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**Identity as an obstacle to state-building in
Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Master's Thesis

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Study programme: International Relations

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 15.07.2024

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References

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Abstract

The thesis examines the establishment of collective identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while searching for current conflicting elements of the collective identities of each Bosnian constitutive nation. In the thesis, the author sets three research questions two of which are concentrated on identity formation and development, and consequent seeking of mutually conflicting elements of identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The third research question is preoccupied with setting into place a set of steps necessary to reconstruct current opposing identities into collective identities ensuring progress in state-building. While the first two research questions are theoretically approached solely through social constructivism, the third research question is also approached through post-conflict reconciliation and consociational democracy. From the perspective of the identities formation was the Bosnian war a watershed moment since it transformed already existing identities and set a path to the three distinct meta-narratives about the past which are nowadays accompanied by post-war self-victimization that is translated into opposing collective identities. From the perspective of reconstruction of identities and state-building, I have outlined a set of concrete measures that will lead to desired change in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These are the reach of transitional justice, reform of the Dayton Agreement, educational reform, promotion of seeming homogeneity, and extensive external intervention. However, enforcing the above-mentioned measures leading to the change requires willingness, a lot of political capital, economic assistance, and potentially further military presence of peacekeeping mission EUFOR Althea, which might not occur in the foreseeable future.

Abstrakt

Práce zkoumá vytváření kolektivních identit v Bosně a Hercegovině a zároveň hledá konfliktní elementy dnešních kolektivních identit jednotlivých bosenských konstitutivních národů. Autor si v práci klade tři výzkumné otázky, z nichž dvě se soustředí na utváření a vývoj identit a následné hledání vzájemně konfliktních prvků těchto identit. Třetí výzkumná otázka se zabývá stanovením souboru kroků nezbytných k rekonstrukci současných

protichůdných identit v kolektivní identity zajišťující pokrok ve státotvorbě. Zatímco první dvě výzkumné otázky jsou teoreticky řešeny výhradně prostřednictvím sociálního konstruktivismu, třetí výzkumná otázka je kromě sociálního konstruktivismu řešena optikou postkonfliktního usmíření a konsociační demokracie. Z hlediska utváření identit byla válka v Bosně a Hercegovině přelomovým okamžikem, neboť transformovala již existující identity a nastoupila cestu ke třem odlišným metanarativům o minulosti, které jsou dnes doprovázeny poválečnou sebeviktimizací, jež se promítá do protikladných kolektivních identit. Z hlediska rekonstrukce identit a budování státu jsem nastínil soubor konkrétních opatření, která povedou k vytouženým změnám v Bosně a Hercegovině. Konkrétně se jedná o dosažení spravedlnosti za historické křivdy, reformu Daytonské dohody, reformu školství, podporu společenské jednoty a rozsáhlou vnější intervenci. Prosazení výše uvedených opatření vedoucích ke změně však vyžaduje ochotu, velký politický kapitál, ekonomickou pomoc a případně další vojenskou přítomnost mírové mise EUFOR Althea, k čemuž nemusí v dohledné době dojít.

Keywords

Bosnia and Herzegovina, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian War, social constructivism, identity, reconstruction of identity, Dayton Agreement, Bonn powers

Klíčová slova

Bosna a Hercegovina, rozpad Jugoslávie, válka v Bosně a Hercegovině, sociální konstruktivismus, identita, rekonstrukce identity, Daytonská dohoda, bonnské pravomoci

Název práce

Identita jako překážka budování státu Bosny a Hercegoviny

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Introduction

The geographical space of Former Yugoslavia and namely of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was historically ruled by an authoritarian political culture. The strong and long domination of the territory by foreign powers, be it Austria-Hungary or the Ottoman Empire, has influenced politics, religion and culture. The existence of this historical phenomenon has influenced life in the communist Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav republics were ethnically and religiously heterogeneous and BiH was even more heterogeneous. In BiH were present three constitutive nations (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks) and three religions (Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam) (Matevski & Matevska, 2018). Conflicting ethnonational and religious identities were always present in Yugoslavia, yet their manifestation was suppressed as Tito ruled with an iron fist and offered Yugoslavia and its citizens a new collective identity built on Yugoslav brotherhood that rises above the past. How fragile is the collective identity of “Brotherhood and Unity”, became evident shortly after the death of Tito (Mirescu, 2003). The transition from the identity of “Brotherhood and Unity” to the identity dominated by ethnonational tension is simply yet aptly described by Zlata Filipović (2006), a young child who kept her diary about her upbringing in the besieged city of Sarajevo, who wrote: *“Among my girlfriends, among our friends, in our family, there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims. It’s a mixed group and I never knew who was a Serb, a Croat or a Muslim. Now politics has started meddling around. It has put an ‘S’ on Serbs, an ‘M’ on Muslims and a ‘C’ on Croats, it wants to separate them.”* (p. 178).

Yugoslavia started to slowly but steadily slide into suppressed ethnonational conflicts and BiH became a main battleground and its citizens the main victims of the dissolution. Living in BiH became unbearable as described by already mentioned Filipović (2006): *“It’s as if Sarajevo is slowly dying, disappearing. Life is disappearing. So how can I feel spring, when spring is something that awakens life, and here there is no life, here everything seems to have died.”* (p. 216). BiH became severely impacted by the dissolution as the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995 cost the lives of many and displaced even more. Furthermore, all sides of the conflict committed crimes against humanity which scarred previous intergroup coexistence. The ratification of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Agreement, put an end to the bloodshed. The Agreement outlined the political and administrative division of the country as we know it

nowadays - two entities, three constituent nations, and 14 regions. In BiH was established a system of power-sharing, while grand coalitions, group veto, proportional representation, and even group segmental autonomy were introduced. Yet, power-sharing among parties representing all three main ethnic groups led to a situation when parties emphasized accountability towards their ethnical group rather than the multiethnic state (Kapidžić, 2020). Therefore, the Dayton Agreement preserved peace in the country but also prevented any major post-war reconciliation. Bosnian post-war politics can be characterized as the “continuation of war by other means”. Everyday political life is driven by conflicting collective identities which were established during the Bosnian War. Never-ending internal conflicts translate into a lack of prosperity and prospects for the country. Since the country lacks a common conflict-overlapping identity, secessionist rhetoric is an everyday occurrence and that leads to additional destabilization of the country and consequently the whole region. In order to identify factors that could reconstruct the conflicting collective identities into collective identities ensuring progress in state-building, deconstruction of the unfortunate events of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and analysis of post-war development is necessary. Thus, I set the following research questions:

Question n. 1: How was the collective identity of each constitutive Bosnian nation established?

Question n. 2: What are the conflicting elements of collective identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Question n. 3: Can the current divergent collective identities be reconstructed into collective identities ensuring progress in state-building, and if so, how?

In light of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the region of the Western Balkans lost the attention of the EU. Nevertheless, Western Balkans did not lose its geostrategic importance as it is still a battlefield of world and regional powers. Although the long-term dispute over the status of Kosovo receives most of the media coverage, smoldering hidden conflict in the BiH has the potential to become a new detonator to wider conflict. Finding a sustainable solution to a stalemate in BiH is key to positive development not only for the country but also for the whole region. Although conflict in the BiH can be perceived through several perspectives, the most explanatory is the examination through the formation of collective identities since Bosnian politics has been driven by ethnonational tensions for a long time already. Therefore, I am going to theoretically approach the conflict mainly through social

constructivism and methodically through historical research. The aim of the thesis is to comprehend the formation of collective identities in BiH and identify factors that could reconstruct the collective identities into collective identities ensuring progress in state-building.

The thesis is structured into the first part of the theoretical-methodical framework discussing the way of collecting, structuring and analyzing data. The second part of the thesis is preoccupied with qualitative research divided into two subchapters describing the historical formation of collective identities in BiH and the reconstruction of the current opposing identities. The former is further divided according to timeline into the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian War and the post-war era. The latter is divided into the necessity to reach transitional justice, reform of the Dayton Agreement, education as a spreading tool of “ethnonational truths”, formation of seeming homogeneity through culture and sport, High Representative and Bonn powers, and external influence.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Social constructivism

The thesis is grounded in the theory of international relations known as social constructivism. The main idea of social constructivism is accurately described by one of its founding fathers Alexander Wendt (1992) who is the author of the claim: “*Anarchy is what states make of it*” (p. 395). The theory perceives the world and what we can know about it as socially constructed thus its focus is attention on the awareness and consciousness of the human being and his understanding of international relations. Social constructivism is not a single theory but rather a theory of several streams of thought with the two most distinguishable forms of so-called “conventional constructivism” and “critical constructivism”. Although differences between the main forms of the theory can be distinguished, both forms build on three main pillars.

Firstly, constructivists argue that the fabric of international relations is socially constructed rather than materially determined. Therefore, the main premise of social constructivism is a belief that ideas, belief systems, concepts, languages, discourses and narratives are responsible for the state of international relations rather than material factors. Constructivists do not deny the existence of a material base, yet what matters is intellectual elements that decide how the material base is perceived and consequently utilized (Jackson, Robert/Sorensen, Georg, 2010). The supremacy of ideas over material base can be illustrated in another Wendt’s (1995) statement: “*500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than 5 North Korean nuclear weapons, because the British are friends of the United States and the North Koreans are not*” (p. 73). Although the British nuclear arsenal is considerably larger than the nuclear arsenal of North Korea, the United States considers North Korea to be a threat and not the United Kingdom despite larger material base. What matters is how actors perceive each other, rather than material fact represented by weapons of mass destruction.

Secondly, constructivists agree that studying the effects of non-material structures on identity formation is crucial as interests are shaped by identities which further lead to actions of actors. Therefore, identities are the basis of the interests. This belief does not rule out self-interested actors as described by another prominent school of thought however, simple self-

interest does not explain the essence of international relations. Without a definition of an actor's "self" cannot be understood its "interest" (Devetak & True, 2022).

Thirdly, constructivists assume that the agents and the structures are mutually constituted. Intersubjective meanings that shape our identities and consequently interests understand the material and social reality certain way and define the parameters of legitimate behavior. Through repeated interactions are created enduring social structures that again define our identities and interests. Social structures are usually translated into social norms. Social norms are defined as the shared expectation of acceptable behavior. Norms and ideas repeatedly define an actor's appropriate behavior that manifests in international relations as expected appropriate diplomatic practice, right to use force, lie of sovereignty or conduct related to human rights (Devetak & True, 2022).

Critical and conventional constructivism share theoretical foundations build on the socially constructed world by ideas. The ontology connects both approaches, epistemology distinguishes them. Conventional constructivism believes in objectivity that can be researched through standard scientific methods. Therefore, conventional constructivism explores not only identities but also conditions under which identities reform. The ability to set conditions required for the expected reformation of identities is denounced by critical constructivism as impossible and not even potentially desirable (Hopf, 1998). Since I am convinced that a set of specific requirements can be achieved in order to estimate changes in actor's identities, this thesis is based on the knowledge of conventional constructivism rather than a critical one. In this regard, constructivism can be further differentiated on the basis of analysis level to systemic, unit-level and holistic. Application of solely systemic or unit-level analysis unproductively narrows down research and prevents understanding of the complexity of the researched topic. While the systemic level ignores development inside the actor and takes the actor predominantly as a single entity, unit-level ignores international influence and rather focuses solely on domestic players in the formation of the actor's identity. The holistic approach bridges the dichotomy between the formation of identity based on internal or external influence. It combines both and treats internal and external actors as two faces of one reality (Devetak & True, 2022). As such is the approach the best fit to explain political reality in Bosnia and Herzegovina and therefore it is applied in this thesis.

As already mentioned, identity is influenced by domestic and international aspects. Constructivist theorists such as Finnemore and Wendt pay more attention to the international aspects of forming collective identity. Wendt (1992) believes that through repeated interaction between actors expectations are developed between each other. Actors tend to create social structures that further enforce developed expectations. Once identities are created it is not simple to alter them because social structure and previous interactions constrain actors' choices. Actors might be also reluctant to change their behavior due to internal and external factors. Their commitment to maintaining stable identities can constrain any changes, as well as incentives from established institutions or other external actors. Although Wendt finds changes in identity a difficult and complex task, he also provides concrete mechanisms based on a conscious effort to change identity. According to him is actor able to enter a phase in which critically self-reflects his identity and decides to engage in new practices. Wendt further distinguishes between identity and structural change. While identity changes happen on a micro level, structural changes happen on a macro level. If the actor is successful in the process, it influences other actors because identities are formed not only through the perception and behavior of the actor itself but also through the perception of other actors. Therefore, a change of identity at the micro level can lead to a change of identities at the macro level. Wendt (1999) clarifies four structural mechanisms at the macro level that form collective identity including interdependence, common fate, homogeneity and self-restraint. If the objective interdependence of actors becomes also subjective then each actor considers the interest of another actor as its own. Common fate is described as a situation in which external actors treat other actors as one group. The mechanism of interdependence and common fate are similar in the way that the well-being of one actor is linked to the well-being of another actor however the source of this linkage differs. Interdependence is a result of two actors' interactions, while common fate is a result of the third-party coupling of the two actors. Homogeneity refers to the likeness of actors. If two actors are able to find more common elements which means actors look as seemingly homogenous, the otherness is no longer an obstacle and a new common collective identity can be formed. The most important mechanism of self-restraint is absolutely necessary as without it any formation of common collective identities is not possible. Self-restraint is the ability to overcome a fear of being swallowed by the other actor with which it tries to build a collective identity. Wendt considers the above-mentioned mechanism as generally

applicable to any formation of collective identity as its goal is to redefine the boundary between “self and other” and “us and them”.

Martha Finnemore focuses on the norms of international organizations and their impact on identities and interests. Unlike Wendt’s approach of analyzation of states’ interactions between themselves, Finnemore draws attention to states influenced by norms and international customs created by international organizations. According to Finnemore are international organizations autonomous and their impact on the formation of identities should not be underestimated. She illustrates it on the UN spread of state bureaucracies designed to coordinate scientific research through normative language. The narrative fostered the expectation that science should be coordinated and coordination leads to higher effectiveness (Finnemore, 1996).

In the opposite to Wendt and Finnemore who pay more attention to the international aspects of forming collective identity, stand authors such as Katzenstein, Hopf or Bozdağlıoğlu who highlight domestic aspects of forming collective identity. Katzenstein (1996) illustrates the shortcomings of pure constructivist reliance on structural research of identities. In comparison between the national security policies of Japan and Germany, significant differences can be found, despite the similar historical position of both countries after the end of the Second World War. Both countries faced defeat, occupation, rapid economic development and democratization from rigid totalitarian regimes. Yet, the national security policies looked diametrically different therefore structural aspects are not relevant enough to explain the differences between the countries. Katzestein concludes that domestic norms and identities are responsible for the national security policies division. Specifically, the responsibility lies in the institutionalization of norms creating in the longer term the significant differences. To a similar conclusion came Hopf (2002) who studied identity formation in the late years of the Soviet Union and the first years of the Russian Federation. He focused mostly on the social construction of who is foe and ally and concluded that domestic factors are responsible for the sense of understanding the world. Bozdağlıoğlu (2007) focuses on the smallest unit of analysis when he points out that even policymakers and high-level politicians are members of the society they represent, and thus are shaped by the domestic personal identity. However, that doesn’t imply that everyone in a country shares the same identity. Individuals, domestic institutions, and groups are shaped by the previous experience and background they live in that can greatly differ from person to person.

Therefore, state identity is constituted by the struggle between various societal groups that attempt to reflect their identities to the collective identity of the state. Thus, national identity, consequently state identity is formed by relatively most influential social groups and individuals.

We can sum up, that while constructivist domestic-level analysis can detect why identities in some states are absolutely different, the structural constructivist level analysis can shed light on the development of similar or almost identical identities. Wendt termed four structural mechanisms - interdependence, common fate, homogeneity and self-restraint - leading to a positive change from conflicting to inclusive identity. Finnemore highlighted the importance of narratives created about practices on the international stage translating into changes in views on a domestic level. Hopf and Katzenstein rather underline the domestic social structures such as discourse, tradition, and decision maker's understanding of himself and external others and question the universal transferability of knowledge about identity from one state to another. In order to fully grasp events in international relations, the combination of both approaches is required since the domestic and external aspects of identity formation play their role in shaping the social reality of actors.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is not the only state in the world that needs to find the right balance between multiple and occasionally opposing identities. Other countries also exist with multiple identities and many of them are considered as very successful despite several sets and layers of identities in one state. Multiple identities that are at first sight contradictory to each other do not necessarily lead to severe political conflict. Around the world exist states that entail more than one dominant national, ethnic, language or cultural group, yet the states are more or less functional. These countries provide us an understanding of how diversity can be bridged and how society and institutions can assist in such a transition.

Language plays an important role in the building of national identity. Common language enables members of the community to communicate and create a sense of "us" (Espersen, 2013: 18–19). A comparison between Belgium and Switzerland provides examples of a more or less working approaches towards identity building that has to overcome multilingualism. Belgium is an example of a country where elites underestimated the importance of language in building a common Belgian identity, yet the country is still politically functional. Ongoing reminiscences on the division of the country are still present in the population. The fact that parity between the Flemish and French languages was neglected for a long period of history

created an ongoing division of Belgium. The country can be divided into Flemish-speaking Flanders in the north and the French-speaking Wallonia in the south. Official languages of Belgium are recognized Flemish, French and German. Aside from the two dominant languages, the relationship between Flanders and Wallonia is tense due to uneven economic prosperity. While Flanders reach higher economic performance, Wallonia is less prosperous (Espersen, 2013: 51–52). The consequent religionization and more autonomy for the regions prevail to be obstacles for elites to create a unifying identity behind which all regions rally. The regional identity is so prevailing that before economic and social parity is reached, Belgian diversity and multiculturalism cannot become beacons unifying different societal identities. Furthermore, building a common identity usually takes a lot of time which Belgium did not receive. Belgian statehood is younger than 200 years which is considerably less than other countries with stable identity (Espersen, 2013: 56–57). In contrast to Belgian shaky common identity stands Switzerland as a unique success story that handled lingual and cultural differences. Although in Switzerland there were in the past cultural, religious and linguistic tensions, the state was able to form a common identity and currently is perceived as a success story of absorbing diversity. Swiss success is based on a specific approach to linguistic policies. All three main languages have become official at the same time and the federal government made sure that all languages are not equal only on paper but their equality is also properly implemented. Evading visible preference for one language at the expense of others leads to the absence of conflict between language groups. Furthermore, the federal government made sure that federal institutions were not centralized. Therefore, the institutions were not distant from people of all regions. Even these precautionary steps would not be sufficient if there was not the honest effort of Swiss elites to not intervene in the already created regional identities. The country pursues at least two types of identities: a multilingual, embracing diversity and common institutions and Alpine way of life, and a sub-regional based on sentiment to original historic cantons. Swiss elites helped to form a new collective identity that complement already existing regional identities, instead of fighting them. The Swiss national identity is therefore based on political rights, consensus and direct democracy (Espersen, 2013: 71–73).

Worth mentioning is the construction and changes in the Hungarian national identity. The Treaty of Trianon concluding World War I, signed by representatives of Hungary on one side and the Allied Powers on the other, has left a large number of ethnic Hungarians living outside of their former homeland. Although Hungary has never fully internally reconciled

with the impact of the Treaty, the vision of accession to the EU and overall heading towards the West has reduced the merit of the national trauma. Hungary has become an example of how to cope with reminiscences of the past and abandon the idea of re-creation of a “greater” state. That national identity is constantly developing and ruling elites have the power to shape it. It has proved after the 2010 parliamentary election that was with a great margin won by Viktor Orbán's party Fidesz. Orbán was able to seize control of narratives of many crises. However, decisive for altering of national identity was the so-called 2015 migration crisis. The reconstructive politics introduced by the new government such as the new Fundamental Law, the constitutional amendments and extensive media legislation were heavily criticized by the EU. The liberal values associated with the EU were in Hungary popular therefore constant criticism from Brussels was damaging Orbán's political credibility. However, the migration crisis provided the opportunity to disrupt the existing bonds between Hungarians and Brussels. The slow European crisis management and series of terrorist attacks allowed Orbán to securitize migration and shatter the existing Hungarian identity. Throughout the years to come he and his party created a completely new narrative of Hungary that opposes “the left-wing” Brussels political elites, wages a crusade against terrorism and Islamism while prevailing “European Christian identity”. The rise of populist and nationalist narrative has completely changed Hungarian identity and Hungary has shifted from constructive pro-European to nationalistic proudly illiberal (Illés, Körösnéyi & Metz, 2018). Changing identity brings changing interests. Therefore, in Hungarian politics is once again presents subtle nostalgia for greater Hungary. Fidesz politicians are again dredging up the “national trauma” of the Treaty of Trianon. Orbán himself angered neighboring countries when he wore a football scarf adorned with a map of an expanded Hungary (BBC News, 2022).

Besides identity based on nationality can be reached common identity based on belief in a common set of values. An example of political identity is the United States, where the subjective meaning of being American is associated with a shared set of values such as equality and individualism. The contested part of American identity is the need of citizens to believe in God and support the steps of the country even if it is wrongdoing otherwise, a citizen cannot be a “true American”. Political identity unites all members of society which seems to be a crucial aspect of national identity because the USA consists of diverse ethnic and racial groups. Primary identification with being American and a secondary member of many diverse ethnic or racial groups enables the country to be politically functional, despite

the diversity (Huddy, 2001). The emergence of identification of Americans with federal polity was not granted consequence of the federal constitution. Even imminent external threats did not force a strong common identity upon citizens of former British colonies. The success of common identity creation lies in the combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches. The latter was produced through essays portraying the unified USA as a place of success and glory, symbolic drawings of masses, and public festivals celebrating unity, most noteworthy Fourth of July parades. The bottom-up approach originated from the top-down effort. Democratization of the USA allowed citizens to participate in the political process. The involvement of the masses allowed the fragile identity created by elites to be bolstered by the identification of the masses with a new political identity, consequently developing in the national identity (McNamara & Musgrave, 2022).

1.2. Post-conflict reconciliation

Although different copying strategies with diverse collective identities were introduced, none of the strategies can be simply transferred and utilized in the Bosnian case. The divergent collective identities are grounded in several factors such as ethnicity, nationality and religion which distinguish BiH from other countries where usually only one of these factors plays a role. Moreover, BiH has only recently experienced a bloody war and it has not yet escaped its past. Therefore, an effort to alter collective identities in the country must engage in a process of post-conflict reconciliation and the concept of transitional justice.

Mechanisms of transitional justice were developed to deal with crimes that were committed during a conflict period and the mechanisms may take a number of forms. Their purpose is to bridge “collective narratives” that are becoming increasingly relevant as conflict escalates and develops over time. The collective narratives created during the conflict can shape the historical perception of all sides of the conflict and focus exclusively on the other side's responsibility for the outbreak of violence (Aiken, 2008).

The mechanisms of transitional justice usually include international or local courts or truth commissions. Truth commissions are becoming increasingly popular mechanisms of post-conflict reconciliation. They are less politically delicate as they cannot hold anyone accountable for wrongdoings and conclusions and recommendations are often ignored by political elites. If mechanisms of transitional justice are not established promptly after the end of the conflict, they become more toothless (Mobekk, 2005). General expectations from the establishment of truth commissions and enabling rulings of local or international courts

are to recover the truth about atrocities and construct narratives about the past which produce reconciliation between groups, victims and perpetrators. Successful implementation of these measures is considered to be a precondition for the consolidation of peace, stability, democratization, and nation-building. However, in conflict such as the War in BiH which did not result in a clear victory of any side and ethnic divisions were institutionalized in political structures, ensuring implementation of post-conflict reconciliation proves to be difficult (Hughes & Kostovicova, 2018). Although the concept of reconciliation is not a clearly defined term, and what is the successful outcome can differ from case to case, BiH does not fulfill any definition of reconciliation. In fact, the country remains deeply divided along ethnonational lines. For reconciliation is a characteristic development of mutual trust which replaces past fears and overcomes atrocities of the past. Furthermore, reconciliation involves the process of social learning which develops a broader sense of collective identification that bridge between “us” and “them” and address antagonistic societal beliefs that enemies hold about one another and could bring a return of violence (Aiken, 2013). To transitional justice in Yugoslavia contributed The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia which was established to prosecute the war crimes that had been committed. While some transitional justice partly took place in the country, none of the aspects of reconciliation were achieved. However, an example of at least partially successful reconciliation can be found in recent history in Northern Ireland and South Africa.

During the last century was society of Northern Ireland an example of a deeply divided society. The division line went between Irish “nationalists” largely by faith Roman Catholics and pro-British “unionist” largely by faith Protestants. The modern genesis of the conflict date back to the end of the Irish War of Independence in 1921 when Irish state was declared and recognized while North Ireland remained in the UK. Between 1922 to 1972 protestant majority used its populous dominance to discriminate “subversive” Catholic minority. Majority-biased electoral law and gerrymandered constituencies while segregation has increased in everyday life. Between the early 1970s and the late 1990s violence escalated and consequently during this period died around 3,500 individuals and almost 50,000 were injured. The armed conflict was concluded in 1998 by the Good Friday Agreement which entailed the release of paramilitary prisoners and the dissolution of paramilitary units while enshrining power-sharing in Northern Ireland. Although the number of affected people throughout almost 30 years of conflict is dramatically lower number than in Former Yugoslavia and particularly BiH, it greatly affected social cohesion and created an

environment of hatred, suspicion and distrust. The case of Northern Ireland is specific in terms of post-conflict reconciliation and transitional justice. Even in the time of the most intense violence, the territory remained a functional liberal Western democracy with a judicial system and police forces in place. Therefore, the peace process was not accompanied by any centralized trial such as tribunal or truth commission process. Northern Ireland applied a decentralized approach that included bottom-up community-based programs of reconciliation while political power is shared between previously conflicted parties (Aiken, 2013).

Conflict in South Africa was based on the division of citizens according to their race to the categories of “white”, “black”, “colored” and “Indian”. Every citizen was forced to carry an identity card to be able to recognize membership to the racial group. Between 1950 and 1980s led policies of the white minority to discrimination against the majority that escalated with resettlements effectively creating “white” and “black” sectors. Any resistance to the policies was met with the brutality of police forces leading to the creation of armed wings of black liberation movements. Before the transition to democracy in 1994 killing, torturing and detention without trial occurred by the government towards the black majority while the armed wing of the liberation movement terrorized public authorities. Institutional racism under the apartheid system dismantled social cohesion and wide inequality based on race remains nowadays in areas such as income, housing or education (Aiken, 2013). While transitional justice was in North Ireland decentralized, South Africa chose a centralized mechanism of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It was important that the primal roots of post-conflict reconciliation were on domestic and local levels rather than forced by the international community. TRC is associated with the approach of restorative justice rather than the approach of retributive justice which was instrumentalized in Former Yugoslavia. TRC in South Africa focuses mostly on searching new status quo and rectification of the past while bridging divisions rather than punishing individuals. The approach was projected in economic reconciliation in the form of partial compensation for victims of discrimination (Gready, 2010).

1.3. Consociational democracy

To ensure peaceful political stability in plural societies, successful democracies such as Switzerland, Austria, Netherlands or Belgium utilize the model of consociational democracy. Yet, the application of consociational democracy does not automatically bring

success in the governance of a plural society. The Dayton Agreement, the backbone of the Bosnian constitutional order, follows the model in the form of power-sharing executives, veto rights, proportionality, and segmental autonomy, yet it did not deliver the expected outcomes. Therefore, the outline of the favorable factors for the establishment and maintenance of consociational democracy has received a lot of attention. Although the literature does not agree on a definite list of favorable factors due to the ever-changing political and socio-economic reality in countries where consociational democracy is already applied, a few general favorable factors relevant to a state such as Bosnia should be mentioned. The factors are segmental isolation, external threats, a balance of power, and a small country or population size (Bogaards, 1998).

Firstly, segmental isolation was reached in Bosnia geographically when all nationalities were separated through ethnic cleansing and genocide. Geographical concentration allows for increased group autonomy through federalism. However, the concentration was reached violently which created an additional issue in the form of the need for reconciliation and transitional justice.

Secondly, the balance of power between segments should be ensured by power-sharing executives, veto rights and segmental autonomy. Furthermore, Lijphart's (2008) recommendations for unitary states were implemented. The recommendation guides constitution writers to favor a parliamentary form of government over presidential, ethnic-based quotas for representation in politics and indirect way of presidential elections with the merely ceremonial role of the president in the political system. However, political practice proved that the balance between segments is not guaranteed since elected officials to power-sharing bodies are not always chosen to the liking of the people they should represent (Lakic, 2018). Furthermore, veto rights and segmental autonomy also brought not intended secondary consequences such as the institutionalization of ethnicity, a freeze of ethnic division and autocratization (Aitken, 2010) (Kapidžić, 2020).

Thirdly, the existence of external threats promotes internal unity, however, that applies only if citizens and their political elites are loyal to the state. The only external threat, targeted against Bosnian territorial integrity, is coming from Croatia and Serbia which are at the same time ethnonational “parent-states” of two of three ethnonational groups in BiH. Therefore, any external threat is rather destructive for BiH than constructive for the survival of the state.

The fourth factor of a small country with a small population is fully fulfilled, yet it is not a factor to be proud of since Bosnia is battling with enormous emigration out of the country thus each year shrinking population.

Arend Lijphart, the father of consociational democracy, described in four publications spread over almost two decades many more favorable factors, yet not all of them are relevant to the Bosnian case. An example of such a factor can be the length of time consociational democracy has been in operation. Undoubtedly, the longer the system operates, the higher the chance that it persists any potential upheavals. Yet, a factor of such a character does not bring any value to my analysis. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that even Lijphart warns that his factors are more illustrative rather than exhaustive. Furthermore, the factors need to be adjusted to the specificities of the country where consociational democracy is implemented (Bogaards, 1998).

2. Methodological approach

2.1. Historical research

The thesis mainly relies on historical research to conceptualize a cause-and-effect link between historical events and the formation of national identities in BiH. History is a crucial concept that this thesis relies on, yet proper comprehension of its application is necessary. A simple and intuitive description of what is history refers to linking historically accurate facts such as the year in which became Sarajevo besieged city. The scope of such analysis is very limited and for my purpose not relevant. Mere stating of historical facts does not shed light on any social fabric formed by history. In fact, history combines historical facts, interpretations and evaluation through a present understanding of the world. Thus, history is full of facts that were constructed into comprehensive narratives (Carr, 2018). However, comprehending interpretations and evaluation of historical facts is a prerequisite to reforming collective identities formed mostly along historical lines. To uncover the social fabric of history formation the combination of historical research and social constructivism is applied. Historical research allows to list the decisive moments and events for the formation of identities, while social constructivism allows to deconstruct the construction of social understanding and interpretation of historical events. History is used as a source of the “facts”. Historians usually describe what happened, and scholars of international relations interpret the “facts”. The disputes are usually not over the data or facts per se, but rather about their interpretations (Thies, 2002).

The link between what happened and how were the events perceived, narratives constructed and further transmitted from generation to generation allows me to grasp the formation of collective identities that drive nowadays BiH. It is the historical research focused on facts combined with the theory of social constructivism that allows me to find how was the collective identity of each constitutive Bosnian nation established and what are the remaining conflicting elements in the collective identities. The main premise of social constructivism is a belief that identity is constructed through ideas, belief systems, concepts, languages, discourses and narratives. Therefore, the question is how to “measure” identity. Yet, identity cannot be simply “measured” as material factors since identities are held on several levels of analysis, and the object of research usually possesses more than a single identity (Jackson, Robert/Sorensen, Georg, 2010). Yet, a thorough analysis of discourse,

history, and widely held beliefs combined with public opinion polls or census can shed light on the matter. In relation to the timeline, the analysis follows all the major relevant developments in collective identities in BiH. Therefore, the collective identities analysis begins in the early 1990s, as around that period of time ethnonational tensions slowly but steadily and gradually manifest, and concludes in the present. Yet, from time to time historical excursion beyond the 1990s is required since identity is built for centuries and sometimes refers to the events dated to ages before any ethnonational states even existed.

After the conceptualization of elements that formed nowadays identities in BiH and the identification reason for their conflicting nature, the analysis of the prerequisite for the reconstruction of collective identities ensuring progress in state-building will be performed. The reconstruction will be analyzed at the domestic level and structural level as described in the theoretical framework. The reconstruction will follow the findings from other countries that face or faced similar identity challenges, while their practice will be adjusted to the specific socio-historical environment of BiH.

3. Formation of collective identities in BiH

3.1. The dissolution of Yugoslavia

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, commonly known as Yugoslavia, emerged after the end of the Second World War as a nationally, ethnically and religiously heterogeneous state that needed to overcome the recent past. A large part of the reestablished Yugoslavian state was ruled during the Second World War by the Ustasha fascist regime that was responsible for the massive ethnic cleansing of Serbs, Jews and the Roma population, while antifascist Muslims and Croats were persecuted as well. In order to proceed with effective rule, ethnic reconciliation was necessary. The communist machinery tried to overcome the past by creating a new collective identity built on Yugoslav brotherhood that rises above the past, known as the concept of “Brotherhood and Unity”. The concept represented the creation of identity based on class and pan-Slavism that transcend traditional forms of ethnic, national and religious division (Grove, 2018).

In order to reach high identification with the newly establishing Brotherhood and Unity identity, propagandistic tools were utilized. Truth Commission and various courts prosecuted responsible individuals linked to the Ustasha movement for war criminal activities while disseminating a monolithic truth about history. The courts and Truth Committee opted to mention any wrongdoing by the communist partisans who perpetrated unnecessary violence on civilians. Despite condemnation of the Ustasha regime and blaming it exclusively for all the committed war crimes, the communist regime tried to clearly distinguish between “innocent ordinary” Croats and the murderer Ustasha movement. The collective guilt would create additional tensions in an already fragmented society and that was not in the interest of the communist power that tried to keep the state together (Dulić, 2015).

Despite efforts to create a new unifying collective identity, the national, ethnic and religious identities were still present in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav republics were ethnically and religiously heterogeneous and Bosnia and Herzegovina was even more heterogeneous. In this sense is worth mentioning the old yet true cliché: “*Yugoslavia is a country with six republics, five nations, four languages, three religions, two alphabets, and one Yugoslav—Tito.*” (Bertsch, 1977, 92). In Bosnia and Herzegovina were rooted all three main religions (Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam) present in Yugoslavia (Matevski & Matevska, 2018).

A characteristic of Yugoslavia was the overlap of ethnic and religious identities. Ethnic identities usually utilize cultural characteristics, symbols and traditions that are related to their religious beliefs. This complete overlap between ethnicity and religion partly explains why despite almost identical language and often shared nationality, distinguishing between citizens was possible (Elzarka, 2018). Therefore, most Serbs declared themselves to be Orthodox, while most Croats felt to be Catholics. Bosnian Muslims found themselves in special position. In the census from 1948 were Muslims given options to choose from Muslim Serb, Muslim Croat or Muslim with an undetermined nationality, in the census in 1953 these options were removed and instead of that was provided the option of “Yugoslav - unaffiliated” (Matevski & Matevska, 2018). The born of the census category “Yugoslav - unaffiliated” and the measuring of religiosity enabled to tracking strength of the “Brotherhood and Unity” identity. Although the use of census in ascertaining prevailing identities is sometimes disputed as this method faces its limitations, it remains a well-suited tool. Constructivists believe that census is never merely a statistical exercise but a political question at its core as it normalizes categorizing citizens according to their race, ethnicity, nationality or religion. Till 1971 when “Muslims” were given the choice to identify themselves as a distinctive nationality based on their religion, the category “Yugoslav - unaffiliated” was widely used by Muslims who could not fit into other existing national identities. With distinct recognition of the “Muslim nation”, the meaning of Yugoslav identification shifted. Despite the efforts of the communist party, Yugoslav identification remained irrelevant in comparison to other national identifications. Yugoslavism recorded its peak in 1981 when 5,8 % of the Yugoslav population prioritized Yugoslav identity over other national identities (Bieber, 2015). Even at its peak, the weakening of national identification was not very successful, although it is a matter of dispute if identification with Yugoslavism was not more prevalent due to potentially multiple layers of national identity that could not manifest in the census as people were expected to report only one national identity. More successful was the weakening of religious identities. Yugoslavia recorded an evident trend of secularization when in the first census from 1953, 86,6 % of citizens declared themselves as religious/believers while in the census from 1990 the religiosity dropped to 43 %. We can conclude that efforts to unite Yugoslavia under the new collective identity were only partly successful. Yugoslavism as national identification manifested only in families with mixed ethnoreligious backgrounds and with individuals who were fully committed to communist ideas represented by membership in the communist party. Yet,

communist Yugoslavia successfully eroded religious identities as expressing religious beliefs had plummeted over time (Cohen, 1998).

3.2. The Bosnian War

Although factors that led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia are disputed till nowadays and their list ranges from fairly academic to media simplification, not a single factor can explain the complexity of the collapse. While some scholars advocate for economic reasons, the state of international politics or the personalities of leaders in Yugoslavia, others advocate for more identity-related reasons such as the rise of nationalism, religiosity and cultural tensions. I am going to focus on the factors related to identity because the “objective” factors such as economy, demography or geopolitics cannot sufficiently explain by themselves the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Dejan, 2001). Yet, I am going to evade the “ancient ethnic hatred” argument that was very popular among politicians and the wider public as an explanatory framework although it is seemingly in constructivist understanding of the world. The dissolution of Yugoslavia was violent however not due to centuries-growing inter-ethnic hatred. There is a lack of empirical support for such a claim since there is missing evidence of strong ethnic clashes during Tito’s reign and even during previous times lived citizens of several ethnic backgrounds in relative peace next to each other. Yet, shifting collective identities can be observed just before the dissolution of Yugoslavia and during the violent ethnic campaigns. In the case of BiH is important to track the rise of ethnonational identity in Croat, Serbian and Bosniak groups. In the analysis of former and latter ethnonational groups the existence of Croatia and Serbia as ethnonational “parent-states” need to be taken into consideration, while the analysis of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) can be centered only around their presence in BiH since Bosniaks not possess any ethnonational “parent-state”. Ethnonationalism was not the only leading collective identity during the Bosnian War. In the whole Yugoslavia was an overlap between ethnic and religious identities. Ethnic identities usually utilize cultural characteristics, symbols and traditions that are related to their religious beliefs. This almost complete overlap between ethnicity and religion is not only unique but also partly explains why despite almost identical language and often shared nationality, distinguishing between citizens was possible (Elzarka, 2018). Although Tito’s Yugoslavia successfully sidelined religious identities, a survey conducted in 1985 illustrates the already existing shift back to spirituality reporting that 62.3% of Catholic families were religious, as compared with 43.8% from Muslim families and 26.2% from Orthodox families. Religiosity was found to be at that time higher between younger people than older

due to the fact that the older generation still remembered the times of Tito and his identity created on the concept of Brotherhood and Unity (Mirescu, 2003).

Serbian collective identity just before the war and during the war formed on strong ethnonationalism that was primarily flamed by elites. Opinion leaders actively created a whole new discourse that depicted other ethnonational groups as a threat (Sekulić, Massey, Hodson, 2006). The alliance between nationalistic political leaders and The Orthodox Church (SOC) created a comprehensive ethnonational identity that became an underlying foundation for Serbian resentment fueling Serbian collective identity during the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Bosnian War. The identity was based on historical experiences and repeatedly spread information and images supporting historical myths and rigid ethnonational views of the world (Pesić, 1996).

The historical experiences are the 14th century territorially expanded the Serbian medieval state and the role of Serbs in the Second World War. The Serbian medieval state that controlled the vast majority of the Balkan peninsula provided to Serbs with a sense of previous statehood and supported territorial claims of all lands with the Serbian majority population in Yugoslavia (Majstrovic, 1997). However, even more important was the following collapse of the state caused by the defeat of Prince Lazar at the battle of Kosovo Polje, since SOC pointed out that this event was a period of history when religious repression against Serbs started and with this assertion sided with growing nationalistic tendencies. In the late 80s of the 20th century, the SOC utilized the 600th anniversary of the Kosov Polje battle and transported the remnants of Prince Lazar through Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to mark the political space of “Greater Serbia”. During the transportation were propagated terms as “heavenly Serbia”, “heavenly people” or Serbian “heavenly soil”. The SOC revived historical battle and created around it a myth of Serbs being “heavenly” people, while assuming a definite attitude towards Croats and Muslims (Abazovic, 2007).

The Serbian Communist Party and the SOC did not jointly establish Serbian identity only on what it symbolizes and who it protects, but also on what it denounces. It refers to events during the Second World War, concretely to the genocide of the Serbian population due to Ustasha policies in the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Drzhava Hrvatska). The Orthodox Church created its identity in the opposite to the Ustasha regime and Croatian Catholic Church. Specifically, it refers to the alleged collaboration of the Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojije Stepinac, with the Ustasha regime (Mirescu, 2003). To bolster the newly

acquired collective identity, media has repeatedly spread information and images supporting historical myths and rigid ethnonational views of the world. Serbs were depicted as victims of Yugoslavism since they were supposedly the only nation that naively accepted Yugoslavism while others built their ethnonational states. This conspiracy against Serbs was led by previous Yugoslav Communist leaders, namely Tito (the Croat) and Kardelj (the Slovene). Serbia was allegedly economically exploited when its wealth was redistributed to other Yugoslav republics and instead of gratitude Serbs received hatred and persecution. Serbs were pictured as permanently exposed to genocide perpetuated by anti-Serbian behavior of police forces in other Yugoslav republics than Serbia. The genocide card became very effective as it played on historical experience with the Ustasha regime that perpetrated violence toward minorities (Pesić, 1996). The combination of historical experience and everyday ethnonational propaganda effectively transformed Serbian collective identity and interests leading to extreme hostility toward other ethnonational groups and an attempt to create a “Greater Serbia” that would unite all ethnic Serbs in one state.

Croats are very often in public eyes seen as one of the victims of Serbian ethnonationalism, yet Croatian collective identity was also created on strong ethnonational feelings that were not flamed purely by Serbian attempts to monopolize power in Yugoslavia. Although fear of “kosovization”, the process in which the Serbian minority attempts to succeed from another republic, strengthened ethnonationalism in Croatia, the first national rebellion started already in the late 1960s. At that time Croatian leaders already escalated their nationalistic rhetoric which was followed by calls for greater autonomy and in 1971 became evident that even the Croatian Communist Party was not immune to nationalism. “The Croatian Spring” was crushed by Tito and the Croatian Communist Party was purged, yet it did not fully eradicate nationalism from the society. It only reinforced importance of the Catholic Church as traditional protector of of Croatian national interests, culture and identity (Ognyanova-Krivoshieva, 2005). Croatian ethnonationalism is grounded in the historical memory of the Croatian medieval kingdom from the 11th century and its independence during the Second World War, represented by the infamous Ustasha regime (Majstorovic, 1997). The Croatian ethnonationalists did not glorify the Ustasha regime as a role model for Croatia, yet they casually downplayed the perpetration of the regime. Relativization of the dreadfulness of the Ustaha regime in order to justify the historical memory of the independent Croatian state was possible since in Croatia existed an alliance between political leaders and the Catholic Church. After all, it was the Church that historically played the role

of defender of Croats against any totality, be it Fascism or Communism (Bowmann, 1994). The Church has built its identity around an ambiguous stance on the activities of the Archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Stepinac. Although the Archbishop was only following at that time official policy of the Vatican and on his full cooperation with the Ustasha puppet regime was not agreement, the decision not to disassociate the Church from him is controversial. His case became even more complicated when he was arrested and imprisoned by the communist Yugoslav regime. With the ongoing Cold War Stepanic was made Cardinal and was promoted into a symbol of resistance to communist rule. He eventually became a symbol and martyr for dissidents of Croat nationalistic conviction living outside of Yugoslavia. He was portrayed by Croat nationalists as a person who advanced the “Holy Croat Cause”. The identity of the Church as a resistance of Croats against the Yugoslav communist regime has only strengthened by this association. Disassociation from Archbishop Stepinac became even harder for the Church because the relationship between the atheist communist authorities and the local Catholic Church remained tense (Iveković, 2002).

The alliance between ethnonational politicians and the anti-Communist Church reinforcing ethnonational cause would not be complete in consolidating a new collective identity if it was not for the spread of ethnic intolerance by mass media. Croatian president Tudjman and his party, which operated in Croatia under the name HDZ and in BiH under the name HDZ-BiH, manipulated the public by use of mass media. Tudjman infamously spoke in the mass media that he was happy that his wife was neither Serbian nor Jewish, relativized the violent substance of the Ustasha regime, and advocated for “Greater Croatia” and “human transfers” which was a euphemism for ethnic cleansing. All of that happened in the name of the “expression of the historical aspirations” of the Croatian nation within “historical and natural boundaries”. Furthermore, Serbs were presented as “Byzantines” whose ultimate goal was to bring Western civilization and the Church to the knees (Sekulić, Massey, Hodson, 2006) (Ognyanova-Krivoshieva, 2005). To further bolster Croatian identity, the Croatian language became artificially adjusted by introducing new words and bringing back archaisms used in the territory with the Croatian ethnic majority in order to distinguish Croats from Serbs (Denich, 1994).

Bosnian Muslims found themselves in the most precarious situation regarding their identity out of all ethnonational groups in BiH. Bosniak identity entered the Bosnian War as a primordial and only after the event of the sieges of Sarajevo and Mostar and the killing fields

of Srebrenica, the identity was forged (Majstrovic, 1997). Muslims in Yugoslavia were considered Muslim both by religion and by nationality. Simply, to be a Muslim in BiH meant to be a religious believer of Islam as well as a member of the nation thus the way in which was Yugoslavia dissolved did not give Bosniaks any other choice than to emerge their identity on religion. However, Islamic Religious Community (IRC), the religious organization of Muslims in BiH, could not build its identity around hundred-year-old myths as SOC or its involvement in the Second World War as the Croatian Catholic Church. During the Austrian-Hungarian rule of Bosnia and Herzegovina Islamic religious institutions detached themselves from Islamic institutions governed from Istanbul. Thus, new structures were created known as Islamic Religious Community. The newly inquired independence from institutions led by Istanbul cut the connection of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a long religious identity fostered in the Middle East (Larise, 2015). Thus Bosnian Muslim community was by far the most secularized religious group and Islam was more cultural than religious identity. They were secularised because the Muslim population lived mainly in urban areas, which were used to having mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds. (Iveković, 2002).

Furthermore, the rising religious identity was prior to the Bosnian War and at the early stage of it eroded by both Croats and Serbs. Croatian national propaganda saw Bosniaks as ethnic Croats of the Islamic faith since Croats needed allies against the Serbian threat. However, the narrative of ethnic Croats of Islamic faith undermined Bosniaks formation of national identity (Ognyanova-Krivoshieva, 2005). On the other hand, Serbs viewed Bosniaks as ethnic Serbs who only underwent a forced process of Islamization under Ottoman rule. Paradoxically, it was Serbian leader Milošević who mobilized a sense of threat in Bosniaks when he sought public support for intervention in Kosovo and used exclusive language describing Kosovor Muslims as “Muslim invaders” and consequently assisted in Bosniak identity formation (Kriještorac, 2022). The clear denial of Bosniak national identity from Serbs and Croats and Serbian securitization of Islam sporadically accompanied by Croatian securitization of Islam provided an impulse for the formation of Bosniak identity. Although Bosniak Islamic identity was historically moderate and more cultural than religious, the secular wing was sidelined and new leadership was formed around Alija Izetbegovic, whose agenda was a promotion of the role of Islam in Bosniak identity. Bosniak identity formed on religion was further reinforced by Islamic forces from the Middle East who fought on the Bosniak side. Although Islamic volunteers were relatively low in numbers, their assistance

in the war coupled with the material involvement of countries such as Turkey or Iran and Serbian rhetoric followed by ethnic cleansing led to the acquirement of a new collective identity (Jenkins & Sofos, 1996).

3.3. The post-war era

More than three years of the Bosnia War, which killed around 100,000 and over two million others displaced, ended in December 1995 through the ratification of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Agreement. In order to assure lasting peace, the Dayton Agreement divided the country into two nearly ethnically homogenous regions, the Bosnian Federation and Republika Srpska, which are under the umbrella of central government following the model of consociational democracy for ethnically divided society as described by Arend Lijphart (2008). Yet, the political division into almost ethnically homogenous entities further divided into cantons in combination with power-sharing did not bring a new overreaching collective identity, political stability or economic prosperity. Consociational democracy is sustainable only if at least some of the prerequisites such as segmental isolation, external threats, or a balance of power are fulfilled. Yet, the most important prerequisite missing in BiH is the loyalty of citizens and their political elites to state. A deeply divided society that just recently suffered from war accompanied by war crimes and acts of ethnic cleansing can hardly thrive in such a constitutional framework. The Dayton Agreement also introduced the institute of Office of the High Representative in BiH (OHR) whose role is to oversight fulfillment of the Dayton Agreement, yet its legitimacy is often questioned (Rice, 2017).

The first democratic election in BiH in 1991 championed ethnonational parties rather than parties promoting civil identity. Despite or perhaps due to the war experience, the first post-war elections in 1996 won landslide ethnonational parties that were very pro-active during the war. The peace agreement strengthened political parties that were already in power and thus legitimized their declared goals that led to the war in the first place. Besides a few exceptions, all national elections after the ratification of the Dayton peace agreement are dominated by ethnonational political parties. Political elites utilize their influence and establish the public discourse on an ethnic rather than non-ethnic base. Bosnian politics of post-war transition can be therefore characterized as “continuation of war by other means”. Therefore comprehension of peace, state arrangements, and answers to national questions stem from an interpretation of what happened during the war. The collective identities

endured as established during the Bosnia War and in the post-war era are the identities only reinforced by the interpretation of who is responsible for the war eruption, who is a hero, and who is a victim (Tepšić & Džuverovic, 2018).

The identities of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks are set on three general dominant meta-narratives and several additional individual victimhoods of ethnic groups or their parts. Bosniak meta-narrative interprets the Bosnian War as a heroic part of history when the statehood and Bosniak ethnonational identity were forged. It is described as an unjust war that was brought upon Bosniaks and even though the most vile deeds were committed against them, they still fought the War noblesly. This view is suitably described by Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović: *“When going to negotiations to the European countries I do not have to bow my head because we did not kill women, children and old people. We did not attack anyone’s sanctuaries. However, our enemies did all that, and right before the eyes of the entire West.”* (Tepšić & Džuverovic, 2018, 33) . Croatian meta-narrative approves Bosniak's position on who is to be blamed for the war. Both sides blame Serbian ethnonationalism and expansionism, yet they disagree over the issue of Herceg-Bosna, a Croatian entity during the war. For Bosniaks is the entity synonym for another attempt to portion BiH, for Croats it is an entity that stood up to Bosniak's majoritarianism, a hidden effort to sideline Croats in BiH. Serbian prevailing narrative is grounded in an official document adopted by the Assembly of Republika Srpska in 2013. The declaration states the exact way of interpretation of the war. Serbian involvement is not considered to be aggressive toward Croats and Bosniaks. The cause of conflict lies in the Bosniak political elite who tried to dominate the unitary state with their relative population majority while not paying attention to the needs of other ethnonationalities. The whole war is interpreted as a civil war with a high degree of international involvement which after the war demonized Serbs and imposed a collective guilt upon them (Tepšić & Džuverovic, 2018). The metta-narratives are accompanied by post-war self-victimization that is translating even to nowadays everyday politics in BiH. Mijić (2021) identified through structured interviews with common people several strategies for maintaining self-victimisation. Interviewees tend to compare the wrongdoing of members of their own ethnonational groups with the wrongdoing of members of other ethnonational groups in order to relativize violent actions. This interpretation is sometimes accompanied by exaggeration of the wrongdoing of other sides of the conflict. Political elites often get rid of responsibility for the war by referring to the war as an external event that was forced upon politicians and common ‘innocent’ people.

The externalization of guilt and self-victimization is usually aligned with the already described meta-narratives. Thus Bosniaks and Croats tend to blame Serbs for aggressive behavior, while Croats and Serbs accuse Bosniaks of building a unitary Islamic state and Serbs with Bosniaks describe Croats as fascists imitating Ustashe regime. Historical narratives combined with recent experiences of the war and its interpretation remain the main source of all ethnonational identities. Mochtak and Muharemović (2024) collected and analyzed data for both legislative chambers in BiH - the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples - between 1998 and 2018 in order to ascertain the importance of the war issue and detect its pattern in political life. They concluded that the topic presence is immense and the main grievance exists primarily alongside the Bosniak-Serb line while Croats used to hold back on the issue due to strategic decisions to accommodate their political aspiration in BiH and international pressure. Furthermore, the analysis found that Serbs and Bosniak representatives progressed on radical rhetoric when Serbs defend the war legacy and relativize the atrocities, while Bosniaks call for a dissolution of Republika Srpska on the grounds of collective guilt.

4. Reconstruction of the current opposing identities

The reconstruction of identities in BiH is feasible as I have already illustrated on the lively development of collective identities in recent history. Thus, the current mutually opposing collective identities can be potentially reconstructed into collective identities ensuring progress in state-building. However, as history proved to us, the solitary action of one actor is not sufficient to bring lasting changes in robust and on several layers formed identities. To make the reformation successful, broad coordination between several actors is required and various changes in political, social and economic life are envisioned. The reconstruction follows the findings from other countries that face or faced similar identity challenges, while their practice is adjusted to the specific socio-historical environment of BiH. Both domestic and external aspects of identity formation are considered in the reconstruction process. While domestic identity formation is undisputable, external formation is an integral part of the identities since two out of three constitutive nations possess an ethnonational “parent-state” and the whole political system of BiH is overseen by OHR.

4.1. The necessity to reach transitional justice

In order to cope with traumatic historical experiences, the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and domestic war crimes trials were established. Their main goal was to search for truth, hold accountable offenders, reparate and repatriate victims of wrongdoing. The ICTY operated from 1993 till 2017 and indicted 162 and sentenced 84 high-ranking individuals from military and political circles. Although the ICTY successfully documented many perpetrations of violence and held accountable their initiators, it did not bring reconciliation and it did not build a foundation for overcoming the past. Thus, the ICTY failed in the most crucial task as the foundation for ethnic reconciliation. In fact, the ICTY was not able to create a feeling of justice for the victims and failed to clearly communicate its findings which further fueled competing narratives and victimhood between ethnonational groups in BiH. As already mentioned, the ICTY has focused mostly on high-ranking war criminals, therefore there was a need for establishing domestic courts for the investigation of ordinary individuals. The War Crimes Chamber started to operate in 2005 and aimed to prosecute the most complex and high-level cases within seven years. However, the domestic courts as well as the ICTY failed to render justice. The domestic courts were not imposed on BiH from the international community which was

supposed to be an advantage as the process of justice would be served in the country itself, yet it failed due to mistrust of ethnic groups in domestic institutions. The prosecutor's office became backlogged, corruption and disrespect to the rule of law occurred, and politicians from Republika Srpska repeatedly attacked the court's integrity (Bell, 2019).

Expulsions, property destruction and ethnic cleansing of massive volume caused the displacement of around two million people. To serve justice, the affected people are supposed to be compensated for their loss, yet to reparate such a large scale of victims takes time, financial resources and most importantly political will. BiH hoped for a ruling that would ensure reparation from Serbia for the Srebrenica genocide, yet the international courts did not order any war reparation and BiH had to settle only with a declaration of Serbian responsibility and an order of handover of Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić to ICTY. Several other foreign courts considered compensation for some Bosnians who claimed third party responsibility. For instance, survivors of the Srebrenica genocide filed a lawsuit against the United Nations and the Dutch Government for failing to protect civilians from harm. However, the efforts on the international stage to reach war-related reparations failed since even if some law cases are won and reparation is gained, these are only single cases without overreaching impact on society. Moreover, within BiH were efforts to secure reparations largely unsuccessful (Ferstam & Rosenberg, 2020). Therefore, BiH still copes with large internal displacement and even displaced people who return to their homes face hardship. However, reaching transitional justice is a prerequisite for the formation of any collective identity that would keep BiH together and consequently create a feeling of interdependence between actors as described by social constructivism.

A viable solution leading to lasting change could be internationally funded programmes such as Regional Housing Programme (RHP). The primary goal of the initiative, which was established in 2012, is to accommodate the most vulnerable refugees and internally displaced people in post-Yugoslav space. Thanks to RHP found a new home more than 9,000 people (RHP, 2024). The programme itself is only a drop in the ocean, yet it provides an example of reaching justice which is a prerequisite for any reconciliation and reformation of identities. Many other buildings, former houses of internally displaced people suffered from only minor damage and thus people could return, yet they decided not to do so. The decision is sometimes made voluntarily due to persisting trauma, other times involuntarily when the community with the ethnic majority does not welcome returnees of other ethnicities or when

the returnee's former house found "new owners" who moved in when the house was empty. While disputed ownership of the house can be solved through lengthy court battles, the hostility of ethnical majority villages against ethnic minority returnees can be mitigated by state-sponsored dialog sessions as a way of coping with the past. The retributive measures have mostly failed in BiH thus the need for alternatives leading to bridge the opposing identities remains. Focusing on rebuilding inter-group relationships and fostering trust is the main key to success. A unique aspect of the dialog sessions is their informality. BiH could establish a state-wide Truth Commission but it is unlikely that such a new official organ would find something more than ICTY already found. Furthermore, formal state institutes seeking truth would only further fuel disputes in the country since ethnonational politicians would turn the process again into politics full of hatred (Bell, 2019).

4.2. Reform of the Dayton Agreement

The Dayton Peace Agreement, also known as the Dayton Accord, serves as a constitutional framework for BiH. The Accord utilizes characteristics of consociational democracy such as power-sharing executives, veto rights, proportionality, and segmental autonomy. The Dayton Agreement is based on the representation of three distinctive groups known as "constituent people" who are Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. As such peace settlement institutionalized ethnicity in post-conflict institutions. Presidency in BiH consists of a Bosniak and a Croat elected from the Federation and a Serb from the Republika Srpska rotating every 6 months as a formal head of state. The House of Peoples consists of 15 delegates and each category of constitutive people is represented by 5 members of the House. The House of Representatives is directly voted by two-thirds from the Federation and one-third from Republika Srpska. When a majority of delegates from any constituent people is formed, it can veto any parliamentary decision. Although Lijphart's (2008) recommendations for unitary states were implemented, they did not promote a move away from the domination of ethnic parties. Nowadays politics is dominated by political parties that emphasize accountability towards their ethnic group rather than the multiethnic state. Parties fight between themselves to attract voters however always only from one of the constitutive nations and cross-ethnic parties are almost non-existent or marginalized. The Dayton Agreement institutionalized ethnicity and froze ethnic division which de facto rewarded the war policy of ethnic cleansing referred to in literature as the "apartheid logic" of partition. Power-sharing, vetos, and segmental autonomy reinforced the idea that constitutive nations are fundamentally distinct from each other. Thus it strengthened ethnic-based identities and

limited the formation of non-ethnic identities. Furthermore, the constitutional framework enabled autocratization at the national level, since many responsibilities are shared on multiple levels of governance (Aitken, 2010) (Kapidžić, 2020). Therefore the Dayton Agreement proved to be useful in maintaining negative peace, but it did not promote reconciliation and reformation of opposing identities. Changes to the constitutional framework are deemed to be necessary as several international rulings found very concerning the very idea of constituent people. The essence of the rulings is precisely summed up by the Council of Europe which pointed out to discrimination of “others” in political life when citizens of BiH who do not identify themselves with any of the constitutive people cannot run for a seat in Presidency or House of People (Tran, 2011). Although the very essence of constitutive people lies in the representation of ethnicities, not all ethnicities feel to be represented. Željko Komšić, a long-time Croat member of the Presidency of BiH is by many Croats considered an illegitimate representative of Croats. Since Croats share an administrative entity with Bosniaks who are by far the majority in the entity and voting for representatives is based on the personal declaration of ethnic alignment. Therefore, the political system effectively allows Bosniaks to meddle in the election of Croatian representative on the state Presidency (Lakic, 2018).

The current constitutional arrangement seems to be unfit for the long-term prospects of the country since it is not effectively fulfilling the idea of constitutional democracy, namely the aspect of balance of power as described in the theoretical framework. The above-mentioned defects of the Dayton Agreement are not recognized only by international courts and experts in the field but also by common people. Public trust in the system of government is for a long time very low considering this is the most important document of the country. Only about 50 % of the population definitely or probably supports the setting (Morgan-Jones, Stefanovic & Loizides, 2021). At least partial reform of the setting is inevitable. Abandon system of constituent people is crucial as it discriminates and overreaches veto of each constituent ethnic group blocks any deep reform of the state or membership in institutions such as the EU or NATO. An alternative to the current state of the constitutional framework could be the introduction of a pluralist federation where sovereignty is divided between the federal and central governmental levels. Each unit of government has constitutionally entrenched responsibilities and powers that cannot be simply abolished by a unilateral decision of central authority. To change this governmental setting consent of both levels needs to be reached. Generally, it is advisable that units of a federation are relatively small

and federation decentralized. Additionally, neither the federal government nor the unit can unilaterally change the constitutional setting. Such a federation is usually bicameral, where the chamber of the units are the units usually disproportionately represented. In this way, countries such as Switzerland or the United States over time became functional states (McGarry & O’Leary, 2017). Alternative to the consociational model of democracy is Donald L. Horowitz’s (2023) proposal to design various electoral mechanisms that would ensure the election of moderate candidates acceptable for the large majority of citizens of the state. The most popular methods are “alternative vote” or “instant runoff”. In alternative-vote systems voters are asked to rank candidates. If a candidate receives an absolute majority of the first preference, he is elected. If no candidate reaches this threshold, the weakest candidate is eliminated and the ballots are redistributed according to second preferences. This process continues till one of the still-standing candidates reaches the majority of votes.

4.3. Education as a spreading tool of “ethnonational truths”

The process of state-building in BiH faces an alarming trend of radicalization of youth. Ethnonationalism, separatism, and religious extremism pose a threat to multinational and multireligious states. The trend of youth radicalization is caused by an interplay of several factors such as demographic, social, political and economic reasons. All the factors could be mitigated by fine quality and inclusive education, yet education in BiH is very far away from those qualities. In general, we can say that education plays an important role in building collective memories, thus education process can be a tool that generates brotherhood or ethnic hatred. Ethnonational elites in BiH understood the importance of education and craftily designed the educational system in a way that it maintains divisions in society. The aim of this policy is to maintain the ethnic and religious specificities of territories. Thus although the war is officially over, its battleground has shifted to other areas such as education (Oruc & Obradovic, 2020).

While education in the world is increasingly becoming more centralized and unified, education in BiH remains fragmented and differentiated. The current education system mirrors the administrative landscape of the country created by the Dayton Agreement. In practice, this means that each canton has its own ministry of education which creates a disintegrated system of thirteen ministries dealing with the education policies of elementary and secondary schools which are teaching according to three different curriculums. In

Republika Srpska is educational system centralized by curricula that teach in a mono-ethnic and nationalist manner. In the Federation of BiH is applied the educational design of the so-called “Two schools under one roof”. It evolved as a temporary solution for a post-war period that would incentivize refugees and displaced people to return to their former homes, yet even today, decades after the war, there are still more than thirty schools operating under this design. Under this model of education are Bosniaks and Croats separated into different classrooms where they are taught according to different curriculums and sometimes segregated to such an extent that students are physically separated by fences and forced to use different entrances. Teachers are also chosen based on their ethnicities. Ethnical segregation of students and teachers combined with curriculums in which religious aspects are pronounced and exclusive dominant group’s narratives, history and culture promoted, cannot lead to the reconstruction of current divergent identities into identities ensuring state-building (Bravi, 2023).

Since the separation of children based on their ethnicity only strengthens prejudices and intolerance, and further isolates children in their ethnic bubbles, BiH needs to drop this practice to the full extent and furthermore centralize an educational system that would ensure the creation of a single-nation curriculum that would teach children history without disseminating “ethnonational truths”. Yet, new schools following the segregation design are inaugurated across the Federation of BiH with excuses that the design ensures students' rights to receive education in their own native language. Schools used to refer to “education in native language” as a reason for segregation since Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian are considered as different languages even though speakers of these languages understand each other perfectly. Although the Supreme Court of the Federation of BiH ruled the model of “Two schools under one roof” represents ethnic segregation and as such is unacceptable, segregation in schools remains a practice (Bravi, 2023).

4.4. Formation of seeming homogeneity through culture and sport

When I am referring to the term “homogeneity”, I mean the promotion of homogeneity as described by social constructivist Wendt, which means the celebration and promotion of what unites citizens of BiH. Advancing homogeneity, as Wendt describes it, has nothing to do with attempts to create homogeneity through ethnic cleansing or genocide as it happened during the Bosnian War. In order to form identities exceeding ethnonationalism, promotion of a common language, history, culture, and state is crucial. In this sense is a very effective

approach to rebuilding and looking after places with interpretative significance such as the rebuilding process of Stari Most in Mostar. To rebuild a highly symbolic old bridge that links the Bosnian side of Mostar with the Croatian side of the city, which was destroyed during the Bosnian War, reminds its multicultural past (Grodach, 2002). Financial assistance to museums that narrate the story of the Bosnian War in a complex manner is another way of promoting homogeneity through collective memory. For example, Sarajevo's Museum of War Childhood represents one facility that develops collective, historical, and cultural memory within the society (Takševa, 2018). Sport can also bond people together as it happened in 1984 during the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo. The event brought a sense of pride to the people of BiH and even nowadays is celebrated and remembered. Although the facility used for the Winter Olympics was destroyed during the Siege of Sarajevo, the sports complexes were at least partially reconstructed, and gain organization of bigger sports international events with financial assistance from the international community could enhance the feeling of “we” in the country.

4.5. High Representative and Bonn powers

The position of High Representative (HR) was established by the Dayton agreement as an institution responsible for monitoring and coordinating peace settlement and reconciliation. HR is de facto responsible to numerous international organizations such as the Security Council of the UN, the European Union, and more than 50 countries which are represented in the Peace Implementation Council through which is HR elected and appointed. Although HR started with a very limited budget and almost an observatory position in the political system of BiH, over time HR's role changed. The year 1997 is considered to be a watershed moment in HR's position in BiH. The office was given executive and legislative control over BiH with the Bonn powers. In practice, it meant that since then was HR able to issue legally binding decisions, alter or revoke laws, amend the Constitution, and overturn judicial decisions. Furthermore, HR could from now on remove any elected officials and non-elected public servants who pose a threat to the implementation of the Dayton agreement, engage in corruption or mismanage public property. Bonn powers were game-changer in the political reality of the country and HR was no longer in a wait-and-see role but rather stepped up to a more proactive role. Nevertheless, the EU hoped that Bonn powers would become soon obsolete and overcome institute since Bonn powers were perceived as “push powers” that were forcing BiH into a certain political reality rather than motivating it to voluntarily state-building development. By contrast, the inclusion in the European institutions was perceived

as a “pull power” that would in the long run replace Bonn powers. Today, we know that this was only wishful thinking of the EU and Bonn powers developed from complementary political actor to necessary political actor keeping the country together (Beglerović, 2022) (Dijkstra & Raadschelders, 2022).

As a history of HR post proves, HR’s performance varies according to the institute's powers, received support from local and international actors, and the challenges it faces. When the international community stands still behind HR and at least part of the local actors approve its doings, HR performance tends to be more effective. Between 1887 and 2009 was HR very proactive with interferences in BiH. It proceeds to almost 900 decisions with the majority of the decisions being related to the removals of officials from offices. The number of HR’s decisions significantly decreased from 2010 to now, with only a little over 50 decisions being made. Current HR, Christian Schmidt, faces severe challenges as his predecessor did not succeed in the process of state-building. HR Schmidt is not accepted as legitimate by the political leadership of Republika Srpska. According to Dodik, the leader of Bosnian Serbs, HR Schmidt needs to be appointed by the UN Security Council and the appointment of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) is not sufficient. The decision of appointment in PIC was not unanimous as Russia refused to endorse Schmidt into the position. Yet even though unanimity is desirable, it is not legally necessary and Schmidt became legally HR. Aside from rejecting HR’s legitimacy, Dodik refuses the current constitutional order when referring to a return to the so-called “original Dayton”. That is an implication to the state of politics before mutually approved reforms by political elites of the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska about the transfer of selected competencies from entities to the state level (e.g., the state control of the army) (Beglerović, 2022).

Although HR’s legitimacy is constantly undermined by political elites from Republika Srpska and polls about the approval rating of the office are not systematically collected to determine the popularity of the office, HR needs to be more proactive. HR can assist with the development of several favorable aspects discussed in the theoretical framework needed for the reconstruction of current opposing identities. It can promote interdependence, homogeneity even self-restraint moreover, HR has the Bonn powers to rectify broken aspects of the current form of consociational democracy in the country. BiH can hardly reconstruct its identities if HR does not act. Leaders of Republika Srpska cannot remain in positions while publicly threatening that they will secede from BiH and thus will not abide by the

Dayton Agreement. Relativization of genocide in Srebrenica and the glorification of war criminals by political elites is also unacceptable. Illegal celebration of a self-proclaimed national holiday accompanied by a military parade where Dodik openly calls for secession by all available means to prevent any state-building (Radovanovic, 2024). Long 12 years of HR Valentin Inzko framed by little interference in BiH clearly did not bring desired outcomes. HR Schmidt needs to become progressively more proactive than he is right now even at the cost of causing short-term instability. HR's actions could be perceived as illegitimate but we should not forget that the Bosnian population strives for change. Public trust in political parties, politicians and institutions eroded a long time ago. According to NDI polling, an alarming 90% of the population thinks that BiH is moving in the wrong direction (NDI, 2021) Public opinions are ruled by dissatisfaction with the current socioeconomic situation and the population hopes for a political earthquake (Keegan, 2022). However, such bold moves require the political backing of the relevant members of the international community, namely the EU and the US. Advisable would be also a substantial increase of military personnel of peacekeeping mission EUFOR Althea in case of actual secession attempts or Republika Srpska from BiH and a strong pledge of the West that it would intervene.

4.6. External influence

BiH does not occur in a geopolitical vacuum. The country is influenced by external factors more than any post-Yugoslav country due to its unique political system rising from the Dayton agreement. Based on everyday Bosnian political reality, can be assumed that an important factor currently holding the country together is the pressure of external actors on Bosnian territorial integrity. The external pressure corresponds with Wendt's idea of common fate however, forced coexistence of all ethnic groups inside BiH, as advanced by the West, does not translate into the formation of new and peaceful collective identities and thus objective interdependence of actors did not become also subjective interdependence. Actors currently do not consider the interests of other actors as their own and external pressure is unlikely to change this situation. Change as such needs to come from inside the state, yet it does not mean that external actors cannot contribute to the building of new collective identities. A good starting point would be a renunciation of Serbia and Croatia once and for all of efforts to reunify with ethnonational Serbian and Croatian populations in other states. Serbia and Croatia will remain to play an important role in Bosnian state-building since they are ethnonational "parent-states" of two of three ethnonational groups in

BiH and as such they should act responsibly in order to maintain Bosnian territorial integrity. However, the idea of some form of reunification or at least the shattering of BiH remains present in both Serbia and Croatia (N1, 2020). In Serbian politics is the concept of the so-called “Srpski svet”¹ present and dangerously is creeping into the foreign affairs of the country (Vukićević & Tuhina, 2021). Therefore the collective West should make a political and economic effort to persuade Serbia and Croatia to drop revisionistic and nationalistic rhetoric and action. Furthermore, the West should assist both countries in overcoming their own war-related traumas and identities since identities in BiH are intertwined with those in Serbia and Croatia.

¹ The term is a substitute for an earlier used term of „Greater Serbia“ which represents the creation of a Serbian state which would incorporate all regions of traditional significance to Serbs including even territories nowadays outside of Serbia. The exact territories that are included in Greater Serbia are not generally agreed upon, yet usually are discussed territories of modern-day BiH, Montenegro, Kosovo and sometimes Croatia.

Conclusion

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural state with a deeply divided society. While ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse was BiH for centuries, the current deep societal division is an outcome of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, namely the Bosnian War. During the Tito Yugoslavia were ethnonational identities sidelined and the empty space it created was filled with the new concept known as “Brotherhood and Unity”. The concept represented the creation of identity based on class and pan-Slavism that transcend traditional forms of ethnic, national and religious division. After the death of Tito, Yugoslavia started to slowly but steadily slide into ethnonational conflicts and BiH became a main battleground and its citizens the main victims of the dissolution. During the Bosnian War died around 100,000 people and over two million others were displaced. The whole country lied in ruins. The collective identities just before the war and during the war formed on strong ethnonationalism that was primarily flamed by elites. From the perspective of the identities was the war a watershed moment since it forcefully reinforced the formation of distinct Bosniak identity from Serbian and Croatian identities. Moreover, the war only intensified the emphasis on ethnonationalism in all three main identities present in BiH from then till nowadays. The post-war era can be characterized by the dominance of the three distinct metta-narratives about the past which are accompanied by post-war self-victimization that is translated into opposing collective identities and thus into modern everyday political reality in BiH.

I identified the conflicting elements of collective identities in BiH to be enduring ethnonationalism and specifically the dispute over the interpretation of the past, namely the Bosnian War. While tracking of development and identification of conflicting elements in collective identities was a complex yet clear task, finding the way that would lead to the reconstruction of opposing collective identities into collective identities ensuring progress in state-building is much more complicated. Therefore I have outlined a set of concrete measures that are supposed to be undertaken in order to achieve the change. First and foremost, to reach transitional justice is a prerequisite for any reconciliation and reformation of identities. Namely, serving justice, return of displaced people and focusing on rebuilding inter-group relationships through state-sponsored inter-group dialogue. Secondly, reform of the Dayton Agreement which institutionalized ethnicity and froze ethnic division is needed.

Furthermore, education requires complex reform leading to the centralization of the educational system and the creation of a single-nation curriculum that would teach children history without disseminating “ethnonational truths”. Thirdly, the state and international community should further finance Bosnian sports, culture and places with interpretative significance in order to promote seeming homogeneity. Last but not least, a large chunk of responsibility for the future of BiH and the reconstruction of collective identities lies in external influence. High Representative in BiH hold significant power to intervene in BiH. High Representative should act more proactively and strictly eliminate any legislative or judicial decision and politician from political life that pose a threat to the implementation of the Dayton agreement. However, such bold moves require the political backing of the relevant members of the international community, namely the EU and the US. The situation in BiH would help also restrain from intervening on behalf of Croats and Serbs by Croatia and Serbia. Revisionistic and nationalistic rhetoric and action from Zagreb and Belgrade usually only escalate inter-group conflict in BiH rather than settle it.

The above-mentioned measures would in an ideal world be implemented overnight and the reconstruction of current opposing identities could begin immediately. Yet, we do not live in the ideal world. To enforce the measures leading to the change requires willingness, a lot of political capital, economic assistance, and potentially further military presence of peacekeeping mission EUFOR Althea. Likely, the most complicated reforms such as the opening of the Dayton Agreement or the reaching of transitional justice require a lot of time therefore in the meantime a proactive High Representative willing to use Bonn's powers to rectify the missteps of politicians is needed. Reconstruction of identities is an ongoing and complex process and it is possible that it will not be fully successful in any foreseeable future. Yet, it is the only hope for the country how to evade further escalation of the inter-group conflict that would bring another meaningless misery and in the longer run would not solve anything.

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