

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AS A FACTOR OF THE WESTERN BALKAN SECURITY SUBCOMPLEX

Review Article

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Abstract: Relying on the basic theoretical assumptions of the Copenhagen School, especially the sectoral understanding of security and Regional Security Complex Theory, the paper analyzes the security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), its implications for the wider Western Balkan security environment, including the situation in BiH realized in the context of differentiating the Western Balkan security subcomplex in relation to the wider European security identity which has an impact on the region. The aim of this paper is to point out the key factors that determine the security situation in BiH and its surrounding region, including the specificities of the security context in BiH, which is reflected in the essential inseparability of its political and societal dimension, because the issue of collective identity in BiH, which is exclusively grounded on the ethno-political premises manifested through its Dayton constitutional structure and the consociative character of its political system. Therefore, the paper concludes, among other things, that the causes of the unfavorable security situation in BiH and its negative implications for the region must primarily be sought in the permanent conflict between the three ethno-political identities and the dysfunctionality of political mechanisms for conflict resolutions, including inadequate policies which have been applied to Dayton BiH by key representatives of the European security identity, such as the European Union and NATO, almost since its establishment.

Keywords: BiH; Western Balkan security subcomplex; political security; societal security; Serbia; Croatia; European security identity; EU; NATO;

INTRODUCTION

Two probably most eminent representatives of the so-called Copenhagen school, Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, offered an essentially neorealist theoretical setting in which local regions, as relatively autonomous security complexes

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with their own internal dynamics, but also complex interrelationships and interconnections with environment in which they operate, were singled out as key actors of the modern international political and security system (Buzan & Weaver, 2003). Within regional security identities, in certain cases, there are narrower security subcomplexes which, on the one hand, rely on the broader framework under their impact, but, on the other hand, are characterized by a series of immanent properties that separate them from regional security complexes (Kelly, 2007; Santini, 2017). Within the given theoretical matrix, the paper attempts to look at the basic characteristics of the Western Balkans as a security subcomplex in relation to the broader European security framework with which it is firmly connected, the prospective of the Western Balkan security identity and, in particular, the impact which BiH, with its complex internal security dynamics, has on a wider environment, manifesting itself as a key factor in preserving the security identity of the Western Balkans. Key issues within the subject of this study are considered using the conceptual-categorical apparatus and methodological tools of international relations and security studies, across several analytical levels: a) identifying key features of the Western Balkan subcomplex that differentiate and separate from the wider European complex, b) considering the basic factors and characteristics of the internal security context in BiH itself, c) the nature of BiH's relations with other relevant Western Balkan entities, primarily Serbia and Croatia, and d) BiH's direct relations with key bearers of European security identity, such as the European Union and NATO. Following the analysis, the author's concluding remarks are presented.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WESTERN BALKAN SECURITY IDENTITY

Yugoslavia's bloody collapse and the wars of "Yugoslav succession" (Bakić, 2011: 109 - 139) in the 1990s, with their multidimensional implications, differentiated the political space of the former SFRY in relation to the rest of Europe. Contrary to the integrative processes which, with the collapse of bipolarism, gained momentum in the rest of Europe and contributed to the construction of a new European security identity, structurally and institutionally embodied in the European Union and NATO, the former SFRY moved in the opposite direction, facing the phenomenon of Balkanization (Todorova, 2015) and successive armed conflicts in the form of a civil war with foreign intervention. In other words, unlike the European security complex, integration, liberalization and desecuritization as its basic characteristics, the area, which has been referred to by the clumsy geopolitical term "Western Balkans" since 1998, has imposed itself as a separate but not fully rounded security context in which the focus was placed on phenomena and processes which were "at the other end of the pendulum" in relation to those characterized by the broader European security framework (Skočajić – Juvan and Grizold, 2017). After a considerable delay and

failure by the key European and international actors in general to immediately stop, if it was not possible to prevent, the armed conflicts in some former Yugoslav republics, a dilemma over a foundation on which to develop future relations with this turbulent area arose – to gradually incorporate it into the wider European political and security framework or to treat it as an external security challenge. The issue was resolved in the late 1990s by establishing a comprehensive political approach to the region and creating a possibility for integrating the Western Balkan countries into the European Union and NATO and, thus, pulling the transformed Western Balkan subcomplex into the wider European security complex. Nominally, with the successful implementation of integration processes, the implementation of necessary reforms and development of regional cooperation, the overlay of the Western Balkan subcomplex by the European security complex would become more and more apparent, with the final outcome being a total merging of identities (Vučić and Milenković, 2014).

However, regardless of the various failures/successes of the countries in the region on their path to the EU or the fact that some of them have joined NATO, the Western Balkan security identity is still present and clearly visible. Its specificity is especially reflected in the strong intertwining of the political (Weaver, 2011) and societal (Panić, 2009) security dimensions (Leka, 2020: 207), in the sense that the issues of national, religious and cultural identity are still important, while in some Western Balkan countries, it is the only basis for mobilizing political legitimacy and political articulation. With the exception of global threats, countries in the region identify security threats primarily in interethnic and interreligious relations, which are, in this sense, far more oriented to one another than to external factors, developing internal regional security dynamics different from those present in the rest of Europe. Regardless of the involvement of the countries in the region in the integration and reform processes of varying intensity, which results, among other things, in the partial adoption of certain elements of the European security identity, the Western Balkans still exist as a relatively autonomous security entity. Although other Western Balkan countries, such as Northern Macedonia, could serve as a good example, it seems that the specific security characteristics of the region are most pronounced in BiH; the following section, therefore, deals with the most important features, phenomena and processes which not only create a context in this state union, but they also significantly affect the overall security situation in the region.

CURRENT SECURITY CONTEXT IN POST-DAYTON BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Although 26 years have passed since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, which, as it is usually said, ended the civil war and defined its constitu-

tional structure and political system, BiH is still characterized by a high level of securitization of the overall political, societal, military, economic and even the ecological spheres and it still represents a deeply divided and fragmented socio-political community whose rare homogenizing factors are exclusively external in nature. The roots of continued securitization can be identified primarily in opposing perceptions, and thus attitudes toward the Dayton structure of BiH by key domestic and international political factors. In other words, the three constituent peoples differently perceive BiH and build a relationship with it and its remaining two constituent peoples. On the one hand, Bosniak political actors, as representatives of a people who constitute a majority of the country's population, openly try to functionally bring almost every political process and activity under the matrix of the unitarization of the internal structure of BiH with the ultimate goal of abolishing the two entities and establishing a "civil state" where relations would be regulated in accordance with the needs and identity value elements of one people in BiH (Party of Democratic Action, 2019). In parallel with the formal and, more often than not, informal revision of the Dayton constitutional structure attempts are being made to impose a "Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity" as a "common determinant of all citizens of BiH and a feeling of belonging to the BiH state" (Maksimović, 2019). Such processes automatically lead to responses primarily by Republika Srpska, as the state-building framework of the Serbian people in BiH, but also one of the signatories of key annexes to the Dayton Peace Agreement,² and a strong securitization of all issues related to the place of the Serbian people in this former Yugoslav republic. Representatives of Croats, whose place within the FBiH is threatened by Bosniak dominance and, unlike the Serbs and Republika Srpska, the lack of an appropriate constitutional and political-institutional framework which would provide adequate protection and political autonomy to Croats, perceive such projections of Bosniak political actors as an immediate political danger and a direct attention to ensuring the "equality" of Croats in BiH, especially in the FBiH, through changes in electoral legislation which, with the implementation of the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the *Sejdic and Finci vs. BiH* case (Bardutzky, 2010), would enable Croats to elect their own legitimate political representatives, rather than the Bosniak electorate doing so on their behalf (Croatian Media Service, 2020, September 25).

With complex relations between the three constituent peoples and their political representatives spilling over into all spheres of social life, maintaining a constant sense of threat and securitization, an additional aggravating circumstance for internal relations and, in particular, political and social security, is and the actions of the High Representative in BiH, who through a series of his unconstitutional decisions significantly modified the Dayton structure and distribution of competencies between certain levels of government, as a rule to the

² Particular emphasis is placed on Annex IV, which constitutes the Constitution of BiH, and Annex X, which regulates the civilian aspects of the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, including the place and competencies of an international community's High Representative in BiH.

detriment of the entities, more specifically, the Republika Srpska. In the last few years, under the circumstances when the High Representative's instruments of power are relatively weakening due to political response by Republika Srpska (National Assembly of Republika Srpska [NARS] 2021), his *modus operandi* has been used by the Constitutional Court, nominally a BiH institution but also the only constitutional court in Europe and one of the two constitutional courts in the world, with a panel of three foreign judges who, along with the Bosniak judges, impose decisions with strong unitarian implications through revoting.

The relationship between the domestic actors and accumulated unresolved issues related to its existence, functionality and direction of political development and, as will be seen, many systemic errors made by relevant international actors keep BiH's political and societal security in a state of permanent threat, minimizing opportunities for joint action, including the issues which, like the current pandemic crisis, pose an identical security threat to all.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND THE WESTERN BALKAN SECURITY SUBCOMPLEX

Starting with its ethnic and constitutional structure, autonomous political activities of its two entities and ethnic collectives, including a shared Yugoslav past and the current formal bonds with most of the countries in the region, the security contexts of BiH and the Western Balkans are strongly connected and determined. The security situation in BiH, especially at the political and societal levels, is transposed to other countries in the region similarly to the actions of other Western Balkan countries, especially Serbia and Croatia although the latter joined the European Union on July 1, 2013 and thus, formally, joined the broader European security identity, which reflect on the internal relations in BiH. At the same time, regardless of the fact that, according to the standards of international law and the provisions of Annex IV of the Dayton Peace Agreement, BiH is the only state which assumed the legal continuity from the former "Republic of BiH", including membership in the United Nations³, heterogeneity in approaching a number of issues is particularly pronounced in BiH's activities at the international level, including its relations with certain Western Balkan countries, particularly with the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Croatia. The following section deals with key political points in BiH's contemporary relations with these two neighboring countries. Political and societal security threats in the Western Balkans, where ethnic-religious identities are at the center, are manifested in the tripartite principle, as is the case with the BiH–Serbia–Croatia relationship or, on the other hand, the Serbia–Macedonia–Kosovo* relationship, if the focus is placed on the Albanian national question and the security threats it induces.

³ Article I - 1 of the Constitution of BiH.

Regarding the Republic of Serbia, as one of the signatories of the Dayton contract package, a sharp distinction can be identified between the relations developing between Republika Srpska and Serbia on the one hand, and the federal part of BiH or the institutions of BiH and Serbia on the other. Based on the possibilities provided by Article III - 2 of the Constitution of BiH, Republika Srpska and Serbia signed the Agreement on Special Parallel Relations in September 2006, as a broader platform for the development of mutual relations in various fields and the Political and Economic Representative Office of Republika Srpska in Belgrade which was established in 1992, with the basic task of facilitating and managing the cooperation between the two entities. Although their relations during the post-Dayton period went through different phases, Republika Srpska is, naturally, leaning on Serbia and trying to follow the official policy of Belgrade on numerous issues, taking into account that members of the same people live on both sides of the River Drina. For example, BiH is the only country in the region that, due to Republika Srpska's objections, has not recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo and Metohija in 2008. Also, following the official policy of armed neutrality of the Republic of Serbia, but also rejecting the possibility of establishing a "NATO border" along the River Drina, Republika Srpska strongly opposes BiH's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance, which was expressed in the 2017 Resolution of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska on the Protection of Constitutional Order, which, however, does not target exclusively NATO, but contains a general formulation of armed neutrality in relation to the existing military alliances until a referendum is called in Republika Srpska, in which a final decision on this issue would be decided (National Assembly of Republika Srpska, 2017). Generally, for Republika Srpska the development of relations and strong reliance on Serbia, as the regionally strongest political, military and economic actor, represents a crucial factor in strengthening security under the circumstances of strong pressure from domestic and international factors.

On the other hand, actors across the Bosniak political spectrum and those whose basic political platform is the "statehood" and "sovereignty" of BiH view Serbia's actions and its positioning in the region through the prism of security threats and securitization. There are two groups of reasons for this perception. One group consists, loosely speaking, of inherited factors through which the concept of only one nation as a victim of the 1992-1995 armed conflicts and Serbia as an "aggressor" was established and developed (Dupljak, 2001; International Crisis Group, 2011), which has been, partly through inertia but basically intentionally, transposed to the present day. The second group of factors is related to the fear of this group of political actors from shifts in the distribution of power in the region and possible implications for internal relations in BiH, especially regarding the position of Republika Srpska. At the same time, this does not prevent Bosniak political actors from following the ethnic line, trying to develop intensive cooperation with political actors in the Raska region (Sandzak) in the Republic of Serbia, and BiH has recently opened its office of consular affairs in Novi Pazar.

The Republic of Croatia, like Serbia, is a signatory to the Dayton Peace Agreement. Although at the general level relations between BiH and Croatia during the post-Dayton period could be assessed as satisfactory, one of the key issues in relations between the two countries in recent years has been the position of Croats in BiH and their struggle for political equality in terms of securing the right to elect their legitimate political representatives, for which Croatia has expressed interest with varying intensity at certain stages, from relativization and inertia to openly expressing its concern (Nacional (September 25, 2020)). According to the Croatian legislation, BiH citizens of Croatian nationality have the right to a facilitated acquisition of citizenship and travel documents of the Republic of Croatia and often manifest themselves as an important factor in the election process for the Croatian Parliament. First as a candidate for membership and today as a member of the European Union and NATO, Croatia's official policy toward BiH is aimed at strengthening good neighborly relations and providing support to BiH on its "path to EU". However, this certainly does not mean that certain issues did not cause tension between the two countries, such as the construction of the Peljesac bridge and, according to political actors based in Sarajevo, a serious violation of the territorial integrity of BiH and denial of access to the high seas (Huseinović, 2018); (Jazvić, 2019). BiH has the longest land border with Croatia amounting to 1,047 kilometers and a number of open territorial issues, from the area of Neum, over the bank of the river Una to the border area between Bihac and Korenica.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND THE WIDER EUROPEAN SECURITY COMPLEX

Like other countries in the region, BiH has been actively involved in the integration processes into Western political, economic and security structures, the end result of which is, among other things, the transformation of unstable Western Balkan countries in line with the prerogatives and standards of the European security complex. Two key institutional authorities regarding the transformation process are certainly the European Union and NATO; however, it seems that the results of the activities undertaken so far are far less from expected, especially regarding BiH.

Nominally, BiH is at the back of the "Western Balkan column" in terms of the results achieved in the Stabilization and Association Process, as a key political instrument of the European Union's regional approach to this area. Although it represents one of the few homogenizing factors in the deeply divided and very conflicting BiH's political space, the process of European integration, since the conclusion of the contract with the European Union in 2008, has been burdened by numerous delays and crises for which political actors in BiH do not bear a sole responsibility. One problem is the issue of "reconciliation" of the complex and highly decentralized constitutional-legal and institutional

structure of BiH with the requirements of efficient implementation of obligations arising from the accession process. In this sense, it is possible to identify two opposing views. On the one hand, there is a legalist approach whose main advocate are Republika Srpska's institutions, which indicate that the obligations from the process can be successfully implemented in the existing Dayton constitutional framework, as evidenced by the results achieved, in this context, by Republika Srpska. Contrary to this, there is an approach embodied in the attitudes and actions of political actors based in Sarajevo, which means an attempt to manipulate the integration process to completely redefine the constitutional structure and centralize and strengthen the position and competencies of the institutions of BiH. In the collision of two opposing concepts, regardless of the nominal compromise expressed through the "Coordination System in the European Integration Process in BiH" (Council of Ministers, 2016), which seeks to ensure coordinated and coherent action by all levels of government in the European integration process in accordance with their constitutional competencies, and to ensure that BiH has "one vote" in relations with Brussels, and the basic characteristic of BiH's "path to the EU" is the stagnation and continued securitization of the process. At the same time, this situation is supported by the approach, often unadapted and insufficiently flexible, of the European Union itself and BiH's every formal step forward in the process is conditioned by meeting the requirements which are not in line with the *acquis*, which are inappropriate for a country with BiH status, particularly those which deeply encroach on the constitutional configuration and competencies of the entities, meaning their implementation is already doomed to failure. It suffices to refer to the conditions laid down by the European Commission before BiH in terms of granting candidate status to BiH, among which are those related to the transfer of a large portion of jurisdiction in the area of justice from the entity level to BiH level, including certain functions of constitutional courts and the legalization of a number of non-Dayton, that is, unconstitutional institutions, as well as processes and practices at the level of BiH that had been established under pressure exerted by the international factor, primarily the Office of the High Representative (European Commission, 2019). At the same time, the position of BiH as a country involved in the process of European integration is irreconcilable with its status as a territory under protectorate, personalized in the High Representative, despite the fact that the European Union with its member states finances the Office of the High Representative and his/her actions (Office of the High Representative [OHR] 2021). Faced with numerous internal problems which are systemic in nature and failing to offer a concrete and clear European perspective whose realization would be based on more appropriate political and economic and financial instruments, the European Union has significantly lost its transformative power (Kovačević, 2019: 26-49) in relation to the entire region, especially in relation to a country with very complex relations such as BiH.

Regarding NATO as the second authority which should assist BiH in implementing the necessary reforms which would help to overcome the Balkan

and accept the European (Euro-Atlantic) security identity, the situation is even more complex. While there is a nominal consensus on the European integration process of all its constituents and their political representatives, the issue of BiH's integration into NATO, in itself, means sharp divisions, securitization and political tensions. As already mentioned, the institutions of Republika Srpska, which follow the official policy of armed neutrality of the Republic of Serbia on this issue, strongly oppose BiH to enter NATO. Therefore, regardless of the presence of NATO forces in BiH, though in a more specific form than before, and regardless of the cooperation that the Armed Forces of BiH have with this military-political organization, the usual strategic planning and operational instruments inherent in countries on the formal path to NATO membership are not used, nominally or essentially, in relations between BiH and NATO

The development of mutual relations so far indicates that the central goal of both the European Union and NATO in relation to the Western Balkan region is to cut off "Russian malignant influence" in this area (Radio Free Europe (July 2, 2019)), which would, according to this projection, ensure its stronger reliance on Euro-Atlantic political, security and any other identity and a far higher level of security in the "European backyard." At the same time, the focus of corrective action undertaken by Western powers in the Western Balkans is collective identities and policies identified as "promoters" of Russian presence in this region.

In addition to the instability they induce at their external borders, the Western Balkans are also, in relation to the European Union, the "exporter" of specific security threats, among which are terrorism-related threats (Vukoičić, 2018: 103-117), especially in light of the connections of individuals and organized groups which took part in the armed conflicts in the region in the 1990s or in the armed conflicts in Syria, with the terrorist acts carried out in Western Europe over the last few years. According to the existing data, seven organizations which have their branches in BiH are on the sanction list of entities associated with terrorism, which is regularly published and updated by the UN Security Council (United Nations Security Council, 2021).

CONCLUSION

BiH, with its internal relations, accumulated political and security problems, specific internal security dynamics and, in particular, the transposition of its internal complexity and vagueness to relations with other countries in the region, primarily the Republic of Serbia and, to a lesser extent, the Republic of Croatia, as signatories to the Dayton Peace Agreement and perceived as homelands of its two constituent peoples, manifests itself as a key factor in the Western Balkan security subcomplex.

The internal political and societal security context in BiH, with occasional and relatively short "detente phases", has been extremely unfavorable since

the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, while conflicting perceptions of BiH as a constitutional, political and even cultural framework for independently exercising the identity content elements of its constituent peoples lie at its core. In other words, at the heart of the internal conflict is a collision between a concept which insists on preserving and protecting the Dayton constitutional and political framework as a guarantee of autonomy on ethnic and religious criteria of the collective identities established and a concept which seeks to recompose BiH's internal structure and establish a new – “civic” BiH identity which assumes politically and security-wise dangerous outvoting by the largest constituent people and submerging of traditional ethno-religious identities in an artificial identity matrix based on “Bosnian” national prerogatives. Conceptual opposition at this basic level results in the constant securitization of almost all relevant issues across the social spectrum, deep divisions and tensions in public discourse which includes the issue of the very survival of BiH as a political community.

At the same time, in addition to the legacies of the war, the internal situation in BiH is strongly reflected in relations in the region, especially in the dominant ethnic triangle – Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks – which, along with unresolved Serb-Albanian and Macedonian-Albanian relations, is a key to stabilizing the region and its gradual security transformations.

At the very least, the responsibility for the unfavorable political and security situation in BiH, and indirectly in the region, is also borne by the strongly present international factor, starting from the outdated, counterproductive and legally highly questionable High Representative in BiH, to the European Union and NATO, which, instead of manifesting themselves as key facilitators of the security-identity transition in this region, contribute to the deepening of the unfavorable situation with their unadapted approaches and policies and often unilateral engagement in favor of one of the three constituent actors. In the interaction of the elements of the two security identities, the advantage is still given to the Western Balkan identity, while the European identity, which is embodied primarily in the actions and policies of the European Union, proves insufficiently potent to achieve key transformative influence and more firmly incorporate this sensitive area into its own stabilization framework.

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