

Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation

Raluca FĂRCAȘ

„Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: *The end of the Cold War revived the national problem in Yugoslavia, which, together with the fundamental issues that remained unresolved after the death of Iosif Broz Tito, contributed to the outbreak of violence. The article examines three important periods for the evolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the beginning of the wars in Yugoslavia, after the fall of communism and to the time of Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union, in 2016, focusing on the international community's efforts to ensure transition and restoring balance in the region. The Dayton Accords have failed to ensure the transition to a state independent of international aid, leaving behind an ethnically grounded political system that slows the progress of reforms and the path to European integration. The article analysis the extent to which post-Dayton reconciliation and reconstruction between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs have been achieved. Thus, the paper will highlight the extent to which the Peace Accords and international intervention have succeeded in ensuring the transition of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a modern, viable state with functioning institutions.*

Keywords: Bosnian war, reconciliation, ethnic conflict, Dayton Accords, European integration, post-conflict reconstruction.

Following the end of the Bosnian war and the signing of the Dayton Accords, efforts by the international community have been directed at ensuring the transition to a democratic, self-regulating state that is a viable partner for the European Union and NATO. However, the political and socio-economic development of Bosnia and Herzegovina has come to a standstill with its European course. The Dayton Accords, in an attempt to prevent the dominance of one ethnic group over the others, created a highly decentralized state with weak institutions, and nationalist, radical rhetoric of leaders of ethnically grounded political parties and political patronage that blocked reforms and dialogue for reconciliation between ethnic groups, thus deepening economic tensions and disparities. This environment of economic and social instability, caused by ethnic cleavages, divisions, and economic problems can lead to a new ethnic conflict. In this regard, the article examines the extent to which ethnic reconciliation and state reconstruction have been achieved since the conclusion of the Dayton Accords. Thus, the paper is structured in three sections for the three important phases in the evolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the fall of communism and the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, as follows: first, the period 1990-1992, which includes the beginning of secession waves and the Croatian war; secondly, the period 1992-1995, which follows the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; lastly, the period 1995-2016, which envisages the reconciliation of ethnic groups, the transition to democracy, the restoration of the state and the European path of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union created a favorable context for the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, reviving the national problem.¹ The issue of national identity was not a new issue in the Balkans, but

¹ Christopher Alan Bayly, *Remaking the Modern World 1900-2015*, Medford, Wiley Blackwell Printing Press, 2018, p. 300.

„Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation,” *Astra Salvensis*, VIII (2020), no. 16, p. 119-131.

stability was maintained by Joseph Broz Tito for a long time, through the rotating rule of Yugoslavia (1971). However, after his death on May 4, 1980, ethnic tensions resurfaced, and the composition of the federation (six republics and 20 autonomous regions) made the outbreak of a conflict inevitable.² In this sense, we can say that Yugoslavia was not just an ethnic mosaic, but a compromise for the national problem of ethnic groups, and this problem could not be solved in favor of a nation without generating the dissolution of the federation.³ Thus, Tito’s death left behind three main unresolved issues, namely: divergent ethnic interests amid old conflicts between Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, an inefficient economy and an institutional structure incapable of maintaining the unity of Yugoslavia in the face of nationalist forces, that were the determining factors for the violent dismemberment of the state.⁴ However, we also find a dissolution in the case of Czechoslovakia, but in this case we speak of peaceful separation, while in the case of Yugoslavia we speak, more of a violent dismemberment, not of a dissolution.

Regarding the divisions between ethnic groups, an important factor in the outbreak of violence was the emergence of Serbian nationalism and the revival of the ideal of a Great Serbia under Slobodan Milošević, President of Serbia, but also in the nationalism of Franjo Tuđman, President of Croatia, who ignored the Serbian minority at the time of the declaration of independence.⁵ In this context, a brief presentation of the events that preceded the collapse of the federation is needed. First, in March 1989, the new Prime Minister of Yugoslavia, Ante Marković, proposed the introduction of a series of political and economic reforms to create a favorable framework for the transition to democracy. However, the success of the reformists threatened the power of the conservative political elites, who lost control.⁶ In January 1990, at the Congress of the Serbian Communist Party, an attempt was made to save and re-centralize the communist regime by Serbian conservatives and the Yugoslav National Army (J. N. A.) in order to keep Yugoslavia united and maintain its power. However, the reformers in Slovenia and Croatia wanted to set up their own independent states, so each pursued a separate national policy and ideology.⁷ In other words, we can distinguish between two nationalist political orientations: Croatian separatist politics (aimed at establishing independent Croatia) and Serbian centralist politics (aimed at keeping communist Yugoslavia under its control).⁸

² Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Andre Kaspi, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale*, volume II, Bucharest, Social and Political Sciences Printing Press, 2006, p. 341.

³ Margaret Mikyung Lee, Raphael Perl, Steven Woehrel, „Bosnia War Crimes: The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and U. S. Policy”, in *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, 1998, p. 2; Vesna Pestic, „Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis”, in *United States Institute of Peace*, no. 8, 1996, p. 3.

⁴ David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, in *Parliamentary Research, Service*, no. 14, 1995, p. 5.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁶ V. P. (Chip) Gagnon Jr., „Yugoslavia in 1989 and after”, in *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, volume 38, no. 1, 2010, p. 23.

⁷ Vesna Pestic, „Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis”, pp. 23-24.

⁸ Vesna Pestic, „Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis”, p. 3.

Second, in terms of the inefficient economy, the post-1980 economic crisis in Yugoslavia has been at the root of the rise of nationalist policies and polarization, as Conservative camp leaders feared possible national elections, hence adopting a nationalist agenda and rhetoric.⁹ Lastly, the third important factor is the inefficient institutional structure in maintaining the unity of Yugoslavia, as Tito had concentrated too much power on himself (because of the 1974 Constitution, which ensured the transfer of power to republics by designating them as sovereign nation-states, united in the Yugoslav confederation), the central government being weakened after his death. And this interpretation of the status of republics conveyed the idea that republics can be separated on the basis of the principle of national self-determination („*narodno samoopredeljenje*”). Including the composition of the federal presidency (eight members—one for each republic and two for Vojvodina and Kosovo), but also the annual rotating leadership contributed to the weakening of central power, preventing the emergence of a strong leader and a common vision.¹⁰ Therefore, Yugoslavia failed to establish itself as a nation-state whose identity and structure transcends ethnic differences.¹¹

Phase 1: 1990-1992

In 1990, with the exception of Slovenes, there were no national groups within well-defined ethnic boundaries, most living on the national territory of the other groups. In this sense, about a third of the Republic of Croatia was inhabited by Serbs, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were over one million Serbs, thus the Serbs were divided into three republics. Serbia sought to dominate the other republics, but Croatian nationalism resisted, arguing that individual groups in a state could not redraw the borders of the state in which they lived. However, Croatia did not maintain its position when it came to Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹² where both Serbs and Croats had historical claims on it, and resentment and historical hatred have fueled the perception that each group is a threat to the others.¹³

Following the 1990 elections, Slovenia began its efforts to gain independence, and the victory of the Croatian Democratic Union in Croatia prompted Serbs in Krajina (a Serb minority in Croatia) to work for autonomy (arguing that as long as Croatia may separate from Yugoslavia, Krajina can secede from Croatia). Finally, a major factor in the deterioration of Yugoslavia's central authority was Serbia's refusal to recognize Croatia's presidency, thus violating the principles of the rotating

⁹ Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, „Bosnia: Ethno-Religious Nationalisms in Conflict”, 2013, <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/classroom>, p. 8.

¹⁰ Robert F. Baumann, George W. Gawrych, Walter E. Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, Kansas, Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004, pp. 20-22.

¹¹ Vesna Pesić, „Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis”, p. 14.

¹² J. A. S. Grenville, *A History of the World from the 20th to the 21st century*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 918.

¹³ Vesna Pesić, „Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis”, p. 3.

„Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation,” *Astra Salvensis*, VIII (2020), no. 16, p. 119-131.

presidency.¹⁴ Equally, the negotiation attempts had failed due to the lack of compromise on the part of the three republics (Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia) and due to the secret alliances and agreements, they concluded. In this context, we find, on the one hand, that there was a secret agreement between Slovenia and Serbia that Slovenia could separate from Yugoslavia, while the Serbs could exist in one state and, on the other hand, that Serbia and Croatia allied (in March 1991 in Karadjordjevo) deciding to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁵ In the end, the secret agreement between Serbia and Croatia failed because they wanted to expand their states to the detriment of each other or Bosnia.¹⁶

Thus, Slovenia and Croatia proclaimed their independence on June 25, 1991, despite Serbia’s objection.¹⁷ Slobodan Milošević sought to unite all Serbs, calling any declaration of independence by Croatia and Bosnia a threat to Greater Serbia and saying that the disintegration of Yugoslavia would require border changes to keep Serbs in a united nation.¹⁸ The violence began in Slovenia, but after 10 days the Yugoslav Army withdrew because Milošević was not interested in Slovenia due to the very small Serb population, with the July 7 Brioni Agreement ending the conflict in Slovenia.¹⁹ In contrast, in Croatia (with a population of about 600.000 Serbs in Dalmatia, Krajina, and Slavonia)²⁰ Milošević would have been willing to accept independence if Slavonia was ceded, but Serbian rebel leaders in Krajina had already declared independence from Croatia, being recognized by Serbia.²¹

As a result, a civil war broke out in Croatia in August 1991 (between local Croatian militias and the J. N. A.), with the J. N. A. seeking to take control of strategic targets. In September 1991, Macedonia declared its independence,²² and Bosnia and Herzegovina, drawn into the waves of secession of the other republics, had two possible directions, namely to remain in Yugoslavia under Serbian rule or to proclaim its independence. However, Alija Izetbegović, believing that Bosnia’s sovereignty would be recognized internationally, decided to hold a referendum on February 29, 1991,²³ supported by Mate Boban, the leader of the Croatian Democratic Alliance,²⁴ and proclaimed Bosnia and Herzegovina’s independence on October 15, 1992. Further events were followed by the recognition of the new states by the European Community, under pressure from Germany and the U. S. A. Meanwhile, Serbia and

¹⁴ Stathis Kalyvas, Nicholas Sambanis, „Bosnia’s Civil War: Origins and Violence Dynamics”, in Paul Collier, Nicholas Sambanis (editors), *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis*, volume 2, Washington D. C., World Bank Publications, 2005, p. 192.

¹⁵ Margaret Mikyung Lee, Raphael Perl, Steven Woehrel, „Bosnia War Crimes”, p. 27.

¹⁶ J. A. S. Grenville, *A History of the World from the 20th to the 21st century*, p. 919.

¹⁷ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Andre Kaspi, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale*, p. 341.

¹⁸ Stathis Kalyvas, Nicholas Sambanis, „Bosnia’s Civil War: Origins and Violence Dynamics”, p. 193.

¹⁹ Robert F. Baumann, George W. Gawrych, Walter E. Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, pp. 22-23; David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, p. 10.

²⁰ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Andre Kaspi, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale*, p. 342.

²¹ J. A. S. Grenville, *A History of the World from the 20th to the 21st century*, p. 919.

²² Anthony Best, J. M. Hanhimaki, J. A. Maiolo, K. E. Schulze, *International history of the twentieth century and beyond*, New York, Routledge, 2015, pp. 550-551.

²³ David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, p. 12.

²⁴ Robert F. Baumann, George W. Gawrych, Walter E. Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, p. 24.

Montenegro have declared the formation of a new Yugoslav federation, with the U. N. and E. C. refusing to recognize it as the rights and obligations of the federal state have now been framed in the newly independent states.²⁵ The European Community and the U. N. achieved a ceasefire in Croatia (1992), following several diplomatic efforts led by former U. S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance²⁶ (whose peace proposal was accepted by both Croatia and Serbia and the J. N. A. on 15 January 1992),²⁷ mobilizing 14.000 U. N. peacekeepers and imposing an economic embargo²⁸ on Serbia and Montenegro.²⁹

Phase 2: 1992-1995

With the outbreak of war in Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs occupied most of Bosnia, and on January 9, 1992, Radovan Karadžić (leader of the Serbian Democratic Party) proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of Serbia (Republika Srpska) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.³⁰ In turn, Bosnian Croats occupied about half the rest of the country and proclaimed the Croatian Community Herceg-Bosna. As a result of „ethnic cleansing” by mostly Bosnian Serbs, thousands of Muslims were killed and many others fled the country or were placed in Serbian camps. In response, in May 1992, the U. N.-imposed economic sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro and called for an immediate ceasefire in Bosnia.³¹

The leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina has directed its foreign policy towards peacekeeping efforts. First, the Lisbon Agreement, or the Carrington-Cutiliero Plan, proposed three constituent entities based on ethnic principles and was signed in March 1991.³² In 1993, two peace plans were proposed, namely, the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (a division of Bosnia and Herzegovina into 10 cantons on the basis of ethnicity) and the Owen-Stoltenberg Peace Plan (dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into three parts on the basis of ethnicity), but the Bosnian government together with Bosnian Serbs opposed the plans, the former wanting to maintain territorial unity and the latter not agreeing to cut the link corridor with Republika Srpska. However, the latter plan was accepted by the Bosnian government on the condition that part of the territory is ceded by the Serbs, and in turn, Serbs would obtain a relaxation of the sanctions imposed by the Security Council on July 1, 1992.³³ Finally, the numerous ceasefire

²⁵ Anthony Best, J. M. Hanhimaki, J. A. Maiolo, K. E. Schulze, *International history of the twentieth century and beyond*, pp. 550-551.

²⁶ Stathis Kalyvas, Nicholas Sambanis, „Bosnia’s Civil War: Origins and Violence Dynamics”, p. 193.

²⁷ David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, p. 12.

²⁸ Through Resolution No. 713 of the Security Council of U. N.

²⁹ Stathis Kalyvas, Nicholas Sambanis, „Bosnia’s Civil War: Origins and Violence Dynamics”, p. 193.

³⁰ Robert F. Baumann, George W. Gawrych, Walter E. Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, p. 24.

³¹ Anthony Best, J. M. Hanhimaki, J. A. Maiolo, K. E. Schulze, *International history of the twentieth century and beyond*, p.551.

³² Anida Sokol, „BiH’s Wartime Foreign Policy: Lobbying for Peace and Lifting the Arms Embargo”, in J. Hasić, D. Karabegović (editors), *New Perspectives on South-East Europe. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Foreign Policy since independence*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 33-35.

³³ Caner Sancaktar, „Political and Economic Reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Journal of Balkan Research Institute*, volume 7, no. 1, 2018, pp. 216-217; David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, p. 16.

„Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation,” *Astra Salvensis*, VIII (2020), no. 16, p. 119-131.

agreements were either rejected or signed, and then not implemented due to the impossibility of reaching an agreement between the three parties, which pursued their own interests, but also due to the lack of military involvement on the part of the international community for the plans to be put into practice.³⁴

Instead, the U. S. did not intervene with military troops in Bosnia (but supported the arming of Bosnians), public opinion being reluctant in the absence of a national interest reason, so the Americans imposed only economic sanctions, claiming that this war falls within the competence of European states, the latter not agreeing with the airstrikes proposed by N. A. T. O.³⁵ However, the deadly attack in Sarajevo (February 1994) brought the U. S. back to the scene of the conflict with an ultimatum to Serbs to remove heavy weapons from Sarajevo, otherwise launching an airstrike.³⁶

Fighting between Bosniaks and Croats ends under pressure from France and the United States, with the Washington Accord (March 18, 1994) concluding an allied confederation against Serbia between the Bosnian Croat Federation and Croatia.³⁷ Under these conditions, the Contact Group (consisting of diplomatic representatives from the U. S. A., Russia, France, Great Britain and Germany) was created, which aimed to negotiate an armistice between the Serbs and the new Croatian-Bosnian confederation. In this context, in July 1994, the Contact Group proposed a peace plan which provided that the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina would be divided as follows: 51% to the Bosnian Croat Federation and 49% to the Bosnian Serbs, but only the Bosnian government agreed with this plan, Radovan Karadžić refusing to accept this partition, although the Belgrade government had approved the plan (consequently, Slobodan Milošević closed the borders between Serbia and Bosnia).³⁸ Under the former U. S. President Jimmy Carter, Serbs and the Bosnian Croat federation reached a four-month ceasefire agreement, but Serbs have resumed hostilities in Sarajevo after the end of the period, following to attack Srebrenica.³⁹

Thus, in July 1995, General Ratko Mladic occupied Srebrenica, the Serbs massacring at least 7000 Muslims, and other safe areas were attacked,⁴⁰ which led the Clinton administration to authorize airstrikes.⁴¹ The Serbs took 400 blue helmets hostage, and in exchange for their release obtained the renunciation of military

³⁴ Anida Sokol, „BiH’s Wartime Foreign Policy: Lobbying for Peace and Lifting the Arms Embargo”, pp. 33-35.

³⁵ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Andre Kaspi, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale*, p. 342.

³⁶ David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, p. 16.

³⁷ Caner Sancaktar, „Political and Economic Reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, pp. 216-217.

³⁸ David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, p. 17.

³⁹ Stathis Kalyvas, Nicholas Sambanis, „Bosnia’s Civil War: Origins and Violence Dynamics”, pp. 193-194.

⁴⁰ Serajevo, Tuzla, Zepa, Goretzde, Bihac and Srebrenica became „safe zones” through Resolution No. 824 of the Security Council of U. N.

⁴¹ Gordon Martel (editor), *A Companion to International History 1900-2001*, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 403.

exclusion around the city of Sarajevo⁴² and the cessation of N. A. T. O. bombing.⁴³ In late August and early September 1995, N. A. T. O. responded with an air attack on Bosnian Serb military targets and communications⁴⁴ and a campaign of about three weeks in response to the Serb attack on the safe areas of Srebrenica and Zepa and the attack in Sarajevo.⁴⁵ Following the defeat of the Serbs by the Croatian Muslim land forces and N. A. T. O. airstrikes, the parties were pressured to accept a compromise so as to end the fighting.⁴⁶ Thus, on September 26, in the New York talks led by the Contact Group, Serbs, Bosnians and Croats agreed that Bosnia should be a single state with a federal constitution, presidency, parliament, a constitutional court and free elections, and on 5 October, the parties agreed to a ceasefire and peace talks (Proximity Peace Talks), followed by a peace conference in Paris.⁴⁷

Phase 3: 1995-2016

On November 1, 1995, the process began with the Dayton Peace Accords (Weight-Peterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio), facilitated by the United States, through Richard Holbrooke, who led the negotiations between the fighters. Slobodan Milošević, Franjo Tuđman and Alija Izetbegović, along with Bosnian Foreign Minister Muhamed Sacirbey, took part in the process.⁴⁸ The General Peace Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina was signed in Dayton, Ohio, on November 21, 1995, and in Paris on December 14, with Bosnia becoming a two-member republic: 51% of the Croatian-Bosnian Federation (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), and 49 % Serbian Republic (Republika Srpska), comprising 3 nationalities: Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims.⁴⁹ Moreover, the Croatian-Bosnian federation consists of 10 cantons (5 dominated by Bosniaks and three by Croats), and the Serbian republic is fairly centralized.⁵⁰ Following the agreements, Tuđman won Eastern Slavonia, and Milošević received a promise to end the economic embargo if he complied with the provisions of the agreement.⁵¹ The political system left over from the Dayton Accords is an extremely decentralized one (to avoid the dominance of an ethnic group), in which power is shared between the three constituent parties, with a presidency of 3 members representing each constituent

⁴² The Serbs sieged Sarajevo between 1992 and 1995 (J. M. Roberts, O. A. Westad, *The History of the World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 1148).

⁴³ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Andre Kaspi, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale*, p. 344.

⁴⁴ J. A. S. Grenville, *A History of the World from the 20th to the 21st century*, p. 923.

⁴⁵ Caner Sancaktar, „Political and Economic Reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, p. 217.

⁴⁶ J. A. S. Grenville, *A History of the World from the 20th to the 21st century*, p. 923.

⁴⁷ David Anderson, „The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Background and Summary”, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Sarah E. Garding, „Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U. S. Policy”, Congressional Research Service, 2019, pp. 2-3; Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, „Bosnia: Ethno-Religious Nationalisms in Conflict”, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Andre Kaspi, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale*, p. 343.

⁵⁰ Mark Baskin, „Interim Notions of Statehood in Bosnia-Herzegovina A Permanent Transition?”, in Karen Gutteri, Jessica Piombo (editors), *Interim Governments: Institutional Bridges to Peace and Democracy?*, Washington D. C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007, p. 269.

⁵¹ Robert F. Baumann, George W. Gawrych, Walter E. Kretchik, *Armed Peacekeepers in Bosnia*, p. 31.

„Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation,” *Astra Salvensis*, VIII (2020), no. 16, p. 119-131.

group, Annex 4 of Peace Agreements serving as the Constitution for Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵² In 2000, Milošević was removed from power for his involvement in the Kosovo region,⁵³ with N. A. T. O. intervening against his troops.

Reconciling relations between ethnic groups

Bosnia and Herzegovina's ethnic groups in the post-war period began to be politically and administratively dominated by the following parties, as follows: Croats by the Croatian Democratic Union (H. D. Z.), Serbs by the Serbian Democratic Party (S. D. S.) and Bosnian Muslims by the Democratic Action Party (S. D. A.). Thus, the three leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina were entrusted by the international community with the following responsibilities: the implementation of peace, cooperation with international military and civilian agencies, and the transition to a stable leadership.⁵⁴ Moreover, a multitude of external actors have worked to stabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina and to help reconcile relations between ethnic groups, as follows: High Representative, who cordon off civilian agencies; U. N. International Police Group (U. N. I. P. T. F.); U. N. High Commissioner for Refugees (U. N. H. C. R.); Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (O. S. C. E.); World Bank and European Commission.⁵⁵ The High Representative played an important role in the transformation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the following reasons: first, he gained extraordinary powers by which (at the Peace Implementation Council in Bonn, 1997) he replaced Bosnian institutions in adopting legislation and eliminating local officials; secondly, it made the provision of assistance in Bosnia conditional on the parties' cooperation with the international community. In this regard, Bosnian Muslims have been receptive to these conditions, sharing the same interest in the harmonious achievement of a multiethnic state.⁵⁶ In reconciliation efforts, an attempt was made to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which aimed to promote a sense of friendship for overcoming inter-ethnic animosities, as each ethnic group had its own version of the truth about events in whose nation was the victim.⁵⁷ However, politicians have been reluctant to set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because of a lack of a common vision of the truth (each ethnic group victimizing itself), thus ruling out dialogue and reconciliation.⁵⁸

⁵² Sarah E. Garding, „Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U. S. Policy”, pp. 3-4; Massimo Moratti, Amra Sabic-El-Rayess, „Transitional Justice and D. D. R.: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, International Center for Transitional Justice, 2009, p. 7.

⁵³ J. M. Roberts, O. A. Westad, *The History of the World*, p. 1148.

⁵⁴ Mark Baskin, *Interim Notions of Statehood in Bosnia-Herzegovina A Permanent Transition?*, pp. 264-266.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 270.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 277-278.

⁵⁷ Sanela Basic, „Bosnian Society on the Path to Justice, Truth and Reconciliation”, in Martina Fischer (editor), *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten Years after Dayton*, Münster, LIT-Verlag, 2006, pp. 373-374.

⁵⁸ Sanela Basic, „Bosnian Society on the Path to Justice, Truth and Reconciliation”, p. 378.

Regarding the reconciliation of these ethnic groups, we can say that the peace process after the establishment of the Dayton Accords, contributed to the deepening of ethnic divisions, ethnic identity remaining the only legitimate identity of the population, and elites focusing only on maintaining security, not on the construction of liberal and functional institutions.⁵⁹ The Dayton Peace Accords were designed for the short-term in order to end hostilities and ensure regional stability, addressing a number of issues to facilitate the democratic transition, such as the constitution, elections, human rights, refugees, civilian implementation (the establishment of Office of the High Representative or O. H. R.). Sixty thousand N. A. T. O. (I. F. O. R.) troops were mobilized to successfully implement these provisions of the Dayton Accords.⁶⁰ However, I. F. O. R. failed to detain war criminals, arguing that such actions could destabilize the mission therefore the first people responsible for war crimes were detained by N. A. T. O. only two years after the Dayton Accords.⁶¹

Bosnia's post-Dayton government has proved ineffective in many ways. First of all, the political system together with the inefficient and ethnically grounded state institutions, and the elections doing nothing but accentuate the inter-ethnic tensions, by promoting a radical nationalism,⁶² often to block decisions and impede reforms.⁶³ In other words, this system could not lay the foundations for a self-regulating state,⁶⁴ as the process of implementing peace agreements depended on the international community.⁶⁵ In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the last population census took place in 1991, with over three hundred thousand people remaining displaced in Bosnia (March 2005). The influence of war conditions remained in rural areas, affected by rising poverty and declining job diversity. Despite the involvement of the international community, there is still fear of a resurgence of the conflict due to the nationalist rhetoric of political leaders (Milorad Dodik's intention to hold a referendum on secession of the Republic of Serbia or Dragan Čović to create a Croatian entity in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina).⁶⁶ The main challenges for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which affects the evolution of a modern, stable, viable, democratic state are: strong polarization of the population due to deepening socio-economic inequalities (2014 protests due to unemployment and poverty);⁶⁷ ethnic nationalism; lack of development; corruption; dysfunctional institutions (prevents the development and effective implementation of coherent macroeconomic policies or the establishment of a capital market); poor management of the privatization

⁵⁹ Mark Baskin, *Interim Notions of Statehood in Bosnia-Herzegovina A Permanent Transition?*, pp. 269.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 268-269.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 271.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 274.

⁶³ Argyro Kartsonaki, „Twenty Tears After Dayton: Bosnia-Herzegovina (still) Stable and Explosive”, in *Civil Wars*, volume 18, no. 4, 2017, pp. 498-499.

⁶⁴ Mark Baskin, *Interim Notions of Statehood in Bosnia-Herzegovina A Permanent Transition?*, p. 274.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 275.

⁶⁶ Argyro Kartsonaki, „Twenty years after Dayton: Bosnia-Herzegovina (still) stable and explosive”, pp. 503-504; John O'Loughlin, „Inter-ethnic friendships in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina: Sociodemographic and place influences”, in *Ethnicities*, volume 10, no. 1, 2010, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Aydın Babuna, „European Integration, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Stability in the Western Balkans: A New Strategy”, in *Perceptions*, volume XIX, no. 2, 2014, p. 15.

„Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation,” *Astra Salvensis*, VIII (2020), no. 16, p. 119-131.

process (public sector enterprises are controlled by a political elite), lack of consensus in decision-making on institutional and territorial arrangements.⁶⁸ In other words, a multitude of factors underlies the possibility of a resurgence of conflicts, which attracts the attention of the international community. Due to economic problems, citizens may lose confidence in the state and in the democratic process, being more prone, due to their vulnerable position, to radicalization.⁶⁹ Party leaders, in an attempt to divert attention from high levels of corruption and win elections, distort the historical truth about wartime events, thus accelerating inter-ethnic tensions and divisions (ethnic segregation is practiced even in schools).⁷⁰

In addition, the political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is prone to blocking reforms, due to overlapping institutions and slowing down the development of a coordinated response, and the legislative process with many vetoes makes it difficult to adopt legislation (between 2014-2018, Parliament adopted only 12 laws).⁷¹ At the same time, the current political system is advantageous for the political elite (Bosnia and Herzegovina’s parliamentarians are among the highest paid in Europe). Hence, they have no desire to reform the system and they block any law that could jeopardize their status and position or that could hold them accountable for illegal actions in the implementation of reforms. A good example of this is the Reform Agenda (2015) which has largely proved a failure given the blocking of initiatives by politicians. That being said, a new generation of politicians and civic parties, not based on nationalist rhetoric, to put economic and political issues first, are absolutely necessary for the evolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁷²

A 2009 study by the United Nations Development Program in Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia found that economic disparities are a real threat to stability, with 88% of respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina saying that tensions over economic polarization are a problem, and 79% say ethnic cleavages are a problem.⁷³ A relevant example of this is the 2014 protests,⁷⁴ caused by the collapse of state-owned companies, which led to an extremely high unemployment rate in more than 30 cities. It can be seen here that the economic situation has caused popular unrest and caused violence, by clashing with police and attacks on government buildings (Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica, Mostar), thus attracting the attention of the international community due to the possibility of a conflict.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Sarah E. Garding, „Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U. S. Policy”, p. 9; Marcus Cox, „State-Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Lessons from Bosnia”, Geneva, Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations, 2001, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁹ Marcus Cox, „State-Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction”, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Sarah E. Garding, „Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U. S. Policy”, p. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² *Ibidem*, pp. 8-9.

⁷³ Aydın Babuna, „European Integration, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Stability in the Western Balkans: A New Strategy”, p. 15.

⁷⁴ European Commission, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2014 Progress Report, Brussels, C. O. M. (2014) 700 final, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Aydın Babuna, „European Integration, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Stability in the Western Balkans: A New Strategy”, pp. 15-16.

Moreover, one can see the emergence of two visions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as follows: first, Bosnian Muslims who want to reform the Dayton Accords and centralize the state (building a single unitary state), eliminating institutional arrangements and cantons,⁷⁶ while Serbs and Croats want a third entity in a federal state. Also, if the population wants to reconcile relations between ethnic groups and mitigate ethnic divisions, political elites want to slow down reform through their rhetoric, in order to continue their dominance under the umbrella of political patronage.⁷⁷ It is worth mentioning here that in 2006, Milorad Dodik (President of the Republic of Serbia) began to promote nationalist rhetoric, announcing his intention to hold a referendum on secession, a movement fueled by the events in Kosovo (2008).⁷⁸ On the other hand, Dragan Čović (leader of the H. D. Z.) wants more autonomy for Croats by creating a third entity within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁷⁹

The path to european integration

Relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the E. U. began to take shape in 1996, with the P. H. A. R. E. and O. B. N. O. V. A. programs,⁸⁰ and in 1997, the E. U. Council of Ministers establishing a common strategy for the countries of the Western Balkans, called the „*regional approach*”. In this regard, countries are required to meet conditions for the development of bilateral relations with the E. U., namely: democratization, respect for human rights and freedoms, the creation of the rule of law, privatization of state property and the introduction of a market economy, cooperation with the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia. Following the events in Kosovo (1999), the E. U. focused its efforts on strengthening regional stability and socio-economic development.⁸¹ In 1999, Bosnia and Herzegovina (along with Albania, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro) were included in the Stabilization and Association Process (S. A. P.), which became a political framework for the development of relations between the E. U. and the Western Balkan countries.⁸²

⁷⁶ Ana E. Juncos, „The EU’s post-Conflict Intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina: (re)Integrating the Balkans and/or (re)Inventing the EU?”, in *Southeast European Politics*, volume VI, no. 2, 2005, pp. 92-93; Sarah E. Garding, „Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U. S. Policy”, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Argyro Kartsonaki, „Twenty years after Dayton: Bosnia-Herzegovina (still) stable and explosive”, pp. 501-502.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*. 503-504.

⁷⁹ Agim Mamuti, „Integration Process of Bosnia and Herzegovina to European Union”, in *International Relations and Diplomacy*, volume 1, no. 3, 2013, p. 243; Sarah E. Garding, „Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U. S. Policy”, p. 9.

⁸⁰ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina’s application for membership of the European Union*, Brussels, 2019, p. 7.

⁸¹ Directorate for European Integration, *EU Integration Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, www.DEI.GOV.BA, p. 19.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 22.

„Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation,” *Astra Salvensis*, VIII (2020), no. 16, p. 119-131.

Furthermore, an important moment in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s integration is its identification with other Western Balkan countries as a potential candidate for E. U. membership at the 2003 European Council Thessaloniki Summit.⁸³ In 2004, the Partnership was published, and despite operations by A. L. T. H. E. A. and E. U. F. O. R., E. U. forces have taken over the military peacekeeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina from S. F. O. R. (N. A. T. O.).⁸⁴ Following the entry into force of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (on 1 June 2015, 7 years after its signing), Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted its application for membership of the European Union on 15 February 2016.⁸⁵ It is important to note that the terms of the Agreement Stabilization and Association Agreements are much more severe for the Western Balkan states, primarily because, in addition to meeting the Copenhagen Criteria, involvement in regional cooperation is mandatory, and yet full membership is not guaranteed.⁸⁶

Therefore, the process of European integration is affected by the high level of decentralization of the country, with weak state-level institutions.⁸⁷ Moreover, the E. U. accession process is slowed down by the power struggle of ethnically based parties (H. D. Z., S. D. P., S. D. A., S. N. S. D., S. D. S. and others), along with ethnic cleavages and nationalist rhetoric, which predominate in the face of economic and political problems.⁸⁸ However, it is worth noting that Milorad Dodik acknowledged Bosnia and Herzegovina’s application for E. U. membership, arguing that it is a positive step for the country.⁸⁹

Additionally, there are also a number of obstacles that slow down the process of European integration and weaken the chances of accession, such as: the unwillingness of political leaders to pursue the necessary reforms along the European path and the achievement of European standards, the lack of an effective coordination mechanism for European Union matters, weak political institutions at all levels of government (the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina is limited in adopting European Union legislation), lack of progress in overcoming ethnic animosities, lack of effective cooperation with civil society at the level of the state, entities or cantons, lack of progress in reforming the public administration (strong fragmentation of the administration affects the public service system), poor progress in reforming the judiciary and combating corruption, especially in the public service (political patronage at all levels of government, and the rate of investigation, prosecution and conviction is low; employment in the public system depends on

⁸³ Agim Mamuti, „Integration Process of Bosnia and Herzegovina to European Union”, in *International Relations and Diplomacy*, vol. 1, nr. 3, 2013, p. 240; Directorate for European Integration, *EU Integration Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 22.

⁸⁴ Directorate for European Integration, *EU Integration Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, p. 23.

⁸⁵ European Commission, *Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA II) 2014-2020*, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Aydın Babuna, „European Integration, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Stability in the Western Balkans: A New Strategy”, p. 10.

⁸⁷ Ana E. Juncos, „The EU’s post-Conflict Intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina: (re)Integrating the Balkans and/or (re)Inventing the EU?”, pp. 92-93.

⁸⁸ Agim Mamuti, „Integration Process of Bosnia and Herzegovina to European Union”, p. 243.

⁸⁹ Argyro Kartsonaki, „Twenty years after Dayton: Bosnia-Herzegovina (still) stable and explosive”, p. 504.

political connections), reduced progress in combating organized crime, increased political and financial pressure on the media and the threat of journalists, lack of substantial progress towards a functioning market economy, lack of political elite support for the European agenda and a functional mechanism for cooperation on European issues (affects the achievement of European Union standards and legislation).⁹⁰

Nonetheless, the role of the European Union in the Balkans is essential, especially in order to ensure the implementation of much-needed economic and political reforms. Thus, Bosnia and Herzegovina must make substantial progress towards centralizing the state and creating a single economic space that will turn the country into a viable partner of the European Union.⁹¹

Therefore, the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War revived the national issue of Yugoslav ethnic groups, providing a favorable context for them to follow their own path to independence. Thus, Bosnia was caught in a wave of secession, being pressured to adopt the same strategy for the establishment of an independent nation-state. However, the idea of a Greater Serbia and the divergences over the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina have led to the outbreak of a bloody war, one of the most violent since World War II. Following the involvement of the international community, a ceasefire agreement was reached, with the Dayton Peace Accords being signed. Despite the signing of agreements and the efforts of the European Union and the United States, relations between ethnic groups have not been fully reconciled because of the political elite, which has continued to promote nationalist rhetoric based on ethnicity. Consequently, the state has failed to develop sufficiently to no longer depend on international aid and to be a viable state with functioning institutions. These, together with socio-economic inequalities, the high level of corruption and decentralization of the state, as a result of the division between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, have slowed down the process of European integration. Moreover, the European path has stalled due to Dodik's attempts to hold a referendum on independence, a desire fueled by events in Kosovo and poor progress in reforming the political system. However, 2016 marked the most important step for the European path of Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the application for membership of the European Union. It remains to be seen whether a future European enlargement in the Balkans, under the Commission of Ursula von der Leyen, will complete the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁹⁰ European Commission, *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2014 Progress Report*, pp. 1-3; Ana E. Juncos, „The EU's post-Conflict Intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina: (re)Integrating the Balkans and/or (re)Inventing the EU?”, pp. 92-93; Sarah E. Garding, „Bosnia and Herzegovina: Background and U. S. Policy”, pp. 8-9.

⁹¹ Marcus Cox, „State-Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction”, p. 7.

„Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation,” *Astra Salvensis*, VIII (2020), no. 16, p. 119-131.