by unsustainable levels of debt”, et cetera. Is reform of Dayton fundamental in getting a major solution to the problems that we face?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: It is.

Lord Balfe: And if it is, do we go ahead?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Dayton had all sorts of stupidities and infelicities, but I cannot think of a single compromise made in Dayton, untidy and uncomfortable though they were, that was not necessary to create the context for peace. Nor can I think of any Bosnian I have ever met who would not have preferred an untidy, ragged, even ragtag and bobtail, peace than the continuation of that war. It was the right thing at the time. Bosnia has gone through two phases. The first was stabilisation, and the second is state-building. Dayton was absolutely right for stabilisation. Perhaps the only compromise that we did not have to make was to pretend that there were three languages—Bosnian, Serbian and Croat—instead of one. They are the same language. That has allowed a certain degree of linguistic nationalism to grow up. But the other compromises were all necessary. It was a brilliant agreement, in my view.

The moment of moving from stabilisation to state-building coincided with my arrival in Bosnia in 2002. In the first speech I gave to the Bosnian parliament I said that Dayton had to be our floor but could not be our ceiling. We had to build on Dayton. The problem was that nobody has the power to go beyond Dayton. Nobody can impose that. My mandate there was to act within Dayton. If I wanted to go beyond Dayton, which I did, I had to persuade the Bosnians that that was what they had to do.

We went beyond Dayton in a number of key areas. We went beyond Dayton in establishing a single army; in taking the three intelligence services and making them one; in making them responsible to parliament; indeed, in making them a model of intelligence services legislation; and in creating a single customs service out of three. All these went beyond Dayton—and were created in two years by the way, which is a world record. And from a completely dysfunctional sales tax system a whole new VAT system was introduced that provides sustainable funding for the Bosnian Government.

All those things went beyond Dayton. In all of them, I could not use my Bonn powers as a high representative; I had to use my political persuasion to persuade the Bosnian Governments of Republika Srpska, the federation and the Bosnian state to accept these, and they did. I had to use a lot of pressure, and you could hear a great deal of cracking of bones from as far away as Brussels. In the process of doing that, I extensively used my two colleagues in the European Union: Chris Patten, then a Commissioner, and George Robertson, then the Secretary-General of NATO. It was pretty brutal use to make sure that these things were

done. In the end, the Bosnians understood that this was what they had to do in order to join the European Union and the Atlantic institutions in Brussels, and that it was very important.

The moment the European Union lost the will to use that power to move them forward—not the Bonn powers vested in the high representative but the political powers that came from Brussels—they reverted to the normal fissiparous tendencies. There is a reason for that. I have a theory that in unfinished wars, in frozen conflicts, the nomenklatura who run the war immediately translate themselves into the running the political situation afterwards, and they do not change the aims of the war; they simply pursue them through the means of politics. Therefore, our rush to have lots of elections did not create a democracy simply because none of the other institutions of a democracy were there. I had to create those when I went there: a single judiciary, the beginnings of a free press et cetera, and a decent constitution. You have to continue that political pressure until the generation that ran the war are leached out of the system. By the way, that is beginning to happen in Northern Ireland and why they have a chance there.

In 2006, when I left—and I think it would be fair to say that I was regarded as an excessively muscular high representative—then the European Union adopted the policy of local determination far too prematurely and simply took its hands off the guided tiller, and everything went back and everybody reasserted their policies. Since then, there has been a gradual unstitching. I am afraid to say that, over her time as the European high representative of foreign affairs, Cathy Ashton, for whom I have a great regard—she is a good friend, and I have high respect for her—allowed every step that we made in those days, even in the days of the two predecessor high representatives, to unravel back to a process that is close to dystopian government again. That is very regrettable.

How do we reverse that? We cannot reverse that unless the European Union adopts the will to drive this process and uses its leverage to do so. Going back to an answer given by General Sir Michael Rose, that is always more likely to happen if there is an Atlantic relationship. If the European Union twins with the United States to drive that process, they will form an irresistible force that can make things happen in Bosnia. We have chosen not to do that because we have chosen not to have the political will to make it happen, with the consequence that Bosnia is now tracking not forwards, but backwards.

The Chairman: We will move further to the American role in a moment, but, Baroness Helic, do you want to pursue this theme?

Q10 **Baroness Helic:** I do not know where to start; there is so much there. Thank you very much.

I meant to ask you, although perhaps you have answered this, what in your view are the main challenges for the state of Bosnia. Another thing that I keep encountering is that each time I listen to the high

representative, Ms Mogherini, she gives sweet words about her attachment to the Balkans, her understanding and her ambition that not one of the six countries in the Balkans is left behind, but every time you scratch the surface there is no plan, no political will, no unity, no strategy. It is actually shameful to keep repeating this every couple of months whenever there is a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council et cetera. I just wonder whether I am too critical or whether you see something that I am unable to see in these words and whether there is potentially something behind them that can produce a substantial plan and a strategy to implement it.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: There is a great Bosnian phrase, "Da komsjia crkne carava". To me čini sretnim", which means, "My neighbour's cow is dead. That makes me happy". The word "thrawn" may well be Scottish and Northern Irish, but it is also Bosnian too. They love it when that happens. There is, by the way, a very much ruder version of that. I will not repeat it here or I will make Baroness Helic blush. The Bosnians love extremely rude proverbs.

There is that natural tendency for dysfunctionality. It is very Northern Irish, in a way. Forgive me, but I am a Northern Irishman, so I can say that. So I have no doubt that the key to Bosnia to make this right, is to create a functional state. For as long as the state wastes its very limited money on this vast institution with 10 Prime Ministers and 10 Ministers of the Interior - because all the cantons have one - it cannot spend it on building the loyalty of its citizens. Loyalty from citizens to the state does not, I am afraid to say, come from flags and anthems; it comes from the fact that the state delivers to the citizens the things that the citizens want to have that make them loyal to the state. Good education, jobs and health system. The flags and the anthems come after that.

If you have a dysfunctional state you cannot have citizens who want to commit to that state. They would rather go and join another state, as the Serbs do in wanting to join Belgrade and as the Croats in Herzegovina do in wanting to join Zagreb. There is a need to make a functional state able to deliver jobs, a reasonable economy—there was a growing one when I was there—a decent education system. It is exactly the same as in our own country. For as long as Bosnia is dysfunctional it will not be able to deliver.

How do you make Bosnia functional? I am afraid that Britain is not a model. Belgium is much more a model for modern dystopian states than is Britain. It is highly decentralised, where you pay a certain price of inefficiency in governance to hold the very difficult ethnic and religious mixes together. It is a light-level state that has significant devolution, but at a state level it is able to relate to equivalence in the European Union. So the Minister of Agriculture in Bosnia can do a deal with the Minister of Agriculture from Britain in the Council of Ministers. That is what you need to create.

Is there a plan for that? I do not think there is. Constitutional reform has been tried—I wish they did not call it that, because that sends up

maroons ahead of time. The functional reform of Bosnia is crucial to be able to create a functional state. There is no plan for that. If there is, there is no will behind that plan to make it work. The will does not lie, I am afraid, with High Representative Mogherini; it lies with European capitals. If the European capitals provide the will behind that, the high representative of foreign affairs can do it. Chris Patten did it brilliantly. Before I went there, I spent nine months coming up with a plan, then I took it around each of the key European capitals and got their agreement at a high level—they would give me the political will to drive that plan through. That was then developed through the European Union. Unless you have all those systems in place, even if there was a plan, absent the support from European capitals it will not go through. If Europe wants to solve the Balkans—as it should, for reasons we have given—it needs to develop in its capitals the political will to engage and drive that process through. If they could do that, it can be done. Absent that, it cannot.

The Chairman: My thinking is that we want to come more to what the UK can do in all this. We had quite confused messages from Sir Michael as to whether the Balkans are moving away from Europe towards Russia or from Russia towards Europe.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: I very much agree with Lord Hannay on that. I thought that Michael Rose was wrong. He was talking about the Russia that was and not the Russia that is. I remember going to see Lavrov in Moscow on Bosnia on several occasions. The Russians supported what we did in the PIC in those days. The Russia of today absolutely does not. Russia's interest in the Balkans is to give us as much mischief as possible. Sir Michael Rose said that it did not want a failed state. I think it is perfectly happy to see failed states in the Balkans, because they are our failed states. The exception is Montenegro. Montenegro is 600,000 strong and it has basically been bought by the Russian mafia. That is who owns Montenegro today.

I am very clear that Russia's interest is to give us problems in our own back yard so that we do not have enough energy to do the things that we could otherwise do, for instance in Ukraine. It has lent Republika Srpska money—not very much—in order to show that it can. I will tell a little story. There was an occasion when one of the Bosnian politicians—a Serb, actually—came to see me, because I was pushing the European Union. He said, "Oh, Paddy, we can always go to Russia. We don't have to go to Brussels, because we can go to Moscow". I said, "I tell you what, meet me at 6 tomorrow morning in the square outside the presidency in Sarajevo". He said, "Why?" I said, "Just meet me there". We met at 6 o'clock and we took a little walk around Sarajevo very early in the morning. We went first to the German embassy—there was a great big queue all the way round the street back into the central square. What were they there for? They were waiting for visas. So I said, "Come on. Let's go along and see the Austrian embassy". So we went to the Austrian embassy. There was a great big queue all the way round waiting for visas. I said, "Come on. Let's go and have a look at the Russian embassy". It was completely empty. Nobody wanted to go to Russia. The

truth is that Russia will make mischief for us there. It is in the interests of Russia, probably of Erdoğan, too, these days—although I am bound to say that Turkey played an extremely positive role up until Erdoğan and across the ethnicities—just to make things difficult for us. In so far as we leave a vacuum, where we do not have a plan and the will to enforce it, we give them an opportunity to do so.

- Q11 **Baroness Coussins:** I was going to come on to what the UK should or could be doing to help in the effort that you have just described that is so necessary to create a functional state. In the post-Brexit context, how can the UK use more effectively its membership of other international bodies such as the UN, NATO and OSCE to help promote that, perhaps in particular in helping to tackle corruption and crime, which are two key elements preventing an effective functional state? How would you describe the UK's role in the region post Brexit, especially as part of all those other organisations that we will remain members of?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: I am sorry, I will have to give you a bleak answer: hugely diminished. The things that make Bosnia move are Washington and Brussels, because Washington is the key to putting its armed forces in a position where it could join NATO and Brussels delivers the soft power that enables it to reform its judicial system, create a customs service and so on—and, by the way, it has a huge amount resources going in. Brussels has more institutions of leverage in Bosnia and Herzegovina than it has in any other country in the world. It has a high representative still equipped with the Bonn power who happens also to be the European Union's special representative, responsible to Brussels. It has a huge police mission there and it has a huge, in per capita terms, aid programme. People used to come to me. I would say, "You have to do this, because if you don't do it we're not going to give you the aid", and Chis Patten would give the aid essentially. I was asked, "Are you blackmailing me?" I said, "No. This is our taxpayers' money. We are not going to give it for you to do nothing". If you do not have that leverage, you cannot move things forward.

Are there things that Britain could do? Well, if it remained in the European Union, it could promote the idea that we have a co-ordinated European policy towards the Balkans. By the way, it has to be a regional policy; you cannot have penny-packet policies in Bosnia. If I wanted to get things done in Bosnia with the Serbs, I rang Belgrade and spoke to my friends there. If I wanted to get things done with Croatia, I rang Zagreb and I made it clear that I was always very close to them. So it has to be a regional policy. If you produced a European regional policy, and Britain was prepared to expend the political will to make that work, you could change the Balkans. But Britain acting alone simply cannot do that, so we remove ourselves from the primary power to make things happen. Does that mean that there is nothing we can do? No. Of course, we can provide technical support for anti-corruption measures, and, of course, we can provide technical support to help the economy work better, but they are all things that many other nations can do as well and I do not think we elevate ourselves beyond the position of, perhaps,

Japan—which is a member of the Peace Implementation Council—except that we are able to do it with greater resource. But if we remove ourselves from the European Union, we remove ourselves from having our hands on the primary levers to change things. I am sorry to be depressing about that. It was a huge support to me that I could get things done in Brussels through London that made a difference in Bosnia.

The Chairman: Baroness Hilton, I think I rather rudely cut you out from that, for which I apologise. The Chairman was making a muddle. Would you like to pursue this point, or do you feel that it has been answered?

Q12 **Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** I think my question has effectively been answered, but I would like to ask a different one, if I may, about funding. Looking at the figures for funding, we seem to be funding Bosnia at a much lower level than the other ex-Yugoslavian republics, whereas I think from the evidence we have heard it should be getting far more EU funding.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Yes, I agree. By “we”, do you mean in this case the European Union?

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: I meant the EU, yes.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Croatia has been a really important model. I could always point to Croatia and say, “Look, this is what they’ve done. They’ve put themselves in a position to join the European Union. The accession process is what they get in return”. That was a huge assistance to us. The difficulty is that Bosnia has failed to make those reforms in the main case, in order to become a proper accession country receiving all those funds with the largesse that others have done. I suspect that that is the reason, although there are some, not least in Brussels, who say, “Never mind, let’s not worry. Let’s just make them accession countries. Let them pretend”. Chris Patten had a lovely phrase. He used to say: “The problem with all the Balkans by the way is that they pretend to do what we ask them and we pretend to believe them”. That is absolutely right. It diminishes the power of Brussels. I am quite hard line on this. If the people in Bosnia, Montenegro or Serbia do not make the changes required to bring them up to the standards of the European Union, I am not sure that we should give them money.

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: Macedonia is getting five times the amount.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Yes, it probably is, but Macedonia is very close to a civil war. I can understand why you might want to do that. There is a problem in Bosnia, which may be what you are referring to. I remember saying to my good friends among the Bosnians that I thought that they were being killed by their silence. It was the silence of the Bosnian lambs. The Serbs could do almost anything and we would respond to their threats—a very dangerous thing to do; it was the cause of the 1992 war. When I was there, we refused to

respond to Serbian threats. The Bosnians just sort of sit there and say, "Well, it doesn't matter very much". It actually does. That is one of the problems. Does that answer your question effectively? Am I being gloomy here? I think that I probably am.

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon: I suspect that there is no real answer.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: There probably is not.

The Chairman: The trouble is that we are going over these issues again and again, but they merit deep examination. Lord Reid, you wanted to press on this.

Q13 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** I think that the question of what the UK could do has been addressed from a couple of angles. Thank you for sharing your experiences and your wisdom on this.

Reflecting on what you said, it seems to me that not only have you stressed the need for internal reconciliation, to the extent that you have some form of overall state in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as a lot of devolution, but you have at various times referred to the external structures—you started off by referring to the interface between Christendom and Islam, the Ottoman Empire and then Yugoslavia. The European Union can use carrots and sticks to try to enhance internal reconciliation, but to what extent is it also a positive framework in the sense that Ireland and Britain, both being members of the European Union, facilitated a much closer relationship as well as the Good Friday agreement because of the backstop of everyone being members of the European Union? I am interested in the extent to which, over the longer period, the integration of the countries of the western Balkans into Europe—as well as into NATO, of course, but I am interested primarily in the European Union—is a facilitating framework to bring about internal reconciliation.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Absolutely.

Lord Reid of Cardowan: Therefore, I presume that we are removing ourselves from that element.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Precisely. I remember somebody once saying to me: "The Balkans have always been at war". Actually, it was Douglas Hurd when I came back in 1993. I was really surprised. I am a great admirer of Douglas Hurd's because I just thought he was a fabulous man and he knew his history. I said, "Douglas, it's not the Balkans that have always been at war, it's us, the countries of Europe, who have always been at war—for a thousand years". There have been wars far more regularly in Europe than there have ever been in the Balkans. We have slaughtered each other by the millions, yet we have found our way out of that because we were able to cope with the nationalisms that had been so destructive by creating the overarching framework of the European Union. Exactly the same applies in Bosnia. The Balkans are not more dedicated to war and fissiparousness than we are.

On this business of integration, integration will come if you get a successful economy. There is no difficulty with integration. Most of the people are perfectly happy to integrate. Obviously, they carry the scars of war and it will take time for that to leech away, but there is no difficulty with integration. The difficulty is driven by the politicians at the top who want to preserve the specificities of their ethnicity because it helps them to control power. The parallel is exactly what you said, John: it is Northern Ireland. Did the people of Northern Ireland want to get together? Yes, of course they did and long before their politicians, but it was in the interest of the politicians to maintain those differences. That is exactly the case in Bosnia. Europe is indeed the overarching framework and the only one. I used to say to them frequently, "The only way you can have economic prosperity, a future for your children and peace is to join the Atlantic institutions in Brussels". It was the most powerful argument that I had and it remains the case. I give you this undertaking: if you can create a functional state and a growing economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, integration will take care of itself.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Just following that up, and I know that it is a bit academic since, for reasons that both you and I regret, our influence on the accession process for Balkan countries to the European Union is modest, to put it mildly. Do you think that accession remains viable both at the Brussels end and at the end of each of the component countries: Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and so on—so looking wider than Bosnia? Do you think that the process—which may take a very long time, because, as you rightly said, we should not play games and pretend that they are up to the Copenhagen criteria when they are not—is viable? In the countries, are they tiring of that process and thinking of something else? At the Brussels end, when this lamentable President of the Commission, who said such unwise things about the accession of any new country, passes on, perhaps there will be an opportunity for the European Union to resume a serious policy of accession. What do you think about all that?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: I think it all depends on what Europe will do. An accession policy becomes viable if it is a policy that we are prepared to pursue with purpose and political will behind it. I used to say that unity and peace in Bosnia are rested on two forces. One for a bit was the muscular power of the Peace Implementation Council expressed through the Bonn powers of the high representative, if he chose to use them and was prepared to do so. The second was the magnetic pull of Brussels. If those two were in place, Bosnia would continue to move forward. The sadness is that the magnetic pull of Brussels has massively diminished. Most Bosnians know that they will not be entirely welcome—there will be referenda in France if they join. Many of them would say, "Paddy, don't fool me. I know perfectly well that we are more important to Europe than Europe is to us". It was not true, but Europe behaved in such a way that it looked like it. If you set a series of standards and they did not achieve them but Europe pretended that they did, its seriousness in driving the process forward immediately vanished. I became quite

unpopular, particularly among the Serbs, just for insisting that the standards were adhered to. If Europe has the will, this is possible to do.

I used to try to explain it to Europeans by saying, "Look, this is not an expansion of Europe, this is unfinished business inside the outer circuit, the outer parameters, of Europe. This is your unfinished business". However much I said that, it did not look like that when it was delivered in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So, yes, I think this can be done, but on three conditions: first, that Europe develops the plan and the political will to put it into effect; secondly, that the United States is prepared to throw its weight behind it, albeit that Europe will have to say that it will carry the burden; and, thirdly, that we see this not as penny-packet policies, which we have at present—we have one for Montenegro, one for Kosovo, one for Macedonia, one for Serbia and one for Croatia—but as an overarching regional policy in which we can play the leverages.

If you want to solve the problem of fissiparousness with the President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik—he has a picture of me on his wall that he sticks pins into; some Liberal Democrats do that as well—and want to get him to do something, you will not get it done by bullying him from Brussels; you get it done by getting in touch with his friends in Belgrade. You then say to Belgrade, "As part of your accession process, we are not going to accept you as a member of the European Union unless you pursue European Union policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, actively ensuring that this is not allowed to break up". So there are those three conditions: Europe has a plan and the political will to drive it; the United States is prepared to play some role in that because they are regarded as the people with the muscle—given the history of the Balkans, I am not surprised; and we have a regional policy and play the interlinkages. If that happens, we can begin to move the Balkans forward.

The Chairman: All those conditions are remote, are they not? "No more accession", says Mr Juncker; the Americans are not interested.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Yes. I do not know whether you are picking up on this—I probably should not say it; we are on the record obviously—but I have heard some quite interesting stuff that the Canadians are now thinking of. If it is right that Trudeau is thinking about a sort of Canadian-European axis to drive forward some stuff in the Balkans, it is quite a significant new step. I hear on the grapevine that there is some interest in this. Is Canada a replacement for the United States? Obviously not, but if Canada and the European Union were genuinely interested in making things happen in the Balkans, we might be quite close to the ingredients of a package that could drive it forward. I do not know whether any of you have picked up on that, but some people are quite actively talking about it.

The Chairman: This is such a central theme. I know that Baroness Smith wants to come in on this precise point. Lord Jopling does, too. Can I ask you, Lord Jopling, just to wait until Baroness has pursued it? We are so central on Brexit and how we get out of it, and so on.

Baroness Smith of Newnham: Get out of Brexit?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: Yes, yes, get out of Brexit.

- Q14 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** Let us assume that we are not going to get out of Brexit. We have been talking a lot about the EU. As you have already suggested, Lord Ashdown, there are problems in any case about the Balkans pretending to be ready and the EU pretending to believe them, as happened in the “big bang” enlargement in 2004, which in many ways is part of the problem. If the UK is leaving the European Union, what role do you think it can play alongside the European Union, and to what extent should we try to have a policy that is as close as possible to that of the EU? Should we have that as part of where the UK is going in its post-Brexit foreign policy strategy?

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: I think the answer to your question is yes. If Britain is not part of the European Union, it will not have access to those levers in the way that it otherwise would, but it seems to me an entirely right foreign policy for us to follow. In the Balkans, we and Brussels should be ad idem in what we are trying to pursue, and we should add our weight to theirs. I think that is the right policy to pursue. If we can develop some kind of transatlantic framework for that, albeit with Ottawa rather than Washington under the present dispensation, that is helpful. We should see ourselves as lending weight to the European Union’s policy if we could just determine what that was. The sadness is that, since we are not in the European Union, we cannot influence that policy and change it, which I think is necessary.

- Q15 **Lord Jopling:** Our two sessions this morning have been dominated by Bosnia. We have not heard very much—we heard a little, but I would like to hear more—about the influence of Serbia in all this. You mentioned Serbia. You recalled that Serbia was very much at the centre of starting the war in the 1990s. It is the influence of Serbia that contributes to the people of Banja Luka making Bosnia almost ungovernable. It is the influence of the Serbians in Kosovo, in the northern enclave there, which makes that country almost ungovernable. To what extent do you think Serbia is a malign influence in the western Balkans?

We then come to the figures that we have been given for EU funding, where Serbia appears to get nearly two and a half times the amount of support for any other single country—€1.5 billion compared with the next highest at €664 million. To what extent is Serbia a malign influence? Are we not sufficiently strident with them, and is it because of their flirtation with the Russians? Michael Rose reminded us that Serbia has had many more military exercises with NATO than with the Russians—I think it was 22 to two. I would like to hear a little more about the role of Serbia.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: If we remember the 19th century policy, Britain and France always saw Serbia as the absolute key to the Balkans. It is the largest nation; it is an extremely gifted nation. It has all sorts of problems, but it is the greatest nation of the Balkans, without a shadow of a doubt—Croatia would disagree with that, obviously. If you can bring Serbia on board and get it through this

process, you will have created a huge impetus for the rest of the Balkans to follow. Let me draw a parallel with Northern Ireland—John Reid is right: there are so many parallels. It used to annoy people that I drew attention to them, but, as an Irishman, I am entitled to. The truth was that Northern Ireland was such a basket case that Dublin never wanted it. It would say that it wanted a united Ireland but it absolutely did not want to take on board Northern Ireland in its original case.

The same is true of Republika Srpska. The Serbs do not want Republika Srpska to be part of Serbia. The word Bosniak has come to mean a Bosnian Muslim, but it was originally a derogatory term and meant somebody who came from Bosnia. If you went to Belgrade, you would hear them use “Bosniak” with its derogatory, hick, primitivno meaning to refer to people who came from Banja Luka, Serbs though they were. Just as Dublin’s role in Northern Ireland was important because of how it played out in Dublin’s domestic politics, Banja Luka, Republika Srpska, can always be an extra string to the bow of a Serbian nationalist seeking election in Belgrade, because they can talk about the evil that has been done in taking their fellow Serbs away from them. So it is important to them, but only in terms of internal national politics. I do not think that they have any intention of doing anything that reincorporates Republika Srpska into Belgrade.

Are they a malign influence? Well, in so far as nationalists are in charge of Serbia and are going to be malign, they will exercise that poison in Republika Srpska, too. But, generally speaking, I do not think that Serbia wants to be particularly malign towards Republika Srpska—there may be a bit of mischief here and there. If it is going to play Moscow, why would it not if it drives up its leverage with Brussels? Why would it not have a military exercise with the Russians once in a while to remind NATO and give it some more leverage there? The Serbs are perfectly capable of playing that card, and they do, but we should not regard that as long-term intent.

All that being said, I do not object to the idea of the European Union giving Serbia a lot more money than elsewhere, because I think it is that important. I do object to the fact that it is not attached to very strong conditionality. Should we use more conditionality for that money? Absolutely so. We should say to Belgrade, “You play a role. We expect you to play an active role in Bosnia consistent with the European Union’s policy in Bosnia, which is to create a functional state”. That is the leverage that we should use. There was a moment when, because of a failure to adhere to The Hague tribunal conditions, I had to do the very difficult thing—it was horribly frightening, I can tell you—of getting rid of a directly elected Serb President. I asked him to come and see me and said, “Look, I’m sorry, I’m removing you”. He had just been directly elected by the people of Republika Srpska. He was called Mirko Šarović. He is back in politics now and I greatly admire him for that—but at the time he was not doing what was necessary to catch war criminals, and that was an international crime.

Before I did that, obviously I made sure that I had Chris Patten and George Robertson lined up, but I also rang my friends in Belgrade and said, "Look, I'm about to do this". It was a man called Goran Svilanović—you may remember him; he was a very fine Foreign Minister. I rang him and said, "Look, I'm just going to have to do it". He said, "Paddy, you'll have terrible problems". I said, "Look, I know I will". He said, "I'm going to have to criticise you and shout at you". I said, "Yeah, I know you will". But I had to make sure that he was not going to push the envelope further than that before I felt able to act. That is what you have to do: you must play those leverages. The only leverage we have, absent the Bonn powers, absent 60,000 troops in SFOR in Bosnia and absent a military force that can drive the process forward, is conditionality on the amount of money we give. It is the only thing that we have.

The Chairman: We are rapidly running out of time. It has been absolutely fascinating. I know that Baroness Helic has one point on the figures.

Baroness Helic: Perhaps I may top up what Lord Ashdown has already said. Bosnia is getting proportionally the lowest possible aid from the EU. It is because it cannot meet the conditionality. Why does this happen? I think there is a long-term policy in Banja Luka to ensure that Bosnia is seen as a dysfunctional state. Every time those conditions need to be fulfilled, there is a last-minute withdrawal of Banja Luka's support for it. It has worked. As you can see, since 2014 and even before that—since 2006 actually—Bosnia has been lagging behind because of a long-term strategy to ensure that it is perceived and acts as a country that cannot be sustained. While it marinates in this dysfunctional state, attention and support from the international community subside. The project so far is working, as you can see in these numbers.

Lord Ashdown of Norton-sub-Hamdon: That is so true. That is exactly what the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska is doing. Whether he wants to split away from Bosnia I do not know. My guess is that he has put himself in a state of grace to do it, so that if the moment arrives and he feels he can do it he might, but I do not think that is his primary intention. I do not think that he is a nationalist; I think that he is an opportunist in the same way as Milošević was. He uses nationalism as his lever, but his policy is exactly the same as that of Milo Djukanovic, the former Prime Minister of Montenegro. In Montenegro, they simply made the federation with Serbia completely unworkable until we lost patience and said, "Okay, have your own independence". This is what is happening in Bosnia. Then, I am afraid, he is also very cannily playing the ability to bring other European Union nations to the position that they say "They're never going to work together. Let them get on with. Just let it happen". So he has diplomatic representation in Brussels, and I am afraid to say that Brussels officials see the diplomatic representative of Republika Srpska in Brussels.

Excuse me, but this is not a state; it is a man who pretends that he has a state within a state. Why on earth are we giving him any credibility?

When High Representative Cathy Ashton goes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, she does not say to the Prime Minister of Republika Srpska, "Come and see me in Sarajevo". She goes to Banja Luka and sits down with him. By the way, on the table is a European flag and the flag of Republika Srpska for the television cameras. It is not the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is seen on every television screen around Bosnia. She has hugely reinforced the capacity of this man to play the fact that he is representative of a state and not part of a state.

Why do we give any diplomatic representation, or why do pay any notice to those people? They have diplomatic representation in Hungary, which is quite wobbly on these things, and in some of those eastern littoral countries, the Slav countries, particularly Poland, which are saying, "Well, why not? Just let them get on them with it. It is going to be easier in the long run". The moment in the Balkans when you say, "Take the easy way out", you are on the way to a failure of foreign policy. I am afraid that in the Balkans that nearly always leads with something much worse than just diplomatic break-up.

The Chairman: Lord Ashdown, we have lots of other questions that we would like to ask you, but you have given us your time for an hour and a half or more and I think we are going to have to call a halt here. You have described the dysfunctionality and ambiguity of the situation, with Serbia saying that it wants to join the European Union and yet actively pursuing policies that are hostile to it. Republika Srpska is and is not a country. How do we begin to piece this together? We do or do not have a role depending on our deep and special links, which are supposed to come up with Europe—they may or may not do so; no one knows what they mean yet. So you have set us a lovely jigsaw. The bits are lying all over the table and we are going to have to do something to try to put a few of them together.

In the meantime, we as a Committee should thank you for a fascinating tour of the scene—a lot of wisdom, a lot of insights, not many solutions but that is not what we expected anyway. Thank you very much indeed. You have been really kind.