

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

**Vice President Joseph Biden's Trip to Southeast Europe**

Janusz Bugajski  
May 19, 2009

**Q1: What is the purpose of Vice President Biden's trip to the Balkans?**

**A1:** Biden's trip will be the first high-level U.S. visit to the region since Kosovo gained independence in February 2008. His tour of three capitals (Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Prishtina) will send a strong message of support for the stability and development of all Balkan countries, especially those currently outside of the European Union and NATO. The vice president is a respected and experienced figure in the region. In his capacity as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Biden was at the heart of U.S.-Balkan policy throughout the disintegration of Yugoslavia and has remained closely engaged ever since. He is the equivalent of a permanent special envoy to the Balkans.

**Q2: Does his visit signal more intensive U.S. involvement in the region?**

**A2:** Washington's continuing engagement remains essential especially as the European capitals and EU institutions still suffer from limited credibility and insufficient impetus in the region. One of the underlying signals of Vice President Biden's trip is to encourage EU officials to apply more consistent policies to ensure institutional reform, effective governance, and clearer road maps toward EU accession.

**Q3: What are the outstanding problems facing Southeast Europe?**

**A3:** The most troubling question is the dysfunctionality of the Bosnian state and its potential drift toward division and renewed conflict. Avenues of cooperation also need to be pursued between Serbia and Kosovo that can prevent new instabilities. Additionally, the entire region faces the impact of a deep economic recession that could fuel disputes among competing elites over territories and resources. In this context, indefinite delays or receding prospects for integration into the European Union and NATO would severely damage the region's hopes for progress.

*Janusz Bugajski directs the New European Democracies Project at the Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, D.C.*

***Critical Questions*** is produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a private, tax-exempt institution focusing on international public policy issues. Its research is nonpartisan and nonproprietary. CSIS does not take specific policy positions. Accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2009 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.