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Ismet Fatih Čančar diplomirao je ekonomiju na Sarajevskoj školi nauke i tehnologije i Univerzitetu u Buckinghamu, a magistrirao međunarodnu političku ekonomiju na King's College London. Bio je gost istraživač na programu Partnerstvo za mir na NATO fakultetu odbrane u Rimu od marta do jula 2022. godine. Trenutno obnaša dužnost savjetnika ministra sigurnosti Bosne i Hercegovine. Autor je brojnih stručnih radova i novinskih članaka. Njegova stručnost i istraživački interes su podijeljeni između međunarodne političke ekonomije i sigurnosnih odnosa, vanjske politike i energetske sigurnosti. Njegovo istraživanje se fokusira na geopolitiku zapadnog Balkana, euroatlantsku sigurnost Bosne i Hercegovine i procese demokratizacije i razvoja tranzicijske države.

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**BOSNA I HERCEGOVINA NA RAZMEĐU –
NOVA POLITIČKA PARADIGMA ILI AGONIJA
ETNO-NACIONALNOG EKSKLUZIVITETA**

**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AT CROSSROADS –
NEW POLITICAL PARADIGM OR AGONY
OF ETHNO-NATIONAL EXCLUSIVITY**

Abstract

European collective security has been fundamentally shaken by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In this context, Bosnia and Herzegovina is recognized as one of the most vulnerable points of the European security framework. This paper analyses the position of BiH in the wider context of regional Balkan security. Referring to the history of BiH in the 20th century and its relations with its neighbours, the analysis dives into the most important issues of security and stability of BiH in the struggle with two "Greater-state" projects: "Greater Serbia", today known as *Srpski svet*, and "Greater Croatia", indirectly, through the formation of the third Croat entity on the territory of BiH. The paper also analyses the geopolitical context of current events in Europe to explain how Russia's role fits into the background of BiH's Euro-Atlantic integration. This role is demonstrated through constant support to various Serb and Croat actors who are working to destabilize the political and territorial integrity of BiH. As such, the paper offers a new political paradigm as an alternative to the ethno-national exclusivity on which the Dayton Peace Agreement is based. The new political paradigm in BiH entails the formation of expanded capacities of the state that would make it self-sustainable and capable of independently fulfilling all its international obligations.

Key words: *Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniaks, Balkan, Russia, Euro-Atlantic security, Srpski svet, "Greater Serbia", "Greater Croatia", new political paradigm, ethno-national exclusivity.*

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AT CROSSROADS - NEW POLITICAL PARADIGM OR AGONY OF ETHNO-NATIONAL EXCLUSIVITY

Introduction

With the Russian invasion into Ukraine, war has returned to the Europe. The displayed barbarism in Bucha, Irpin and other cities in Ukraine reminded of the brutality of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH) at the end of the last century. As BiH recently marked 27 years since the Srebrenica genocide, the events in Ukraine have revived fears of the possible culmination of instability in the country that could easily spill over into a regional security crisis.

BiH is a country that has its own political, geographic, economic, demographic, cultural, religious and civilizational characteristics that make it unique in the Balkans. In its lifetime, it has been one of the most stable states whose borders have been defined by natural geographical features on the European continent for centuries, making it an intriguing space on the world political map. Throughout history, BiH has lied on the border of fault lines where great empires clashed, from the Ottoman Empire to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. While these epochs significantly shaped the civilizational space of BiH, the country has managed to maintain its international subjectivity in an almost original form; as the Bosnian Kingdom in the Middle Ages, as Bosnia during the Ottoman rule, as *Corpus separatum* during the Austro-Hungarian rule, and as one of six republics within Yugoslavia.<?>

This reality of BiH in contemporary times is in conflict with the nature of the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine, where a greater power uses force to seize certain or entire parts of the state territory of a weaker power. In this reality, BiH has been recognized as a vulnerable, weak point of the European security framework.<?> There are many indicators that point to a possible revival of conflict in the BiH, not least because of the ongoing two-decade campaign by neighbouring countries to complete the unfinished war-time goals that have failed to materialize through the use of tanks and artillery. This is clearly visible in the actions of anti-state actors, secessionist forces in Bosnian Serbs and Croats, who have planned, put into motion and executed a number of

¹ For detailed account of history of Bosnia through epochs, see Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, New York University Press, 1994.

² See Harun Karčić, *Why NATO Should Worry About the Balkans*, Foreign Policy, March 30, 2022, and Janine di Giovanni, *The Virulent Nationalism That Led to Srebrenica is Back in Bosnia*, Foreign Policy, July 11 2022.

measures that aim towards the partition of the country. The support of native Serbia and Croatia is not absent in these plans, since the politics of those neighbouring countries is to achieve what has failed during the previous war. In such a constellation of relations, Russian support to these actors additionally threatens the stability of the Balkans, and therefore the stability of the European continent. As the war in Ukraine has unravelled the security of the European continent, it is justified to ask how the Russian role fits into the ambitions of neighbouring countries in relation to BiH.

This paper offers an insight into the most pressing issues for BiH's future Euro-Atlantic path, taking in consideration the regional challenges and implications that are deeply rooted in historical constants. The paper starts by explaining BiH's statehood through history, and its struggle to preserve its international subjectivity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Second part provides an understanding of the policy and plans, of ideological and strategic nature, of Serbia and Croatia towards BiH in their destabilization attempts, and how Russia's role fits into this environment of geopolitical struggle between Euro-Atlantic and Russian position. Before concluding, the paper offers a new political paradigm as a guiding principle for development, defence, and protection of BiH against "Greater-state" aspirations, with the aim that the new political paradigm enables building broader self-sustainable capacities firmly woven into the Euro-Atlantic alliance.



ILLUSTRATION ~ BOSNA/BOSNIA, during its ten-century duration, it is one of the most stable states whose borders have been defined for centuries by natural geographical features on the European continent.

BiH through history

As Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed out in his seminal book “The Grand Chessboard”, the region of the Western Balkans is often known as the “global Balkans”. It is a space of constant instability characterized by the mediation of powerful centres, each of which aims to establish its hegemonic dominance over the region.^{<?>} At the heart of mediations in the Balkans lies BiH with its geographical, geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic traits.^{<?>} Its borders divide the Balkans into an area between the EU and NATO, and the country itself is anchored between two NATO members, Croatia and Montenegro. As a territory in a region that is increasingly interconnected with the globalized European continent, Bosnia and Herzegovina contains a number of important road and railway lines that branch further towards the European plains. With sea access, this area connects the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas, Central Europe with the Black Sea basin. Thus, BiH, because of its position, and because of the rich history of connecting the Occident and the Orient, has contributed to the importance of the geopolitical space of the Western Balkans in the international arena.

The history of BiH on the fault lines between East and West reminisces the attempts of neighbouring countries, Serbia and Croatia, to annex territories of BiH into their own states through the manipulation of various historical facts. This incessant urge to constantly question the continuity and international subjectivity of BiH is part of a well-organized, systemically established strategy in which BiH can only coexist under the conditions prescribed by its neighbours. Although the issue of BiH’s international status was resolved in 1992 by the Security Council resolution 757 in which formal membership to United Nations was granted, this did not prevent the neighbouring countries from spending the last two decades in trying to fuel various crises.^{<?>} Each of these crises, from attempts to create autonomous or parallel institutions, to the denial and revision of historically and legally established facts, aim to institutionally disarm BiH. This would render BiH an easy prey for its neighbours due to the unclear perspective and weak functionality of the state apparatus.

Recent period has seen an upsurge of claims by nationalist Serbian and Croat actors that BiH is a construct impossible to survive, an aberration that has no future, due to its ethnic differences and diversity. This line of thought is not new. Previous scholarly debate has tried to employ Samuel Huntington’s theory of Clash of Civilizations as a justification for the impossibility of BiH. These arguments found roots in discussion about Yugoslavia, in which the diverse number of religions has been rendered incompatible with each other, and as such, served as the main argument for the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars that ensued in

³ See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, Podgorica, 2001, p.117.

⁴ For more information, see Selmo Cikotić, *Security Prospectives of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Sarajevo: Vijeće Kongresa Bošnjačkih intelektualaca, 2010.

⁵ See *United Nations Resolution 757* adopted by the Security Council at its 3082nd meeting, on May 30 1992.

the region.^{<?>} However, these arguments lacked substance then for the same reasons they lack substance today. If observed from the point of theology and philosophy, none of the major monotheistic religions teach intolerance towards someone who belongs to another religion. Moreover, all these religions stand for peace and coexistence, for protection and togetherness, and puts emphasis on the importance of religious freedom and encourages understanding towards other religions. Furthermore, historic constants of Bosnian statehood through different eras testify to a diverse environment of different religions and beliefs that coexisted in BiH for centuries in peace and harmony. However, like in Yugoslavia, what was neglected then is neglected today – the role of nationalism and the mechanisms used by political elites to mobilize ideology for conflict.^{<?>}



ILLUSTRATION ~ Galloping nationalism: Why is patriotism more important to some Croats than daily bread?
 ILUSTRACIJA ~ Galopirajući nacionalizam: Zašto je domoljublje nekim Hrvatima važnije od kruha svagdanjeg?

⁶ See Fiona S. Ong, *Huntington's Clash of Civilization in Yugoslavia*, *Inquires Journal*, 2011, Vol.3, No.10, p.1.

⁷ See Florian Bieber, *The Conflict in Yugoslavia as a "Fault Line" War?*, *Balkanologie*, 1999, 3:1, pp.33-48.

Observing the present, we can find concrete examples that support this argument. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro are regional neighbours without open questions, that enjoy excellent bilateral political, social and interpersonal relations. This reality indicates that the source of the problem in the Balkans is not the allegedly irreconcilable religious and national differences between people, but rather the “Greater-state” ambition of Serbia and Croatia towards BiH. A series of judgements by international courts and research by international organizations have clearly established the content and essence of these two “Greater-state” Serbian and Croatian projects – the claim to annex and rule the territory of BiH.⁸ In achieving that, Belgrade and Zagreb have used both ethnic and religious factors to inflame interethnic hatred, mistrust and instability, which culminated in mass war crimes, ethnic cleansing and genocide in BiH.

BiH’s struggle to preserve its international subjectivity, sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of neighbours’ irredentist politics is still alive. In that struggle, Belgrade and Zagreb throughout history have enjoyed support from certain European centres of power, as well as the support of a number of influential European individuals who subscribed to the position that BiH was “impossible” for them, and therefore should be divided for the sake of “painful restoration of Christian Europe”.⁹ Primarily, that support was reflected in aligning views on a common enemy in BiH: Islam, the Muslims. In that wave of the fight against Islam, during the aggression against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RBiH), European political elites were most afraid of the possibility of a birth of a vibrant Muslim state in the southeast of Europe – “one that might become rich, militant, and an inspiration for ethnic or communal strife elsewhere”.¹⁰ The apocryphal condemnation of Serbs by “putting finger on this evil” rather served to mask and soften the position of European power centres – that aggression towards BiH was interpreted as a common way of defending Europe, its religion and its culture – in

⁸ If looking for historic orientation, the Cvetković-Maček Agreement of August 1939 divided Bosnia – parts of it annexed by Banovina Croatia, the rest appropriated within existing banovina Vrbaska and Drinska within the framework of Serbian Banovina; for newer political orientation see “Decision on the strategic goals of Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina” adopted by Assembly of Republika Srpska on May 16 1992 in which strategic goal 3 mandates “...the elimination of river Drina as a border that separates the Serbian states”; and SANU (Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art) Memorandum 2 from 2011 which has laid out a modernized state-building strategy for the continuation of the “Greater Serbia” project and its finalization in peace; for legal precedence see verdicts such as the summary of the decision of the ICTY Hearing Panel in the case against Slobodan Milošević which stated that projects of “Greater Serbia” and “Greater Croatia” was done within the framework of joint criminal enterprise in which, in addition to the Republika Srpska Krajina, the Republika Srpska, Serbia and Croatia also participated (Milošević, 98bis Decision, 258-60.); furthermore, see case against Duško Tadić: the judgement dealt with Milošević primarily because of his role as the ideological and political inspirer of the event. Verdict mentions the “Greater Serbia” policy attributed to Milošević and concludes that “the practice of ethnic cleansing was adopted” as part of the policy of “establishing Greater Serbia”. The judgement also identifies the concept of “Greater Croatia”, which would include all Croats living in the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Tadić, Judgement, 84.); definitive account of “Greater Croatia” has been established in ICTY verdict against Prlić et al. from November 2017 where “the Chamber finds by a majority that a joint criminal enterprise existed had as its ultimate goal the establishment of a Croatian territorial entity with part of the borders of the Croatian Banovina of 1939 to enable a reunification of the Croatian people. This Croatian territorial entity in BiH was either to be united with Croatia following the prospective dissolution of BiH, or become an independent state within BiH with direct ties to Croatia”.

⁹ See Riada Akšimović Akyol, *On the Anniversary of Genocide in Bosnia, a Policy Reassessment is in order*, New Lines Magazine, July 15, 2022.

¹⁰ See John Newhouse, *No Exit, No Entrance*, The New Yorker, June 28 1993, pp.44-51.

preserving the Christian European world.¹¹ For Europe, the incomprehensibility of existence of European white Muslims, progressive in their nature, and naturally integrated into the modern trends of Europe's democratic and cultural legacy was a secondary issue. In fact, the primary one was simpler: that BiH was and still remains one of the only countries in Europe where Muslims are a dominant state-building team, a political factor that has the capacity to produce and consume all parts of a social contract in one state, from culture, music and art, to economy, security and defence.

Such attitudes are still present today, and this support is still visible in the circles of European right-wing, autocrats, radical leaders who embody the policy of national movements for ethnically pure, homogeneous territories.¹² It is a threat not only to BiH as internationally recognized, but to the entire European security structure which rests on the principles of inviolability of borders and national sovereignty. Which is why Russian support towards Belgrade and Zagreb has serious ramifications. Russian role in the past decade has been centred around propping actors to produce perpetual destabilization in BiH.¹³ Exploiting religious, ethnic and political division has been a permanent tool of neighbouring countries to fuel crises in the region. In other words, Russian politics have exploited Belgrade and Zagreb in undermining the stability of BiH in an attempt to prevent the Balkans from catching up with the pace of Euro-Atlantic integration, while concurrently ensuring that Sarajevo remains, indefinitely, in a subordinate position.

Undermining stability – a regional approach to BiH

With the continuous revival of radical nationalistic politics of the 1990s, the ideology of ethno-national exclusivity and national homogenization of territories in multi-ethnic states is a dangerous omen for the stability of the region. This is particularly evident in BiH, where such policies are on full display. Under that line of action, Russia has supported different actors within the Serb and Croat community who have actively worked to destabilize the political and territorial integrity of BiH. Historically, such policies have always threatened the peace and stability of the Balkans and have serious potential to disrupt the delicate peace equilibrium, in the region and beyond.

¹¹ See Jean Baudrillard, *The West's Serbianization*, This Time We Knew, NYU Press, 1995, pp.84-87

¹² The political economy of Europe has witnessed the revival of far-right movements and nationalist leaders all across Europe. Hungary President Viktor Orban's recent letter to Milorad Dodik calls for race purity by: "rebuilding Europe based on Christian civilization and sovereign nations"; his wider remarks attacked the "mixing" of European and non-European races, adding that countries where Europeans and non-Europeans mix "are no longer nations". Ideologies with similar positions are present in far-right movements in National Rally in France, AfD in Germany, and FPÖ in Austria, and others.

¹³ See Jasmin Mujanović, *Russia's Bosnia Gambit*, Foreign Affairs, September 6 2017.

„Greater Serbia” and Srpski svet – rebranding nationalistic discourse

the Bosnian Serbs have been on a disruptive tirade for the better part of the past two decades. As one of the two entities set up under Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), Republika Srpska has invested all efforts in seceding from BiH – a campaign thoroughly supported by Russia in pursuit of broader strategic goals.¹⁴ Breaking BiH apart and tearing up its statehood falls under the greater geopolitical objective of Russia’s undermining of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan countries. It is a strategy that rests on the permanent production of BiH instability that obstructs its Euro-Atlantic integration, although all institutional prerequisites for membership are already in place.¹⁵ So when Russian tanks started trampling across Ukrainian plains, it raised a deep sense of concern for what could happen in BiH – i.e., the use of brute force to redraw borders and carve out new territories.

The leadership in Republika Srpska, at the helm with Milorad Dodik, the Serb member of Bosnian tripartite presidency, guards this possibility through the ideological weaponization of “Greater Serbia” – today known as *Srpski svet*. With support of Serbia and Russia, it advocates for the unification of all ethnic Serbs in the Balkans within one land.¹⁶ The ideology pursues ethnically homogenous territories which contradicts the principle of the inviolability of borders the sovereignty of states. By simulating potential scenarios, one can easily forecast the consequences of these actions for the security of the Balkans. Geostrategically, the secessions of Republika Srpska, with Russian support under the bid to protect the Slavic-Orthodox brotherhood, would de facto create a Transnistrian equivalent in the Balkans – an ideal lever for outsourcing crises in the region. Furthermore, it would enable Russia closer access to the warm-water ports of the Adriatic, a long-standing goal that has traditionally guided Russian interests in South-eastern Europe.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Vesna Pusić, *What Russia Really Wants in the Balkans*, Foreign Policy, November 23 2021.

¹⁵ The Serb component in power-sharing DPA claims that there is no consensus on NATO membership among the three nations in BiH. However, the representatives of the Serb people in BiH have voted on several occasions for NATO membership. Two instances are crucial. In 2005, with the votes of Serbian representatives in the Parliament of BiH, the Law on Defence of BiH was adopted, whose article 84 clearly states that “the Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Ministers, the Presidency of BiH, and all subjects of defence, within their own constitutional and legal jurisdiction, will carry out the necessary activities for the admission of BiH to NATO membership”. A year later, in 2006, the Presidency of BiH, headed by the Chairman of the Presidency of BiH Nebojša Radmanović (Serb Member of the Presidency), signed the Agreement on Accession of BiH to the NATO program “Partnership for Peace” – a stepping stone for NATO membership. Since then, propped up by Russian and Serbian support, Republika Srpska has rejected this position justifying it with historical animosity towards the Alliance that bombed Bosnian Serb army in BiH during the war, as well as the bombing of Serbia during the Kosovo war in 1999.

¹⁶ Earlier in March Aleksandar Vulin, Serbian Minister of Internal Affairs, went public during a conference in Bijeljina, BiH with “*Srpski svet* is the necessity of this generation. If we don’t create *Srpski svet*, I’m afraid we won’t have anything to leave to future generations.”

¹⁷ See Harun Karčić, *Russia’s Influence in the Balkans: The Interplay of Religion, Politics, and History*, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University, July 25 2022.



ILUSTRACIJA – „Srpski svet” je tek eufemizam za stari koncept Velike Srbije, ili slično nazvanog „Ruskog svijeta”, ili Le Monde français, Die deutsche Welt, La mondo Italiano, Lumea Romaneasca ili The English World.

ILLUSTRATION – „Serbian world” is just a euphemism for the old concept of Greater Serbia, or the similarly named „Russian world”, or Le Monde français, Die deutsche Welt, La mondo Italiano, Lumea Romaneasca ili The English World.



ILLUSTRATION ~ Support of „Russian World” / „Greater Russia” and „Serbian World” / „Greater Serbia” in demonstrations across cities in Serbia and Republika Srpska in Bosnia.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Podrška „Ruskog svijeta” / „Velike Rusije” i „Srpskog sveta” / „Velike Srbije” na demonstracijama širom gradova u Srbiji i Republici Srpskoj u Bosni.

On an ideological level, through the Dayton reconstruction of BiH, “Greater Serbia” has provided a “Greater-state” project that has historically aspired towards the reunification between motherland Serbia and the entity in BiH. After 27 years, the project has suddenly gained weight because it now includes the support of Russia whose neo-imperial campaign is using allies in the name of restoring Slavic historic unity.¹⁸ That symbiotic relationship enables to impose a permanently subordinate position on Sarajevo, in which it is too constrained to free itself from the shadow of *Srpski svet* reinvigorated in the nationalist character of Republika Srpska. This handicaps BiH to take a more serious step towards Euro-Atlantic integration. On the other side, it has enabled Russia to disseminate its vision beyond the “near abroad”. The new “near abroad” therefore does not allow the geopolitical expansion of the Atlanticists, and enables Russia to regain its authority and place in the world.

Today, *Srpski svet* is rather a mere rebranding, an evocation of the legacies of “Greater Serbia”, which rest on the same principles, same ideology, but adapted to a different geopolitical context. *Srpski svet* is structured dogmatically, even though riddled with lies and illogicality. Beliefs that the *Srpski svet* is inherently superior to others is used as a proof of innate Serbian intelligence in which the lie represents the highest creative form of Serbian patriotism.¹⁹ Such behaviour is ubiquitous in the Serbian political elite in BiH.

The *Srpski svet* doctrine used by Serbian nationalist in BiH is not accidental. Today it tends to the European right-wing, the same rehabilitated fractions that justified initial aggression in BiH as fighting “Islamic fundamentalism”. The parallel of “Greater Serbia” is also digestible to Russia because it supports the restoration of *Russkiy Mir* (Greater Russia) within historical imperial borders. In the same way that Vladimir Putin considers Ukraine as a historical mistake that needs to be corrected²⁰, the ideology of “Greater Serbia” inherently views BiH and Bosnian Muslims as a mistake in the genetic code that needs extinct.²¹ Hence, the Islamization of Bosnian Muslims is not only a matter of religion – reducing a nation to a religious dimension – but a deliberate attempt of dissecting one

¹⁸ Alexander Dugin, the Russian political philosopher, refers to the historic unity in the Balkans as the rebirth of the Slavic union, with remarks that “the turn of Serbia in Russian geopolitical agenda of Slavic revival will come...we should finish what we started”. Central to his ideology is the “Greater Russia” re-established by force to include countries such as Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, but also Finland, Romania, North Macedonia, Serbia, ‘Serbian Bosnia’ and Greece.

¹⁹ Dobrica Ćosić, by many referred as “Father of Serbian nation” in his 1961 ‘Deobama’ has eloquently elucidated the ideology of lies. This paradigm “lie is Serbian national interest” was later institutionalized through two SANU Memorandums.

²⁰ See article written by Vladimir Putin, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, Kremlin, July 12 2021., which is held to be an ideological pillar of Putin in the perception of Russian-Ukrainian history.

²¹ Understanding this weight of the word “extinction” needs recalling to the infamous Radovan Karadžić’s “road to hell” speech in October 1991 in Parliament in which he threatened: “This is the same highway to hell and misery taken by Slovenia and Croatia. Beware. Don’t think that you will not drive Bosnia and Herzegovina to hell, and the Muslim people into extinction (*nestanak*).” Almost 30 years later, the decision of ICTY case (IT-95-5/18) against Radovan Karadžić in Appeal Judgement has produced legal ground that confirmed that genocide was used as means of extinction, specifically “reaffirmed initial convictions pursuant to Articles 7(1) and 7(3) of the ICTY Statute for genocide, persecution, extermination, murder, deportation and other inhuman acts as crimes against humanity...in relation to his participation in four joint criminal enterprises (JCEs): (i) the “Overarching JCE” with a common plan to permanently remove Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats from Bosnian Serb-claimed territory through the commission of crimes in municipalities throughout BiH; (ii) the “Sarajevo JCE” aimed at spreading terror among the civilian population of Sarajevo through a campaign of sniping and shelling; (iii) the “Hostages JCE” with the common purpose of taking UN personnel hostage in order to compel NATO to abstain from conducting air strikes against Bosnian Serb targets; and (iv) the “Srebrenica JCE” to eliminate the Bosnian Muslims from Srebrenica in July 1995.”

nation from its geography, history, and ethnicity. To dehumanize Bosnian Muslims is to strip them of identity, paint them as lesser among European *populis*. The EU Parliament recently served as a scene for these ideas, where Dodik platformed well-established racist theories according to which Bosniaks, Muslims, are unnatural in Europe, compared to Serbs and Croats who are ancient people in the Balkans.²² In other words, Bosnian Muslims are an aberration, so the existence of BiH as a state is also an aberration. It is the equivalent of the “denazification” campaign in Ukraine, the “historic responsibility of Vladimir Putin to not leave the resolution of the Ukrainian question to future generations.”²³ Thus, to return Ukraine to Russia underscores the need to have its statehood re-structured, re-established and returned to its natural condition as part of the Russian world. Such are the two concurrent concepts employed to deny – Bosniaks in Bosnia, and Ukrainians in Ukraine – a sense of self-awareness that contradicts the historical understanding of their neighbours about them, which they incessantly repeat.

In protecting the Slavic-Orthodox brotherhood, Vladimir Putin has directly recruited the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a soft-power that is instrumental in advancing Russian interests, not only in post-Soviet space, but also in the Balkans and BiH, where Orthodox Christians live.²⁴ Individually, Russia is aided by Dodik who promotes common pan-Slavic and Orthodox roots. Advocating deep cultural and spiritual connections, this alliance has served to facilitate Russian economic and military interests in Republika Srpska.²⁵ Institutionally, Russia’s main interlocutor has been the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). The religious rhetoric of ROC-SOC has been used in BiH as a tool for manipulation of interreligious and interethnic narratives to achieve geopolitical goals against NATO.²⁶ Exploiting important societal and political factors that the church and religion hold, Moscow has been successful in fortifying relationships with political leaders, churches and independent groups. Furthermore, the narrative of Slavic brotherhood and shared Orthodox Christianity possess a strong engaging factor, pulling Oligarchs close to the ROC and other different far-right groups in Russian society to actively interlink the church with various counterparts across the Balkans. One of prime examples is Konstantin Malofeev, an oligarch whose think tank Katehon has been a service for Russian influence operations and the spread of strong anti-Western

²² An interesting observation during the hearing was Dodik’s comment, or question “how is it that Europe is fighting against a Muslim state, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina is pushing Serbs and Croats into such a state”, seemingly looking for support among its right-wing, Islamophobic centres in the EU parliament; for detailed testimony see Committee on Foreign Affairs of EU Parliament hearing on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina held on 14 and 15 March 2022.

²³ The ideas of “Ukrainian question” are part of the mistakenly published Russian article in *RIA Novosti* that gives insight in the neo-imperialist thinking behind Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine. The article has since been deleted, but can be found on the following link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220226051154/https://ria.ru/20220226/rossiya-1775162336.html>

²⁴ See Robert C. Blitt, *Russia’s Orthodox Foreign Policy: the Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia’s Policies Abroad*, University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law, Winter 2011, Vol.33, No.2, pp.364-456.

²⁵ See Paul Stronski and Annie Himes, *Russia’s Toolkit in the Balkans*, Russia’s Game in the Balkans, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, JSTOR, 2019, pp.5-16.

²⁶ See Leon Hartwell, Hikmet Karčić, Josephine Mintel, *Send NATO Troops to Help Stabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina*, War on the Rocks, August 12 2022.

propaganda campaigns.²⁷ He has also, reportedly, coordinated the entry of more than a hundred Cossacks into Republika Srpska to support Dodik on the eve of October 2014 elections.²⁸ All these activities, aided by local political and other actors – from oligarchs to the church, Night Wolves biker gang to paramilitary militias²⁹ – are aimed to facilitate deeper Russian infiltration in the region and BiH.

The infiltration of Russia through *Srpski svet* represent a threat to the security and stability of BiH and the Balkans. Redrawing the internationally recognized borders in the Balkans, which is openly called by the advocates of *Srpski svet*, will ensure new wars. If we allow *Srpski svet* today, the question is what will prevent us tomorrow from having other worlds (*svetove*), such as Hungarian, Albanian, or Croatian.



ILLUSTRATION ~ Support of "Russian World" / "Greater Russia" and "Serbian World" / "Greater Serbia" in demonstrations across cities in Serbia and Republika Srpska in Bosnia.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Podrška „Ruskog svijeta” / „Velike Rusije” i „Srpskog sveta” / „Velike Srbije” na demonstracijama širom gradova u Srbiji i Republici Srpskoj u Bosni.

²⁷ Besides a businessman, Malofeev is the Chairman of St.Basil the Great Charitable Foundation, the largest Orthodox charity in Russia with a reported budget of over \$40 million. He is also the chairman of the media group Tsargrad that is dedicated to Russian Orthodox Christianity, and the founder of international investment fund Marshal Capital Partners.

²⁸ See Christo Grozev, *The Kremlin's Balkan Gambit: Part I*, Bellingcat, March 4 2017.

²⁹ For detailed account of the role of biker gangs in BiH, see Aleksandar Brezar, *Russian biker gang helping increase division in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Integrity Initiative, April 24 2019.

Croat „legitimate representation“

The Croat issues in BiH have been imposed through the historic Cvetković-Maček agreement from 1939. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, the question of BiH within the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes placed the citizens of BiH, especially Bosniaks, in a subordinate position compared to other peoples. That status was additionally worsened by the 1939 agreement where BiH became a 'spare change' between Serbian and Croatian "Greater-state" projects. According to the agreement, in addition to Savska and Primorska Banovina, the newly formed Banovina Croatia also included cities Brčko, Gradačac, Derventa, Travnik and Fojnica – about 1/3 of the state territory. The rest was annexed to "Serbian land" – "Greater Serbia".

The Cvetković-Maček agreement from 1939 laid the foundation of "Greater Croatia", which collapsed together with the defeat of fascist Germany at the end of World War II. With the politics of Franjo Tuđman, the former Croatian president after the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1992, the idea of "Greater Croatia" was revived. Transcripts of Tuđman's conversation dating October 1993 revealed direct instructions to his officers to shore up Herceg-Bosna. Tuđman would then proclaim that those were "the future borders of the Croatian state being resolved there".³⁰ Tuđman's goal was to restore Croatia to the boundaries of the Banovina Croatia from 1939-1941, either as part of the mainland or through the creation of Herceg-Bosna. In establishing Herceg-Bosna, Tuđman found an ally in the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, with whom he discussed the division of BiH. First in Karađorđevo and then in Tikveš in 1991, the principle of vision was agreed upon: "where Serbs are majority, belongs to Serbia, where Croats are majority, belongs to Croatia; for Muslims, an enclave state in the middle".³¹ Partitioning BiH along two "Greater-state" projects required both resettlement of population and national homogenization.³² Just as the nature of Serb atrocities in BiH with the aim of establishing "Greater Serbia" received a court verdict, the nature of war actions of the Croatian side in BiH with which it tried to enthrone "Greater Croatia" received similar judicial epilogue – Tuđman's government used "the organization, planning and coordination of military operations which took place during conflict between the HVO (the Bosnian Croat forces) and the Army of BiH (the Bosnian army) and which the record conclusively proves how the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna

³⁰ See Sabrina P. Ramet and Ivo Goldstein, *Politics in Croatia since 1990* in Sabrina P. Ramet and Christine M. Hassenstab, *Central and Southeast European Politics since 1989*, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp.273-308.

³¹ See Berina Beširović, *Sporazum Cvetković-Maček i njegove reperkusije na dogovor između Miloševića i Tuđmana u Karađorđevu*, Periodical for Social Issues, 2019, Vol.3, No.3, pp.73-85.

³² In his book *Podjela Bosne i borba za cjelovitost*, Anto Valenta, one of the creators of Croatian Community Herceg-Bosna, proposed an exchange of populations: 170.000 Croats would be swapped for 170.000 Muslims; concurrently, 194.000 Serbs from central Muslim areas in Bosnia to be swapped with 194.000 Muslims that would leave areas assigned to Serbia.

had a single goal – to incorporate the ‘Croatian provinces’ into a unified Croatian state.”³³ Muslims, Bosniaks, in this redistribution of BiH were to be reduced, by displacement, expulsion and mass killing to a demographic stain which could not be a political factor that will credibly contribute to processes in the state.



ILLUSTRATION ~ The foundation of the so-called *Herceg-Bosna* was one of a series of decisions by the Croatian Democratic Union, then a political movement with the aim of preparing for defense against open aggression against our country, and then for its independence into a single Croatian state.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Utemeljenje tzv. *Herceg-Bosne* bila jedna u nizu odluka Hrvatske demokratske zajednice, tada političkog pokreta s ciljem priprema za odbranu od otvorene agresije na našu zemlju, a zatim za njezino osamostaljenje u jedinstvenu hrvatsku državu.

³³ Op. cit., *Politics in Croatia since 1990*; more details are revealed in the ICTY verdict against Prlić et al. from November 2017 (IT-04-74-A). The Chamber established that “...as early as December 1991, the leadership of the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna (which included Mate Boban, President of the Croatian Community (and later Republic) of Herceg-Bosna) and Croatian leaders (including Franjo Tuđman, the President of Croatia) deemed that in order to achieve the ultimate goal, namely the establishment of a Croatian territorial entity as previously described, it was necessary to modify the ethnic composition of the territories claimed to be part of the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna. From at least the end of October 1992, Jadranko Prlić, Bruno Stojić, Milivoj Petković, and Slobodan Praljak were aware that achieving this goal went against peace talks conducted in Geneva and would entail moving Muslim populations out of the territory of Herceg-Bosna.”

The idea of subduing BiH to Croatia in today's time is embodied in initiatives to amend internal laws, primarily the election law, in order to fulfil the so-called "legitimate representation". Using its position as a member of EU and NATO, Croatia platforms its policy on BiH on the international stage through initiatives that tender exclusively to the interest of one political party – HDZ BiH (Croatian Democratic Union) – whose sister party is ruling in Croatia. HDZ BiH's president Dragan Čović, also the former Croat member of the Bosnian presidency, has staunchly advocated for an election law reform that assigns more value to the votes of Croats from areas exclusively governed by HDZ BiH.³⁴

Recent proposed changes pushed in Brussels and Washington by the Croatian government, and then leaked as planned draft to be imposed by the international community's High Representative Christian Schmidt produce more disastrous consequences. Croatia's request to Schmidt is in opposition to universal democratic norms and would distance BiH from the ideas and standards of a civic-oriented society.³⁵ It would deepen discrimination by gerrymandering ethically clean political units, produce territorial segregation and the elimination of minority rights within BiH, create further polarization along ethnic lines and lead to radicalization of society.³⁶ Furthermore, the proposed changes are problematic because they completely ignore a number of European Court of Human Rights decisions which concern already established discrimination within BiH's constitution.³⁷

³⁴ Initial propositions, supported both by US Embassy and EU Delegation in Sarajevo, was an electoral model that would be applied only on the territory of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), while in RS the principal would remain "one person-one vote". Of importance is to note that according to latest BiH census in 2013, and based on the results of the Central Election Commission of the 2018 general elections: out of the total number of 497.883 Croats in FBiH, 305.930 Croats live in cantons with a Bosniak majority together with one mixed canton (HNK). Subtracting 305.930 from the total number of Croats in FBiH (497.883) results in 191.903 Croats living in cantons with a Croat majority. In 2018 elections, HDZ BiH won 145.487 votes in FBiH, which conveys that out of the total number of Croats according to the census, only one in three (!) Croats voted for HDZ BiH, if no votes from other citizens are included.

³⁵ The leaked changes to the Election Law introduce a census of 3%. Specifically, only cantons where a constituent people have more than 3% of the total population of that constituent people in the entire FBiH shall elect delegates from that constituent people to the House of Peoples. In other words, this change eliminates representation of certain number of Bosnian minority communities that live in ethnically mixed regions.

³⁶ See Arminka Helić, *Electoral Reform Proposals in Bosnia and Herzegovina Will Cement Ethnic Divisions*, RUSI, August 1 2022.

³⁷ The ECHR verdicts in question are Sejdić-Finci, Zorić, Šlaku, Pilav, and Pudarić against BiH. The verdicts oblige BiH to abolish discriminatory provisions in the Constitution and Election Law of BiH, which prevents national minorities, but also declared citizens, and members of constituent peoples, depending on which part of the territory of BiH they live in, from running in elections for members of the Presidency, Parliament and House of Peoples;

Centre to the issue is the provision of "constituent people" – while it is a constitutional category within the Dayton, it has been declared discriminatory by the ECHR; namely verdict Zorić vs BiH states clearly in point 43 that "in Sejdić and Finci the Court observed that when the impugned constitutional provisions were put in place a very fragile ceasefire was in effect on the ground and that the provisions were designed to end a brutal conflict marked by genocide and "ethnic cleansing" (see *ibid.*, § 45). The nature of the conflict was such that the approval of the "constituent peoples" was necessary to ensure peace (*ibid.*). However, now, more than eighteen years after the end of the tragic conflict, there could no longer be any reason for the maintenance of the contested constitutional provisions. The Court expects that democratic arrangements will be made without further delay. In view of the need to ensure effective political democracy, the Court considers that the time has come for a political system which will provide every citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the right to stand for elections to the Presidency and the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina without discrimination based on ethnic affiliation and without granting special rights for constituent people to the exclusion of minorities or citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina." HDZ BiH's proposal all revolve around further entrenching the provision of "constituent people", therefore ignoring the verdicts by ECHR.

Changes to the election law tailored to HDZ BiH representatives and Zagreb is tantamount to the establishment of the third entity, one which would possess its own executive, legislative and judicial instrument to veto any decision of the majority in BiH. It would imply the revival of “Greater Croatia” resting on the principles of a colonization-like ruling of BiH under Croatia. What has failed as a war-time goal, today would be achieved in peace, through the imposition of a creation equivalent to *Srpski svet*. This end goal has been also recognized by the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (HAZU), an equivalent to SANU. HAZU recently published a paper titled “Contributions to the Protection of Croatian Interests” in which it proposes number of conditions for EU membership for BiH, among which also is “recognizing true, liberating role of Croatia and Croats in the war... and ensuring the equality of Croatian people, i.e., the third entity and all rights arising therefrom...”.³⁸ The echo of HAZU is reinforced by the voices of extreme far-right figures, such as the current Croatian president Zoran Milanovic with the support of more moderate Prime Minister Andrej Plenković’s government.³⁹ Together they have turned Croatia back to Tuđman’s legacy of restored collaboration with Serbian politics in BiH, sharing the same goal – the division of the BiH state. For those goals, Croats in BiH are ready to carry out territorial reorganization, threatening violence if the results of the upcoming October election are not in their favour.⁴⁰

It is simply unbelievable that the international community, in its supposed support for BiH’s Euro-Atlantic path through the amendment of the election law, ignores Croatia’s xenophobic demands that only “clean” national Croats can elect their “legitimate representatives”?! It is even more difficult to relate to Milanović’s statement about the new generation of “Bosniak Muslim lobbyist”, which he considers a “toxic brand”, to the values of contemporary European democracy.⁴¹ Such behaviour of the international community increasingly resembles the failed policies of Western powers during the war in BiH. How else to explain, despite all sound principles of democracy and European libertarian values, an attempt to establish a system in which the political factor of the majority, Bosniaks and declared citizens, is permanently subdued to a minority that stands for national homogenization and ethno-national exclusivity in certain territories of BiH. Montenegrin write

³⁸ For the entire list of criteria towards all neighbouring states in the region, see Croatian Academy of Science and Arts (HAZU), *Prilozi za zaštitu hrvatskih nacionalnih interesa prilikom pregovora Republike Hrvatske s Bosnom i Hercegovinom, Crnom Gorom i Srbijom u pogledu njihova ulaska u Europsku Uniju*, May 20 2022.

³⁹ Croatian President Zoran Milanovic has been on a tirade of xenophobic and chauvinist comments regarding BiH. When discussing the state of BiH, he proclaimed: “...the civil state [in BiH] is a distant, distant dream, and it is a beautiful thing, but first the soap, then the perfume”. In the midst of Russian invasion into Ukraine, Milanovic proposed that Croatia vetoes Finland and Sweden accession into NATO unless international community force Bosniaks to implement election law change as requested by HDZ BiH. He recently stated that today’s Bosnia would not exist without Croatian army and its role during the war in BiH, and called the citizens of Sarajevo who protested OHR’s proposed changes as “unitarist scoundrels”.

⁴⁰ For more information on the ideas of territorial reorganization see latest conclusions of the session of Croatian National Assembly (HNS), the main political organization of Croats in BiH, held on July 29, 2022; for understanding the threat of violence and a detailed account of the stakes at play, see Sead Turčalo and Edina Bećirević, *International Community Risks Fulfilling Russia’s Agenda in Bosnia*, Balkan Insight, August 5 2022.; in the days after the leaked draft of OHR’s possible decision, several diplomatic sources confirmed that the Croat establishment, both in BiH and Zagreb, threatened the use of violence in the south of the country if the election law remained unchanged. Sources reported Washington D.C took this seriously and was the key source of pressure on OHR to impose changes.

⁴¹ Milanović made this statement after the adopted initiative by the German Parliament on BiH. For more details see Bundestag initiative “Supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina on the way to a better future”.

Andrej Nikolaidis recently observed: “to open this political process, the Western intervention is questioning a simple, demographic, biological fact: that Muslims are a majority in BiH, and that there will be more of them tomorrow”. The Western intervention chooses to minimize this fact, since the policy “let’s do everything so that there are fewer Muslims in Bosnia” did not bear fruit, the policy “lets manipulate the system so that the political effect is as if there are fewer Muslims” is instead employed.”⁴²



ILLUSTRATION ~ With his views, Zoran Milanović returned Tuđman's legacy of renewed cooperation with Serbian politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sharing the same goal – the division of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Zoran Milanović se svojim stavovima vratio Tuđmanovom naslijeđu obnovljene saradnje sa srpskom politikom u BiH, dijeleći isti cilj – podjelu države BiH.

⁴² See Andrej Nikolaidis, *Što nije moglo genocidom, može Schindtovom politikom*, Slobodna Bosna, July 26 2022.

This intervention enjoys the support of a large number of far-right European figures, from Serbian representatives in BiH and Belgrade to Russia and Hungarian president Viktor Orban.⁴³ It should be noted that Russia, for a good part of the last decade, zealously defended the position that any use of Bonn Powers is anti-democratic, illegitimate, and that the use of such powers could call into question everything that has been achieved in BiH in the last 25 years. Arguing that “peoples decide the fate of BiH themselves, without external intervention”, Russia warned of the creation of new instability and threats to security in BiH.⁴⁴ Yet, when OHR considered imposing the latest anti-democratic, anti-civilizational Election Law measure that would distance BiH from the ideas of a civic-oriented society, Russia stood in silence. No concerns for the functionality of BiH were expressed, nor were any threats issued in the public sphere. This state of play is understandable when putting Russian position in a wider context of “Greater Croatia” aspirations. First, OHR’s action aid BiH’s surrender to the Russian sphere of interest and in that process separates it from NATO and EU path. Consequently, it was Russian officials that have repeatedly supported HDZ BiH requests to amend the Election Law, and accordingly, it was Čović who proclaimed “the need for more Russian influence in BiH”.⁴⁵ Second, the rationale is clear for Russia. Adopting OHR’s proposed changes to the election law at the request of HDZ BiH means handing over the decision-making in the hands to two “Greater-state” projects that enjoy Moscow’s support in unilaterally reorganizing the territory of BiH in conjunction with the ongoing secession plans by RS. By doing so, BiH would remain paralyzed in achieving any progress, because it would be unable to meet the necessary criteria for further Euro-Atlantic integration. Ultimately, its NATO membership would be stopped, which is Russia’s end goal.



⁴³ Orban has had a number of endorsements towards his Serbian and Croatian counterparts in BiH. His most recent speech held on July 23 2022 at 31st Balvanyos Summer Camp claimed that “the Croats are being cheated in Bosnia”, and that Hungary supports Croatia with “all means at our disposal.” Earlier this year, in April 2022, Hungarian Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Szijjarto reaffirmed this point to the Croatian counterpart Gordan Grlić Radman stating that “Hungary supports Croatian position that Croatian member of the Presidency of BiH must be elected by Croats”, and that “Hungary does not support political pursuit or sanctions against Milorad Dodik...”. Orban’s message at a press conference held in December 2021 was also clear about the challenge with Bosnia in the eyes of far-right when he stated: “the challenge with Bosnia is how to integrate a country with 2 million Muslims [in the EU].”

⁴⁴ See Marija Zaharova’s comments from September 2021 on the usage of Bonn Powers; see Russian Embassy in Sarajevo for comments from April 2022 about destabilization of BiH due to Bonn Powers usage.

⁴⁵ See Avdo Avdić, *Od Lavrova do Orbana, preko Ivancova i Kalabuhova: Od 2017. godine (pro)ruski zvaničnici insistiraju na “legitimnom predstavljanju” Hrvata*, Istraga, August 4 2022.

A way forward for BiH

Observing the historical context, the Serbian-Croatian agreements on division of BiH, first through Cvetković-Maček agreement and then through Milošević-Tuđman deal, should have served as a sounder alarm for the Western powers in their orientation towards the Balkans. The democratic renaissance of the 1990s in the Balkans bore modern BiH out of Bosnian citizens desire for freedom, self-determination and international affirmation. Yet, neglecting historical facts, this renaissance is shadowed by a lingering mistake: the acceptance of a political platform that postulates the Bosnian state as an agreement of the peoples.⁴⁶ Can we imagine the political state of affairs of other Balkan and Eastern Europe countries if this principle is applied to them? BiH as an agreement of the peoples, personified in the DPA, is an anachronistic concept stomped by time. This has become more obvious as the European continent solidified its transformation into a continent of advanced democracies with individual human rights and equality of European citizens regardless of all their differences. More so, this concept has produced more instability and uncertainty than was ever expected.⁴⁷ To offer an alternative to the instability and uncertainty that will continue to produce perpetual crises for Euro-Atlantic security is the adoption of a completely new political paradigm for BiH, beyond crevices of the DPA. The new political paradigm for Bosnian, regional Balkan and European security requires the complete elimination of nationalization of territories and territorialization of ethnic exclusivity. Achieving that is to create a theoretical background for conflict prevention. Only when this political-theoretical platform is adopted by majority of BiH's citizens can BiH overcome the obstacles of a transitional post-conflict society and step into a credible democracy.

Think about the logical implications of continuing to implement the letter and spirit of the DPA: in addition to the fact that the existing constitution denies basic civil and democratic rights to a large number of its populace, its sectarian entrenchment has gradually facilitated nationalist separatism and state-capture in the face of two "Greater-state" projects with the help of Belgrade and Zagreb. These weaknesses of DPA in

⁴⁶ The idea of "BiH as an agreement of the peoples" has been introduced by the first president of the sovereign Republic of BiH, Alija Izetbegovic, in the introductory word at the founding assembly of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) on May 26 1990 in Sarajevo... "there is a new agreement between peoples of BiH and the peoples of Yugoslavia about what kind of Bosnia and what kind of Yugoslavia we want". This paradigm has obstructed the concept of development of the modern Bosnian nation in line with European norms and democratic standards.

⁴⁷ The architect of Dayton Peace Agreement Richard Holbrooke envisioned DPA only to serve as a temporary solution with the primary goal of ending war and establishing initial contours of the Bosnian state. Later expectations revolved around transitioning from Dayton towards a more acceptable, functional constitutional agreement. In his piece for The Atlantic "The End of the American Century" George Packer closely captured some reflections of Holbrooke years after brokering Dayton: "...but in the coming years he would have two regrets about Bosnia. Holbrooke's first regret was pressuring the Muslims to accept the name Republika Srpska – Izetbegovic said it was like a "Nazi name" – for the Serb entity. Republika Srpska became a curse that the negotiators hung around Bosnia's neck. The second regret was forcing the Croatian and Bosnian armies to stop short of Banja Luka and accept a cease-fire in early October. ...What if he had let Banja Luka fall? It would have been the end of the Republika Srpska. Bosnia today would be a multi-ethnic state, messy but whole. The war would have had a winner. And there would have been no Dayton." For detailed account of Holbrooke's role in Bosnian war see George Packer, *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2019.

turn made it easier for Russia to position itself in the 'soft underbelly' of Europe, enabling it to support proxy actors and produce perpetual crises for the Euro-Atlantic security in the Balkans. The question then is why is there commitment to this system? The Western powers led by United States have invested significant amount of effort and political, diplomatic and financial capital into the state-building and security apparatus of BiH. Ironically, DPA has begun to jeopardize all these efforts invested so far. To move BiH away from DPA is to put an end to this quagmire. To reform BiH along the lines of a liberal-democratic standards and norms is to set free of the chain of nationalistic politics. It would be a natural progression towards a functional constitutional democracy present all over the European continent. Another question arises in this context. While Bosnian Muslims, as majority state-building team, are accused of Islamic radicalism because they dare demand to enjoy same democratic rights, rules and values as the rest of the European democratic heritage, the Muslim world is silent. Why is BiH interesting to everyone, from liberal progressive European Greens to far-right circles, except to the Muslim world? This irony is hard to omit when observing BiH between Occident and Orient, as well as the supposed natural relations between BiH and Turkey, and the rest of the Islamic world.

As we try to provide answers to these questions, the Bosnian state must address its existential threats on national security and survival. In the geopolitical context, the new political paradigm implies recalibration of priorities. Bosnian polity must not fall into the trap neither from the West nor from the East, in which BiH is built as a buffer zone in relation to spheres of influence that the West has too lightly yielded to Russia – and from the East that has left BiH susceptible to the ambiguous attitudes of the Islamic world. Furthermore, that buffer zone cannot possibly be under the control of Serb or Croat actors in Bosnia, nor their sponsors in their home countries. Such actors have lost all credibility in the centuries-old treatment towards BiH. Therefore, BiH will carve its path out of necessity precisely because of the incredulity of the European elites and policy in stopping the breakthrough of secessionist actors supported by Russian malign influence. In the meantime, that path will be paved with understanding of the upcoming generations in BiH that the capacitation of the state against the neighbourly "Greater-state" aspirations is the only guarantor in preserving the historical, sovereign borders of BiH. That capacitation implies a clear strategic goal and a national discourse that is firmly grounded in integration in the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

In the first instance, one of the basic measures on which BiH's capacities should be built is the ability to expose the irredentist policies of Serbia and Croatia and the military, intelligence, cultural, economic, political, religious and diplomatic links between Russia and the two "Greater-state" projects. To do so requires building the Bosnian polity into an intellectual factory of antiracist and antidiscrimination policy. Through the creation of credible scientific, academic, non-governmental and diplomatic platforms no credence will be left in any shape or form to Belgrade and Zagreb to further interfere in internal matters of BiH. This particularly applies to NATO and EU forums which are used as a platform for these policies. This must be underpinned by the notion of a "friend in need is a friend indeed". Expanding the friendship circle of the Bosnian cause necessitates investing both capital and human resources in a large-scale foreign policy apparatus that will

initiate a major investment in lobbying infrastructure in key capitals across the world. An apparatus would tie diaspora with affirmed people of Bosnian roots, civil society with citizen activists' associations, businesses with industrialist unions to promote common economic interest and create interdependence links between societies. More so, the political relations require expanding ties with legislative branches on both sides of the Atlantic, seeking a common theme rooted in democratic and principled dialogue. The avenue for promotion of pro-BiH cause in parliaments can be realized through the establishment of various official working groups and caucuses in national legislatures that will jointly shape a new paradigm for BiH – the elimination of ethnic exclusivity and implementation of the idea of a civic state with full respect for individual and collective rights, while also countering Russian actions in BiH.

In this process of identification of the path of BiH, the next generation of citizens will bear most of the weight. To use momentum accordingly, BiH cannot return to its latergic business as usual. The new era of the Bosnian spring must be identified by a revamped personnel policy that that puts into motion a critical mass of new, younger generation of competent, foreign policy savvy, strategically sound and western brought individuals that are positioned to build networks and bridges towards relevant stakeholders, policymakers and capitols around the world, in the West and the East. This personnel legitimizes its foothold, at home and abroad, only if it consistently and unconditionally insists on strict observance of *acquis* of human rights and rule of law standards that prevail in Europe and are embodied through Western democracies. All important issues surrounding BiH should be normalized through the possibility of referendum questions before all citizens of BiH, supported and monitored by the international community. Such paradigm connotes a change in the way of thinking by promoting a new system of values that would break the dynamics of the hitherto established principle of “agreement of the peoples”. Finally, the Bosnian polity focus should remain committed to defence and security capacity building on its path towards NATO membership. A creative approach of marketing of strengths can identify ways in which BiH can contribute as a security provider to the collective defence of the European continent. This primarily signifies the need to continuously bridge the gap between military and security interoperability with NATO standards. In the joint struggle to preserve BiH as a democratic, Western-oriented sovereign state, BiH will seek partners who understand the consequences of idly observing rampant Russian activities in the region. But will also seek those who fervently advocate that BiH as a Euro-Atlantic member is a basic prerequisite for permanent peace in the Balkans – and consequently the elimination of nationalist policies of “Greater-state” projects.

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Conclusion

In shielding the country from “Greater-state” aspirations, BiH is at crossroads between adopting a new political paradigm, or the continuation of ethno-national exclusivity. The latter has attained an ally in Russia and other far-right movements across Europe that support continuous undermining of BiH sovereignty and territorial integrity on its Euro-Atlantic road. *Sprski svet* as an evolution of “Greater Serbia” that shares the same ideology as *Ruskiy Mir (Russian world)* in Ukraine is a threat to BiH. Inevitably, this also threatens Balkans and European security which rests on the principles of inviolability of borders and national sovereignty. Additionally, efforts to establish the third entity through the revival of “Greater Croatia” produces same outcomes. But more than that, these policies send an important message: imposing a solution that will further entrench the ideas of ethno-national exclusivity legitimizes war crimes, ethnic cleansing and genocide in BiH as a valid method in achieving political goals. Such a message can only encourage war-time policies with an even greater appetite in their actions to break BiH. That collaborative approach of dehumanizing the demographic majority of BiH, Bosniaks and all other citizens who refuse to subscribe to ideas of pure ethnic homogeneity, requires the Bosnian polity to engage in serious capacity building with clear strategic priorities and a national discourse.

That is why Bosnian citizens and Bosniaks as a dominant state-building team, that throughout history stood as a bulwark of defense of BiH against those who dared to question its existence, should recognize the importance of the moment they are in. That moment of state-building politics puts the idea of a new political paradigm in the very focus. On the pluralistic political scene, it seeks to bind a common agreement, position and principles regarding the protection and further development of BiH as a citizen democratic country capable of self-sustainable development and defense within the Euro-Atlantic world. This explicit position brought through an agreement and then presented to the domestic and international public can only be formalized and verified by the will of majority of the citizens. To understand and gradually accept the political paradigm of this type will represent the position of the international community towards this country and is the best test for the support of BiH’s friends, both in the West and in the East.