

I'm not robot!

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995)

-Towards a better understanding-

Academic Essay – Excursion Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bart van Genugten

S4479602

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An introduction to the Bosnian War

The Bosnian War started in April 1992 and came to an end in November 1995 by the 'General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina', negotiated in Dayton, Ohio. As a consequence of the agreement, an Inter Entity Border Line (IEBL) was created, which not only separates political entities but also ethnic communities. On the one side you have the Republika Srpska, where a majority of Serbs lives, and on the other side you have the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the majority exists of Bosniaks and Croats, see *figure 1* (Holbrooke, 1998). According to Teal and Dahlman (2006) the war was characterized by ethnic cleansing, whereby 'mostly' Bosnian Muslims were expelled, humiliated, raped and murdered; in order to ethnically cleanse certain regions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Later on Bosnia). Noteworthy, there was a widespread rape of Bosnian women by Serbian soldiers (Zalewski, 1995). However – before the war – Bosnia was the most ethnically diverse republic of Yugoslavia in which people of different backgrounds have lived together relatively peaceful (Dyrstad, 2013). This essay will attempt to examine the factors behind escalation of the conflict, why the conflict is still there, and how initiatives are evaluated to resolve the conflict. Knowledge from a recent excursion to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Mostar, Srebrenica) will be used to complement discussions and arguments. Notably, local discourses sometimes did not coincide with academic' perceptions.

More than 'one' factor behind escalation

In order to understand the Bosnian war and post-war situation, one cannot simply neglect the geographical context of the region, namely the Balkans. According to Todorova (1994) the discovery of the Balkans comes along with the invention of the Balkans. She describes the region as:

“Geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally con-structed as “the other,” the Balkans became, in time, the object of a number of externalized political, ideological and cultural frustrations and have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and ‘the west’ has been constructed.” (Todorova, 1994, p. 455)

The negative construction of the term 'Balkan', also referred to as 'Balkanization', was invented during the Balkan wars and World War I. Moreover, violence was added to the already negative image of the region, due to the barbarity reported by travelers. Todorova (1994) argues that unlike Orientalism, Balkanism emphasizes the differences within “one type of Europe”, hence the Balkans are the peripheral part of Europe. However, the frozen image of the Balkans in which problems stem from a “distant tribal past”, reproduced in books such as the “Balkan Ghost” by Kaplan and the “Clash of civilizations” by Huntington, take us away from understanding violence in a particular moment. This kind of ‘broad’ explanation would suggest that conflicts in the region are inevitable. Which has been confirmed cynically by a Muslim citizen in Sarajevo: “why would you try to understand the conflict – it is nothing more than a trend – we kill each other every 40 years, it is in our blood”¹. Yet, Robinson and Pobic (2006) suggest that this ideal also known as ‘primordialism’ is solely a partial explanation for the breakdown of former Yugoslavia, as it ignores the “specific and crucial contextual considerations” (p. 239). In other words, this ideal oversimplifies the complexities of the situation within Bosnia before the war as well as the situation in Yugoslavia as a whole. Therefore a deeper

¹ Interview conducted with an anonymous Bosnian citizen on 19 January 2016, Sarajevo

I. INTRODUCTION

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Agreement) did not only bring an end to a protracted and bloody armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also heralded the deep transformation both in the state structure and political regime in the country.¹⁵³ The transition from a traditionally unitary into a complex, most likely federal state,¹⁵⁴ and from a majoritarian into a classical consociational democracy has had a profound effect on the nature of the parliamentarism in the country, as exemplified in the state parliament, namely the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although it is often described as a «central arena» in which democratic processes unwind in most direct way», because of which the «people should, mainly, identify with the [Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina]»,¹⁵⁵ the reality is different. Indeed, it has been suggested that its very name (Parliamentary Assembly), which is a curious pleonasm in local languages, and which is characteristic mainly for international organizations, indicates the «disfunctionality of Bosnian political system, that stems from the Dayton Peace Agreement, as well as the lack of the will of the political elites to remove the deficiencies that such an agreement produced». ¹⁵⁶ It points to the problematic locus of sovereignty in the post-Dayton regime which established «the weakest federal system in the world»,¹⁵⁷ such that the identification of the «people», a term of complex meaning in Bosnian context, is more likely to be found with the parliaments of the two constitutive «entities» of Bosnia

153. Perhaps more accurately it finally crystalized the processes of ethnoctratisation started in the early nineties. See i.e. T. Haverić, *Ethnos i demokratija (Ethnos and Democracy)* (Rabic, Sarajevo, 2006,) *passim*.

154. S. Keil, *Multinational Federalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Ashgate, Burlington, 2013) 3.

155. N. Ademović, J. Marko, G. Marković, *Ustavno pravo Bosne i Hercegovine (Constitutional Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina)* (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Sarajevo, 2012) 174.

156. D. Čepo, *Parlamenti i skupštine: demokratski deficit Parlamentarne skupštine Bosne i Hercegovine* [Parliaments and Assemblies: Democratic Deficits of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2 (8) *Studia lexicographica* (2015), 55-75, 73. All the translations from Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language are authors'.

157. J. Marko, *Constitutional Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2005-06*, in *European Yearbook on Minority Issues*, vol. 5 (Brill, Leiden, 2005), 207-218, 213. See also Keil, 2013, 169.

Crises of Bosnia

Aleksandar Savanović

Faculty of Political Sciences
University of Banja Luka
savanovic_aleksandar@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Ever since its formation, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been considered a country of crisis and crises. However, the crisis is manifested in different ways on different levels, having also a different substance which cannot be reduced to the same. This must be emphasised, since Bosnia's nature of crisis is often used as an argument for certain unjustified political demands which in themselves do not reflect the actual context of the crisis. In this paper we argue that the crisis in BH can be broken down into three basic crises which constitute it: crisis of BH as a state, crisis of the Federation of BH and crisis of the Republic of Srpska. The crisis of the state is primarily a crisis of legitimacy: the Dayton Constitution is not genuinely accepted and it is constantly denied and disputed by the political representatives of all three constituent peoples, which results in a permanent political crisis. The crisis of the Federation of BH is a crisis of an unnatural constitution under the scheme "three peoples and two entities", which constantly produces situations of "tyranny of the majority". The crisis of the Republic of Srpska is mostly manifested as a crisis of economic inefficiency – the political situation in RS is relatively stable and it provides a sound basis for addressing the key, economic problems. However, the Government has been showing the inability to cope with such demands. These crises are, naturally, intertwined, but they are still fundamentally different: BH as a state and the Federation of BH are also affected by problems of economic efficiency, while the RS faces challenges to its legitimacy. Nevertheless, the dominant aspects of crises in these three segments of the Bosnian society can be clearly marked and delineated. It is possible to use this diagnosis of crisis to develop an appropriate anti-crisis policy.

Keywords: Crisis, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federation of BH, Republic of Srpska.

1. Introduction

Ever since its formation as a state, Bosnia has been a country of crisis and crises. Ever since the independence referendum, through which the state was quasi-constituted, until the current frictions, Bosnia has been an „unfortunate”¹ state in the state of permanent crisis, on all levels and in various forms. Transition after the civil war has not been happening in the form of gradual opening of the BH society and establishment of the state, but BH has remained „imprisoned” in a sort of closed society in the state of permanent conflict, which fails to start functioning. Such a society blocks itself, producing permanent decline in standards in terms of economy, permanent blockade of political processes, and complete devastation in terms of culture. However, this crisis is manifested in different ways on different levels, having also a different substance which cannot be reduced to the same. This must be emphasised, since Bosnia's nature of crisis is often used as an argument for certain unjustified political demands which in themselves do not reflect the actual context of the crisis. Thus, for example, Bosniak political representatives instrumentalise the thesis of BH crisis for the purposes of unitarisation, while political representatives of the Republic of Srpska (RS) observe it as a justification of the request for secession. Neither of these represents the actual situation. Quite contrary, this is one of the factors of crisis maintaining and deepening.

Generally, the crisis in BH can be broken down into three crises which constitute it: crisis of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), crisis of the Federation of BH (FBH), and crisis of the Republic of Srpska (RS). These crises are, naturally, intertwined, and each of them is more or less present on all three levels that we observe here, but on each of

¹ Even though the term „unfortunate” is not something that can be treated as an objective attribute in terms of scientific rigours, it is frequently present as a description of Bosnia in Bosnian literature. For example, Bosnian writer Denis Susić, in his work „Phantoms”, uses this term exactly to describe Bosnia. In the context of newer research, the term has obtained objective connotations as well. In December 2012, the report Business Insider was published, indexing the „poorest countries” in the world. According to this report, BH was seventeenth on the list of 20 „poorest” countries. Key criteria were unemployment rate and inflation, which in BH, according to the data taken over from CIA Factbook, were as follows – unemployment 43.3% and inflation 3.8%.

