



CAA ON VOA'S APRIL 20 PANEL DISCUSSION "ETHNIC RECONCILIATION IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES: THE CASE OF THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA," APRIL 26, 2005

Voice of America (VOA) organized a panel discussion titled "**Ethnic Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Societies: The Case of the Former Yugoslavia**," which was held at VOA Headquarters in Washington, DC on April 20, 2005.

The panel participants included **Charles Ingrao**, Professor of History at Purdue University, Ambassador **Donald S. Hays**, U.S. Institute of Peace (Recently served as the Principal Deputy High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina), **Ylber Hysa**, Member of the Kosovo Assembly, and **Dusan Svetolik Janjic**, Senior Researcher at the Centre for Sociological Research of the Institute of Social Studies, University of Belgrade. Opening remarks were provided by **David S. Jackson**, Director of Voice of America, and the discussion was moderated by **Elez Biberaj**, Managing Editor of Voice of America's Eurasia Division.

A press release for the event can be found [here](#).

The event was attended by a member of the Croatian American Association who also had the opportunity to pose two questions to Ambassador Donald S. Hays.

In his introductory remarks, Ambassador Hays said he was thinking about other situations around the world that were similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He recalled Ireland, Spain, Israel and other hot spots. What connected these regions? According to Ambassador Hays, these were all "clashes of cultures and religions."

When asked if this is how he would explain the catastrophe in Bosnia and Herzegovina – as a "clash of cultures, religions" – Ambassador Hays immediately called himself a "novice," one who is only beginning to untangle the intricate recent histories of the region. He went on to elaborate that he viewed the Yugoslav period as a state of equilibrium and that this equilibrium had been disrupted by the events of the 1990s.

This is quite a surprising answer! Especially considering that from 1996 to 2000 Hays was in charge of oversight of the European Bureau at the State Department; from 2001 to 2005 he was posted in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and was part of Richard Holbrooke's team during the Dayton negotiations. To call oneself a "novice" after such extensive experience is absurd and merely an attempt to mask a fundamental misunderstanding of the region and an outright refusal to show sensitivity to the people on the ground.



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The next question to Ambassador Hays followed-up on his comments regarding state-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hays had stated: “Bosnia is at the doorstep of transition. It needs a strong, empowered government at the state level.” It needs politicians who are competent to lead.

When asked to bring into this context of a powerful state-level government the role of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), an office in which Ambassador Hays served from 2001 to 2005, he replied: “The exit of OHR will be decided by two groups: the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Peace Implementation Council (PIC);” not by OHR management. In fact, he argued that there already is an exit strategy in place – one that is linked to EU integration. “When Bosnia and Herzegovina is capable, OHR will leave.”

Again, what an odd answer! We recall Gerald Knaus and Felix Martin’s article stating that the OHR is accountable only to the PIC, “which it chairs and whose report it normally drafts.” One is hard pressed to believe that OHR management doesn’t hold the golden key that will forever lock the doors of the OHR. And not only have there been continued pleas for OHR completion domestically within all population groups, but the international community has also very recently brought high-level attention to the matter: Venice Commission, UK Foreign Affairs Committee, and the International Commission on the Balkans.

All this from Ambassador Hays who recently uttered the already infamous phrase on Bosnia: “What we have is a façade, not a state.”

VOA has announced that an archived version of the event would be available on their website for downloading sometime in the near future.

Prepared by M. Jelic