

Open Letter to the Editorial Board of the Foreign Affairs magazine re: Timothy Less's article "Dysfunction in the Balkans – Can the Post-Yugoslav Settlement Survive?"

Dear editors,

As you may be aware, Timothy Less's article has resonated quite strongly around the Balkans and sent shockwaves reminiscent of the horrors of recent conflicts in the region. The article attracted attention not due to the strength of author's arguments, but rather by evoking astonishment at the use of post-factual reporting. The article's most striking feature is the irrelevance of the main question it asks two decades after the wars in former Yugoslavia ended in peace agreements. Moreover, the author's choice to ignore history and facts by suggesting the inevitability of new divisions can only serve as a blueprint for new disasters.

The article makes bold but simply unsustainable claims about group demands in the region. We are glad to provide detailed examples. However, basic fact checking would reveal that demands for drastic changes to the status quo in the Balkans itself is held by considerably fewer actors than claimed and then only by often marginal and radical groups.

We thus appeal to you to recognize the hazardous rhetoric that invokes uncertainty that has led before this region to disastrous consequences. We appeal to you not to hide behind the freedom of opinion and freedom of speech, and instead distinguish between fallacy and facts. Delusions that ethnically 'pure' entities or nation states are a solution for this region are not new – their actual engineers have already been convicted in The Hague, and the victims of those ideas lie buried throughout this region. We refuse to accept the idea that there is no other choice but to divide existing states and societies along ethnic lines. And we would note that recent history shows that such divisions cannot be implemented peacefully. To ignore this, we would need to forget the experience of the 20th century with ethnic cleansing and the forced movement of people. To accept Less's argument would be to turn a blind eye to the genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes of the 1990s.

It should also be pointed out that the author bases his principal argument on the logical fallacy that, with initial round of political divisions having failed to appease nationalist passions in the region, another round will somehow do the job. Instead, as should be obvious to any discerning reader of history and politics, championing divisions simply creates new cleavage lines in society. We hope that the practice of gaining personal publicity through destructive and populist rhetoric at expense of stability in the region and European future is not a new publication standard.

Having said that, we refuse to present in this letter the facts and arguments that prove that ethnic cleansing and creation of 'pure' nation-states is a bad idea. Many of us have devoted most of our professional lives providing such facts and evidence so that new generations can remember how dangerous the nationalist rhetoric is, and how it can lead to projects that risks thousands of lives being lost. The facts are out there – in history books, in academic publications, and not least in court judgements. We take this opportunity to remind

members of your editorial board of those facts, to appeal to you to stay on the side of maintaining peace in the Balkans. *Foreign Affairs* is a part of that legacy – please preserve it!

We admit that there are individuals in our societies who still cherish the notions of greater, ethnically ‘pure’ nation-states. Many of them do so for purely opportunistic reasons, attempting to hide the bankruptcy of their political vision behind the ideology of nationalism. It is the job of democracy to keep those individuals on margins of our societies. And it is the job of democratizers to keep democracy on track, to keep divisive ideas on margins by preserving and promoting facts, and to persistently promote the norms and values of democratic societies.

We recognise that this is an attempt to introduce the notion of ‘post-truth’ into the Balkans. But the ‘post-truth’ presented in your article is anti-civilizational, it is an attempt re-write history, and to re-introduce alleged Huntingtonian clashes to our societies at a point when we are all investing effort to sustain the motion in the opposite direction. Less’s article shows disregard for international law and complete ignorance of international principles regarding the dissolution of states. But most of all – it tries to undermine multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity as values upon which history and future of our societies must rest, upon which Europe still rests. And with that in mind we ask you a question – if division to nation-states is a blue print for the Balkans, is it a blueprint for European states too – for Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom? Although this is a rhetorical question, the answer is still clear – it is a blueprint for new conflicts.

We are appalled by the implied pretence that an article with such content could be seen as benign in a global context that has already been tarred by rising xenophobia, radicalism, extremism, and divisive rhetoric. The standing of your magazine gives this ill-informed and tendentious article the seriousness which it otherwise lacks.

We urge *Foreign Affairs* to distance itself from the article and the ideas expressed therein. We strongly support a vibrant and free debate on policy and consider *Foreign Affairs* an important contributor. However, by propagating ideas which entail massive human rights violations, ethnic cleansing and the rewarding of extreme nationalist forces, and being based on dubious claims and few facts, the article does not contribute to a debate. Rather, it appears to endorse the darkest policies pursued in the Balkans over the past decades.

Signees

1. **Denisa Sarajlić**, Foreign Policy Initiative BH
2. **Lejla Ramić-Mesihović**, Foreign Policy Initiative BH
3. **Davor Vuletić**, Foreign Policy Initiative BH
4. **Amer Kapetanović**, Foreign Policy Initiative BH
5. **Maja Bobić**, Secretary General - European Movement in Serbia

6. **Jelica Minić**, President -Forum for International Relations of the European Movement in Serbia
7. **Adnan Huskić**, Political Analyst
8. **Senada Šelo Šabić**, Institute for Development and International Relations, Zagreb
9. **Hajrudin Somun**, Ambassador, Retired
10. **Mesut Idriz**, International University of Sarajevo
11. **Ešref Kenan Rašidagić**, University of Sarajevo/International Burch University
12. **Asim Mujkić**, Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo
13. **Hasan Nuhanović**
14. **Paul Stubbs**, The Institute of Economics, Zagreb
15. **Ben Moore**, Bosnia Memory Project
16. **Refik Hodžić**
17. **Osman Topčagić**, Ambassador, Retired
18. **Lejla Turčilo**, Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo
19. **Dane Taleski**, Adjunct Professor, South East European University, Tetovo/Skopje
20. **Igor Stiks**, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh, UK
21. **Florian Bieber**
22. **Michael Weichert**
23. **Nerzuk Čurak**, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo
24. **Sandro Knezović**, Institute for Development and International Relations, Zagreb
25. **Jasmina Pašalić**, Ambassador, Retired
26. **Jasmin Mujanović**, Policy Consultant