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ETHNIC DIVISIONS AND POWER POLITICS: UNRAVELLING THE BARRIERS TO MANAGING DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

This article critically investigates the factors leading to the stagnation of democratization and the persistence of societal divisions in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), with a particular focus on the role of political elites. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines historical comparative analysis with qualitative content analysis of political developments, media reports, and public statements. The research uncovers that political elites in BH have systematically exploited and deepened ethnic divisions as a means to consolidate and maintain power supporting the hypothesis that insufficient success in managing diversity is influenced by the interests of political elites to maintain political power through ethnic divisions. This process of homogenizing ethnic groups for political leverage is identified as a significant barrier to democratization and societal integration. The study also examines the lingering effects of ex-Yugoslav socialism and regional geopolitical influences, particularly the relationships with Serbia and Croatia, in shaping the nation's political and ethnic landscape. The main findings highlight that the deliberate actions of political elites, aimed at reinforcing their power bases through ethnic polarization, are the principal contributors to the failed democratization and the continuation of a divided society. The study underscores the necessity for policy interventions that target the root causes of ethnic division, emphasizing the need for political reforms that diminish the power of elites to manipulate ethnic identities for their gain. These insights are vital for understanding the challenges in BH and offer valuable lessons for other post-conflict and multi-ethnic societies grappling with democratization and ethnic reconciliation.

Keywords: democratization and transition; diversity management, post-conflict societies, Bosnia and Herzegovina, European Union integration, nationalism and ethnicity, social cohesion

1. INTRODUCTION

The journey towards democratization in post-conflict societies often unfolds within a complex matrix of historical legacies, ethnic heterogeneity, and political maneuvering. This is particularly evident in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country emerging from the ravages of conflict in the 1990s, where the path to democracy has been hindered by deep-seated ethnic divisions and the strategic actions of political elites. This article aims to dissect these intertwined challenges, providing a nuanced understanding of the barriers to democratization in a post-conflict setting.

At the heart of Bosnia and Herzegovina's struggle lies a paradox: the very mechanisms established to bring about peace and democracy post-conflict have, in some respects, perpetuated divisions. The Dayton Peace Accords, while instrumental in ending the Bosnian War, inadvertently laid the groundwork for a political system that often exacerbates ethnic segmentation. This system has been skillfully exploited by political elites who, driven by the desire to consolidate their power, have continued to stoke ethnic tensions, thereby hampering efforts towards building a unified, democratic state.

To explore this complex landscape, the article employs a mixed-methods approach. It begins with a historical comparative analysis, tracing the socio-political evolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the ex-Yugoslav era to its current state. This historical perspective is crucial in understanding the deep-rooted nature of ethnic divisions and their exploitation by political forces. The study then delves into a qualitative content analysis of recent political developments, media narratives, and public discourses, particularly following the significant political shifts in the 2022 general elections in order to evaluate the main narratives of political elite in Bosnia and Herzegovina and put them in context of their role in management of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Moreover, the research examines the role of the European Union integration process and its impact on the nation's political dynamics and ethnic relations. The EU's involvement has been a double-edged sword: on one hand, offering a path to greater integration and reform, and on the other, sometimes exacerbating existing tensions or failing to address the underlying issues of ethnic division as different actors use these pressures towards reforms to block the EU path and increase tensions.

Through this exploration, the article seeks to unravel the complex web of factors that impede democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In doing so, it sheds light on the broader challenges faced by post-conflict societies in navigating the path from division to democracy, highlighting the crucial role of political structures, elite behavior, and international influences in this transformative process to test hypothesis that insufficient success in managing diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is influenced by the interests of political elites to maintain political power through ethnic divisions. The insights gained from this study not only contribute to the understanding of Bosnia and Herzegovina's unique situation but also offer valuable lessons for other nations grappling with similar post-conflict dynamics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The democratic management of diversity and relationship to success of democratization in post-conflict societies have been identified to have relationship to various factors such as ideology, political system, media, and economic processes and these are reviewed in this section. The methodological approaches used in studies that relate managing diversity and democratization in post-conflict societies are presented next in order to posit our study within the field and finally identify the gaps in research which this study fills out and contributes to the field by relating role of elites and power politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina as root causes to slow democratization and abuse of diversity in society towards maintaining of status quo in post-conflict society.

2.1. Democratic management of diversity and democratization in post-conflict societies

The relationship between democratic management of diversity and the success of democratization in post-conflict societies is a critical area of study. Research indicates that the way diversity is managed in these societies significantly influences their democratization trajectories.

Varshney (2002) emphasizes the role of interethnic networks and associations in mitigating conflict and fostering democratization. In his analysis of ethnic conflict and civic life, he argues that ethnically heterogeneous networks and civil organizations can play a pivotal role in promoting peace and democracy in multiethnic societies. This perspective is crucial for understanding how the management of ethnic

diversity through inclusive institutions and civic engagement can facilitate democratization.

Lijphart (1969) contributes to this discourse by advocating for consociational democracy as a strategy for managing diversity in divided societies. He posits that power-sharing, group autonomy, proportional representation, and minority veto rights are essential components of successful democratization in ethnically divided societies. His work underscores the importance of institutional arrangements that acknowledge and accommodate diversity, thereby enhancing democratic stability and inclusivity.

Horowitz (2000) challenges this view, arguing that while consociationalism addresses ethnic divisions, it may also entrench them, potentially hindering democratization. He suggests alternative approaches like centripetalism, which incentivizes interethnic cooperation and competition. Horowitz's critique highlights the complexities of managing diversity in a way that promotes democratization without reinforcing divisions.

Kymlicka (2007) expands on these arguments by exploring the role of multicultural policies in post-conflict democratization. He asserts that recognizing and supporting cultural diversity through policies and institutions can build trust among ethnic groups, thereby facilitating the democratization process. This approach aligns with the view that acknowledging and valuing diversity is key to building a democratic society in post-conflict settings.

Paris (2004) discusses the challenges of implementing liberal democracy in post-conflict societies, cautioning against rapid democratization and marketization which can exacerbate ethnic tensions and undermine stability. He advocates for a gradual approach to democratization, with careful management of ethnic diversity and attention to building inclusive institutions.

Mansfield and Snyder (2005) provide a critical perspective on the timing of democratization in ethnically diverse post-conflict societies. They argue that premature democratization, particularly in the presence of strong ethnic divisions, can lead to intensified conflict. Their work suggests that the sequencing of democratization, alongside effective management of diversity, is crucial for the successful transition to democracy.

Varshney's (2002) emphasis on the role of interethnic networks in mitigating conflict aligns closely with the argument that institutional settings and democracy *per se* do not present obstacle to democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina and effective management of diversity presents solution to the post conflict society. Varshney's findings support the notion that fostering interethnic collaboration and civic engagement is pivotal for democratization. This perspective validates this article's emphasis

on the role of civic society and interethnic cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina as essential elements for peace and democracy.

Lijphart's (1969) "Consociational Democracy" is advocated and highlighted due to power-sharing and group autonomy which suggests the necessity of inclusive political structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The presence of diverse ethnic groups in the country necessitates a political system that accommodates this diversity, thereby enhancing democratic stability and inclusivity. This study echoes Lijphart's argument by relating how Bosnia and Herzegovina's approach to managing its ethnic divisions through political frameworks impacts its democratization process.

Horowitz's (2000) critique of consociationalism and his advocacy for centripetalism offer a perspective that is particularly relevant to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This critique aligns with article's exploration of the complexities in managing ethnic divisions without entrenching them further. Horowitz's insights into incentivizing interethnic cooperation present an alternative approach that our study considers when examining the dynamics of ethnic relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and suggesting strategy to effective management of diversity in section 5 of the paper.

Kymlicka's (Kymlicka 2007) exploration of multicultural policies in post-conflict democratization presents the argument that cultural diversity as a strength. His assertion that recognizing and supporting cultural diversity through policies builds trust among ethnic groups is a key concept this study explores in the context of BiH. This approach underlines the importance of culturally inclusive policies for the democratization process.

Berman's (Berman 2017) examination of the role of civil society in democratization is basis for the inclusion of civil society role as a factor in management of diversity in BiH. Her argument that civil society organizations are instrumental in advocating for inclusive policies and fostering a culture of tolerance is mirrored in the section 5 of the paper, which identifies civil society participation as a vital component for successful democratization.

Challenges of rapid democratization presented by Paris (2004) and also Mansfield & Snyder (2005) suggest the caution against rapid democratization but the timing of democracy is less relevant after the plunge into transition already occurring in Bosnia and Herzegovina long time ago. However, it provides the perspective that the society was perhaps prematurely thrown into open society and provide critical context to this study. These insights are particularly relevant to the analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the complex ethnic landscape and post-conflict status demand careful sequencing of democratic reforms and management of diversity.

In summary, these studies collectively provide a theoretical and empirical foundation that posits management of diversity as a key factor in successful democratization in complex post conflict society of BiH. They underscore the importance of inclusive institutions, the role of civil society, the need for balanced political structures, and the careful management of ethnic diversity as key components for the successful democratization of complex, post-conflict societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2.2. The role of political system in democratic management of diversity and democratization in complex societies

The hypothesis evaluated in this study focusing on the democratic management of diversity in post-conflict societies, is significantly reinforced by the arguments presented in studies which collectively provide a robust theoretical and empirical justification for the vital role of democratic systems in managing diversity effectively.

Dunn and Singh (2014) introduce the concept of pluralistic conditioning, positing that exposure to diversity under democratic conditions breeds tolerance and inclusivity. This perspective aligns with our thesis, which considers the impact of Bosnia's democratic evolution on its ability to manage ethnic and cultural differences. The idea that democratic systems, through diverse opinions and fair elections, foster an awareness and acceptance of difference is a fundamental aspect of the strategies for effective management of diversity presented in this paper.

Anderson (2006) delves into the epistemic powers of democratic institutions, highlighting how they utilize the diversity of participants for collective learning. This concept of leveraging diverse experiences through free discourse and accountability is integral to the analysis in this paper. It suggests that democratic norms are essential in creating an environment where diverse groups can coexist and contribute to the collective good, a key consideration in this paper's analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-conflict society.

Tartasiuk (2020) emphasizes the diversity of legal systems in democratic societies, underscoring the importance of freedom of expression and a free media. This analysis supports our studies' focus on the role of legal frameworks and media in shaping public discourse and policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, illustrating how these elements allow for the expression and management of diverse opinions, which are crucial for democratic governance.

In conclusion, the insights from these studies provide a basis for the treatment of political system as determinant of management of diversity and democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They collectively affirm the importance of democratic structures, legal frameworks, inclusive political processes, and the recognition of diverse narratives in effectively managing the complex tapestry of post-conflict societies like BH. Also, these studies collectively underscore the pivotal role of democratic political systems in managing diversity and promoting democratization. They highlight how democratic structures, legal systems, and norms facilitate the inclusion and tolerance of diverse groups, contributing to the stability and harmony of complex societies.

Research into the structural deficiencies of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political system reveals a consensus among scholars like Keil and Bieber that the Dayton framework, while ending the war, embedded ethnic divisions into the governance model, creating a stasis that hampers effective policy-making (Keil 2015; Bieber 2002). Zdeb's analysis further argues that the persistence of ethno-nationalism exacerbates political paralysis, making it challenging to advance beyond the status quo (Zdeb 2019). Similarly, Murtagh's (Murtagh 2018) work on party politics elucidates how ethno-political parties exploit these divisions, prioritizing ethnic agendas over national unity and development. These studies suggest that post-conflict BH faced socio-political challenges that could have interplayed with inability to transcend ethnic lines and hence were contributing to insufficient success in managing of diversity.

2.3. Role of ideology in democratic management of diversity and democratization in complex societies

The insights from the previous studies suggest role of ideology in analyzing the democratic management of diversity and democratization in complex societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina. These studies weave a narrative that underscores the multifaceted impact of ideology on democratic processes and diversity management.

Anderson (2006) and Landemore (2012) both accentuate the role of democratic institutions and processes in harnessing the collective intelligence of diverse groups. Anderson's focus on how democratic norms facilitate learning from diverse experiences provides the basis for this study's our approach of analyzing Bosnia and Herzegovina's democratic structures and their responsiveness to diverse ideological perspectives. Landemore's emphasis on the 'democratic reason' and the epistemic benefits of inclusivity in decision-making processes echoes the suggestion that this

study provides that inclusive political practices can enhance the collective intelligence and governance quality in a pluralistic society.

The conditioning effects of social tolerance discussed by Dunn and Singh (2014) provide a nuanced perspective on how exposure to diversity under different ideological contexts can shape attitudes towards diversity. This insight is instrumental in understanding the complex interplay between Bosnia and Herzegovina's socio-political environment and its citizens' attitudes towards diversity and democratization. It underscores the importance of fostering a positive ideological environment to promote tolerance and inclusivity and the role that media and political elites have in this process in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Syed (2008) further enrich this discourse by illustrating how specific ideological foundations and concepts can inform effective diversity management strategies. Syed's model, based on Jinnah's vision, highlights the role of democratization, egalitarianism, and the rule of law in managing diversity, while Zhang's analysis of Rawls' overlapping consensus concept reveals how ideological pluralism can be harmoniously accommodated in diverse societies. These perspectives support the notion in this study that the ideological underpinnings of Bosnia and Herzegovina's approach to diversity management and democratization are important factor to consider.

2.4. Role of economic processes in democratic management of diversity and democratization in complex societies

Economic development, market dynamics, and the integration of democratic practices within economic institutions are essential for creating inclusive and sustainable democratic environments. The interplay between economic processes and the management of diversity in the context of democratization in complex societies is a multifaceted issue that has been examined from various angles by scholars. The economic framework of a society can significantly influence how diversity is managed and how democratization processes unfold. The studies highlighted here collectively provide a robust underpinning for the hypothesis that economic factors have shaped the outcome that political elites have abused economic processes, emphasizing the integral role of economic processes in the democratic management of diversity and the success of democratization, particularly in complex societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ocampo (2006), with his focus on the interplay between democracy and economic institutions, considers the economic framework as a pivotal factor in shaping the

democratic landscape. His emphasis on integrating economic and social rights within democratic frameworks support the thesis that Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic policies and structures impact its democratization journey. This perspective is vital in understanding the balance between market forces, social cohesion, and democratic processes.

Langmead's (Langmead 2017) examination of democratic practices in economic institutions, particularly worker cooperatives, offers an insight into how economic models can contribute to democratic diversity and interdependence. This perspective highlights the potential of democratic economic practices in contributing to the broader democratization process, a key aspect in understanding Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic and political landscape.

Lastly, Fish, and Brooks (2004) challenge the view that diversity impedes democratization. Their findings that economic and social diversity may not necessarily be detrimental to democratic processes support this study's premise that Bosnia and Herzegovina's ethnic and cultural diversity, within a suitable economic framework, can coexist with a thriving democratic system.

Integrating these arguments, this study acknowledges the multifaceted influence of economic factors on democratization and diversity management. The economic development, market dynamics, democratic practices within economic institutions, and the interplay between economic growth and democracy form a complex web that shapes the democratic landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These insights from various scholars provide a comprehensive backdrop against which the economic and democratic evolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is analyzed in Section 4. to evaluate their critical role in the democratic management of diversity and the success of democratization in this complex society

2.5. Role of media in democratic management of diversity and democratization in complex societies

The collection of studies focusing on the role of media in democratic societies significantly bolsters the inclusion of this factor into research on democratic management of diversity and democratization, particularly in the complex context of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The theory of media dependency, as explored by Loveless (2008), and the role of mass media in developing democratic political culture, are particularly relevant to this argument. These perspectives enrich our understanding of the media's influence

in transitional societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina, where media can act as both a facilitator and a barometer of democratization progress.

Furthermore, Kaul (2012) offer insights into the media's responsibility in representing diverse opinions and its potential roles in different democratic models. Their analyses contribute to our identification of media as an important factor in management of diversity by underpinning the importance of media in reflecting a society's diverse voices and in managing democratic discourse effectively.

The media's role in shaping public opinion, facilitating diverse viewpoints, and supporting democratic engagement is a complex yet vital component of this study. These insights emphasize the importance of a media landscape that supports diversity and democratic values, a critical aspect of managing diversity and fostering democratization in the intricate tapestry of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-conflict society.

2.6. Methodological approaches for studying democratic management of differences in complex post-conflict democracies

The complexity of studying democratic management of differences in post-conflict societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina requires a nuanced methodological approach that can capture the multifaceted nature of these environments. A mixed-methods approach, combining historical comparative analysis with qualitative content analysis, is particularly suited for this purpose.

Kostovicova (2016) demonstrates the effectiveness of mixed-methods research in understanding regional post-conflict justice by analyzing civil society deliberations in the Balkans. This approach allows for a deep exploration of the regional dimension of post-conflict justice, integrating quantitative text analysis with qualitative examination of discursive frames.

Thaler (2017) underscores the value of mixed methods research in studying violence and conflict, highlighting how it can provide a richer understanding of the structures, agency, and processes related to these issues. This approach is particularly beneficial in capturing the complexities of social reality and enhancing our understanding of the causes, consequences, and potential remedies of violence and conflict. Hence this paper utilizes this approach which is presented it in the next section.

The above literature review has provided theoretical basis for relating the various factors to democratization. This paper fills the research gap in connecting the power politics and role of political elites in management of diversity to test the hypothesis that insufficient success in managing diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is influ-

enced by the interests of political elites to maintain political power through ethnic divisions.

3. THE METHODOLOGY

In addressing the challenge of democratic management of diversity in complex post-conflict societies like Bosnia and Herzegovina, a mixed-method approach, integrating both historical and qualitative analyses, offers a comprehensive framework. This methodology is justified by its ability to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of post-conflict democratization, encompassing socio-political dynamics, historical contexts, and the subjective experiences of diverse groups.

Quantitative analysis, as employed by Fish and Kroenig (2006) is instrumental in elucidating broad patterns and relationships between social fractionalization, civil conflict, and democratization. This approach provides empirical evidence to understand the macro-level dynamics in post-conflict societies, offering insights into how diversity and conflict impact democratic processes. However, there is no quantitative support that higher diversity is obstacle to the democratization as provided by multi-ethnic studies in Fish and Brooks (2004) and in this study it is assumed that diversity is not obstacle to democratization and study proceeds to identify factors that should lead to better management of diversity through combining qualitative analysis of historical trends in Section 4 and 5.

Complementing this, qualitative methodologies, particularly those based on theoretical frameworks like those proposed by Ercan (2017) delve into the underlying mechanisms and narratives that shape these dynamics. Ercan's work on deliberative democracy and agonistic pluralism highlights the importance of democratic communication in managing conflicts, providing a lens to understand the role of dialogue and discourse in post-conflict settings. Zhang's analysis of Rawls' concept of overlapping consensus in pluralistic societies offers a theoretical foundation to explore consensus-building among diverse ideological and moral perspectives, which is crucial for sustaining social stability and harmony.

This mixed-method approach which combines historical comparative analysis and qualitative content analysis is used in this study and is considered particularly relevant for Bosnia and Herzegovina, where complex historical legacies, ethnic divisions, and political transformations interplay. The combination of historical and qualitative methodologies enables a holistic understanding of the challenges and potentials in managing diversity and advancing democratization in such a nuanced context and

enable us to identify factors crucial for successful management of diversity and deepening of democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

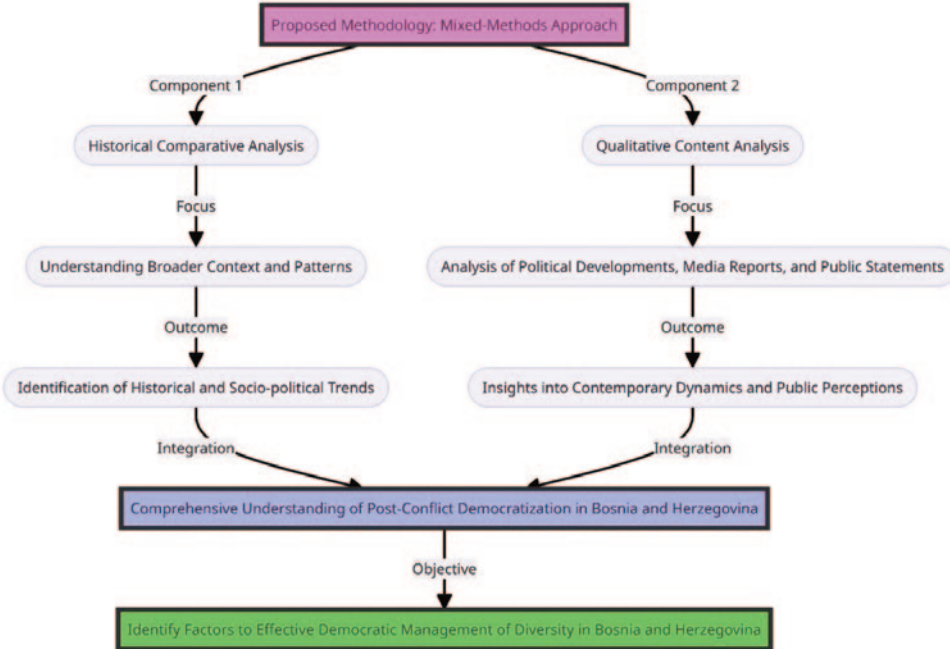


Figure 1. Methodological approach

The graph depicted above visualizes the proposed mixed-methods methodology for studying the democratic management of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina as performed in Section 4 and 5. The methodology is built on two primary components: Historical Comparative Analysis and Qualitative Content Analysis applied together to identify factors that are crucial for democratic management of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Historical Comparative Analysis component is focused on understanding the broader historical context and patterns that have shaped the post-conflict society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It delves into the historical events, socio-political developments, and legacies that have influenced the current state of the nation such as Dayton Peace Agreement, EU integrations, underlying economics processes, political system structure. In other words this analysis aims to identify historical and socio-political trends that have a bearing on the present-day dynamics of diversity management in the country as presented in Section 4.

Qualitative Content Analysis segment of the methodology involves a detailed analysis of contemporary political developments, media reports, and public statements in the period from 2022 to 2024. It seeks to gain insights into the current dynamics, public perceptions, and narratives that are shaping the democratic management of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This part of the study is crucial for understanding the real-time implications of political decisions and societal attitudes.

The outcomes of these two components, when integrated, provide a comprehensive understanding of the democratization process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The historical comparative analysis offers a backdrop against which the current state can be understood, while the qualitative content analysis provides a more immediate picture of ongoing dynamics as shown from the public discourse and analyzed media reports. The daily articles analyzed include daily press reports from main political party actors as presented in daily press and portals such as: “Dnevni Avaz”, “Klix”, “Slobodna Bosna”, “Faktor”, “Bljesak”, “N1”, “BN”, “Nezavisne”, “FRTV”, “RTRS”.

This mixed-methods approach, combining historical comparative analysis with qualitative content analysis, allows us to effectively understand and address the challenges of democratic management of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina and test the main hypothesis of this study that insufficient success in managing diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is influenced by the interests of political elites to maintain political power through ethnic divisions. This hypothesis posits that a comprehensive understanding of both the historical context and current socio-political dynamics is essential for understanding the lack of effective managing of diversity and fostering of democratization in this complex, post-conflict society. The study also provides a valuable insight into the mechanisms and strategies that can support the development of a more inclusive and democratic society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, this study contributes to the field by combining the factors of economic and political power motives together with role of the media in the way they interrelate and influence failure to manage diversity in democratic ways in post-conflict society of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4. ANALYSIS: UNDERLYING FACTORS IN DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF DIVERSITY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

This section utilizes methodology described in Section 3 to deduce the factors that underly democratic management of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4.1. Trust as a catalyst of social cohesion

At the end of 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina finally received the status of a candidate country for EU membership, and at the beginning of 2024 it is expected to determine the date of the start of negotiations for full membership, which are major positive changes that can have an effect on the correction of confrontational and Eurosceptic narratives in the public area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which have become increasingly pronounced in recent years (TI-BiH 2023). This development of events in perspective brings a greater probability of internal consolidation, more unity when it comes to reform priorities, harmonization of public policies with the legal acquis of the EU, and the necessary harmonization of internal inter-ethnic, political and other relations, which is a prerequisite for the intensification of the EU integration process. Candidate status contributes to the strengthening of faith in a common European future and conflict transformation as suggested by Gromes (2009), with a real chance to reduce over time the effect of external influences on the creation and implementation of an authentic and sovereign policy in the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its constituent parts.

The European path of Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the rare strategic goals around which there is a very broad consensus of political elites of all ideological and ethnic prefixes, as well as the citizens and peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina as suggested by the poll on Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens' support for EU accession which is conducted annually by the Directorate for European Integration (VPI 2021). Although, due to the multi-year blockade of the integration process, the original enthusiasm was increasingly replaced by Euro-scepticism, EU integration is definitely a key cohesive social element and a topic around which it is possible to build political, inter-ethnic and overall social trust. The social trust has been proven possible to build in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to depend on positive conditioning by initiatives and projects that have fostered interethnic dialogue and cooperation and education reforms towards ethnic reconciliation that have been conducted to promote multiculturalism and reducing ethnic prejudices among younger generations.

After the general elections held in October 2022, parliamentary majorities were formed with a slightly different party and personal composition, with affirmative messages about changing the focus from divisive topics to goals that can be reached together, and to reforms that benefit citizens, such as is the intensification of the EU integration process (EUnews 2024).

Although incomplete, neither the constitutional nor the administrative framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an obstacle for a functional and just legal order, the rule of law and equality before the law, if the elites strive to find solutions and not to create divisions, fears, mistrust and problems. Trust, as a key concept discussed in this section, refers to the role of the holders of the highest political positions, through the role of the media, the educational and academic system, the judicial apparatus, civil society, and “ordinary citizens”, where everyone has both the responsibility and the power to contribute to building trust. The findings of this paper therefore provide argument for the public lobbying activities, as a kind of “road map” for the future action of the listed actors in the process of catalysing internal social cohesion and accelerated accession to the European family of nations and states.

4.2. The past and future of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Democracy as a form of political rule, but also as an approach and a way of life in contemporary societies and states is facing great challenges when it comes to differences and diversities – ethnic, religious, cultural and others. The first challenge is how to relate to differences and resolve them, without them calling into question one of the essential foundations of democracy – the equality of all before the law. Second, how to satisfy one of the principles of democracy – that everyone is equally represented and represented at all levels of government and in all public institutions. The third is related to the problem of centralization and decentralization, that is, effective autonomy in a democratic order.

All three listed contemporary democratic challenges are present in Bosnian society, and at the same time they are points of separation of different social groups, ideologies and policies, but also points of convergence, because the management of these challenges is a direct assumption of a peaceful, prosperous and modern plural society.

However, before analyzing the listed challenges of contemporary democratic orders in the context of today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is worth opening up the authentic dilemmas of Bosnia and Herzegovina: why society has been trapped in the

past for decades, why trust among people is at a very low level and finally, why are the differences that abound in Bosnian society understood and treated as a burden and a point of separation, rather than wealth, opportunity and a point of convergence?

Soon, a great jubilee will be marked in Bosnia and Herzegovina – 30 years since the “beginning of peace”, since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which put an end to the three-and-a-half-year war in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of 1995. Thirty years of post-war reconstruction of the state, society and interpersonal relations in many fields did not produce the expected results, despite the fact that it is indeed a long period of time (Belloni 2004). By way of comparison, 30 years after the Second World War, in the mid-seventies, Europe was going through an economic boom, and political, social and cultural integration among former enemies was reaching the highest historical level. The basis of the formation of the European communities, and ultimately the European Union, was certainly mutual trust, built, improved, innovated and strengthened over several decades.

In the same interval of three decades, Bosnia and Herzegovina went through a difficult period of post-war reconstruction, establishment of a completely new ideological, political, legal and economic framework, simultaneously going through economic-political transition and post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

Even today, the biggest burden of the war past is the frozen conflict syndrome, i.e. an atmosphere in which the war goals of all warring parties remained unachieved. About ten years after the war, with the strong leadership of the international community and the agreement of all parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, major steps were taken in internal integration, when joint armed forces, a unified electoral system, a unified tax system, identification documents, and a number of other elements were formed. Raised the level of efficiency and functionality of the central institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a huge success that, with the exception of only a few isolated cases, no organized, large-scale or recurring incidents with the character of war revenge, ethnic or religious hatred were recorded, which is an important proof of relatively successful reconciliation among ordinary people.

On the other hand, the legacy of Yugoslav socialism and the totalitarian state, the one-party system, the planned economy, and almost five decades of ideologization of society left a deep mark on the mentality, so even without the war trauma, the transition period would have been slow and difficult with many more obstacles and unusual resistance than in some other post-socialist countries. Collective consciousness and the dominant narrative often labeled democratization itself and the introduction of multi-party elections, as well as the free-market economy and capitalism, as the

culprits or reasons for the painful transition, and even as the cause of war conflicts. Thus, the idea of Yugoslav “brotherhood and unity” was often interpreted by ordinary people as a strong state of social justice, a demonstration of state power and control of individual and group freedoms, as the only ways to rein in excessive collective differences, conflicting interests of social groups, as well as suppressed nationalism and religious intolerance. There is however no proof that diversity promotes conflict and harms democratization as the empirical data did not support the link between diversity and division in multinational studies (Fish and Brooks 2004) giving support support for the hypothesis that divisions are modus for keeping power and not due to diversity present in Bosnian society. Nevertheless, the political system which is dividing power among ethnic groups hampers the country’s EU accession progress (Jahn 2015) also indicates that willingness of political elites representing different ethnic groups is a major determinant in changing the BH political reality and successful management of diversity in BH society.

4.3. Fabricating social peace

The ideal of social justice and large public spending that nourishes social peace, ahead of the ideal of productivity, excellence, competition, free market and “minimum state” marked the entire post-war period in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This fictitious social peace, identified by Drygiel-Bielinska (2023) as fragile peace, is financed indiscriminately from huge social expenditures, combined with the partiocratic manner of government with the concentration of power at the top of the ruling political parties and the capillary corruption that necessarily results from such government, create the tacit consent of the majority of citizens to the current state of affairs as observed in lack of public protests. This agreement through the budgetary clientelism of larger social groups such as war veterans and numerous other categories resulting from the war, pensioners, people with disabilities, social cases, up to a large number of employees of public institutions and large state companies who most often got jobs or promotions through the line party loyalty, and not market currentness, represents a brake on more rapid social progress, because any change would also mean a radical curbing of state clientelism.

By doing so, this study creates a causal connection between the historically inherited narrative about the inevitability of a “strong state”, necessary social justice, linear equality, “the state as the largest employer” on the one hand, and citizens who are accomplices, clients and consumers of such expensive, ineffective and unsustain-

able policies, with the other side. This new syndrome, the syndrome of the “trapped state” does not allow the end of the transition, modernization and Europeanization of society, because the current state fully favors the newly formed social elites, which survive thanks to the production of fears and the fabrication of political conflicts in order to always keep the public’s focus away from the standard of living and progress, and in order for the so-called protection of collective ethnic (national) interests and a constant state of readiness which keeps their own ethnic group homogenized, unprepared for (self) criticism and unwilling to question the responsibility primarily of their own political elites, including organized crime and corruption. Only in recent period since 2023 the media have been filled with reports of fighting organized crime which came out from Sky Application investigation fallouts.

Permanent re-traumatization and collective victimization on war themes, victims, crimes and criminals throughout the post-war years established another conflict – a conflict of narratives with two extremes – that there is collective guilt and, accordingly, collective responsibility for war crimes, which must be legal and political adequately sanctioned; and another narrative about the equalization of guilt, because victims and crimes were recorded on all sides, regardless of the plan, scope and intensity, that is, the verdicts of domestic and foreign courts on war crimes. With the gap between these two narratives, without any intention or need to hear and understand the other side, the political elites are used as a catalyst for mass homogenization, thereby prolonging, deepening and refreshing the traumas of war, which does not contribute at all to building trust and a common future. On the contrary corruption and elite capture of institutions are break on BH moving forward (Siljak and Nielsen 2022).

4.4. Privatization and formation of new social elites

The social order constructed in this way is caused by another phenomenon, namely the positioning of new social elites that arose in the war and post-war chaotic times. Considering the reduced history of capitalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 19th and 20th centuries, during the 1990s and 2000s, an unfinished socio-economic process took place, namely the original accumulation of capital, partly through mass privatization of social property, and partly through capitalization and investments from abroad. Most of the large companies in former social ownership were thus privatized, although very few of them survived on the market, especially in the production sectors. The aforementioned privatizations often took place with minimal use of money,

mostly using securities such as “certificates” mass-issued as a form of non-monetary compensation for war mobilization in the nineties, which were then partly traded on the official, and more significantly on the black market, many times below the price. In the end, ordinary people, owners of certificates, received smaller amounts of cash for them, and owners of capital, by purchasing certificates far below the price, received enormous wealth for a minimal price, thus rounding off the first major process of capital accumulation, the so-called certificate privatization (Omerbegovic Arapovic 2015).

Similar to the formation of the economic elite, the formation processes of other social elites, such as academic, religious, political, where ethnic, party or family connection often took precedence over the criteria of excellence, meritoriousness or professional biography. This created a large gap in society for many years, without significant differences within the three ethnic communities, which devalued human capital, with the insistence on particular ethnic-party criteria when deciding on issues of state or social interest, from the appointment to the highest political positions, through state financing, public procurement of large and small “state” jobs, all the way to public services and public budgets, which are treated as election spoils. Thus, excellence, work and effort became secondary qualities, which, along with chronic poverty, capillary corruption and general insecurity in society, became the terminal reason for the large outflow of young people from the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina is officially on the global map among the first countries in terms of “brain drain”, which makes the lack of human capital, educated and young labor force one of the biggest challenges for the country.

The acquired positions of power of the new social elites, networked interests and close relations between big capital, politics, the judiciary and the media, defend their own positions for many years with the same methods and techniques, so the issue of positive politics and building trust is actually opposed to the interests of the current elites, which maintaining the status quo is the best guarantee of maintaining the acquired positions of power. Such a corrupt and manipulative political elite has been a brake on the European prospects of Bosnia and Herzegovina for many years, because every reform priority, the elites latently or manifestly declare a danger for some collective interest, renew victimization and create a fictitious internal or external enemy of their own ethnic group, hiding their real motives for slowing down modernization and reforms that necessarily lead to the rule of law, equality before the law, strengthening of institutions, while at the same time weakening the power of political and non-institutional actors close to them.

4.5. Regional context

Lastly, but not least, we must understand the broader, regional, and often overall global context that strongly influences social processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. First of all, it is a very close connection of Serbian and Croatian political elites from Bosnia and Herzegovina with their own national centers in Belgrade and Zagreb. The symbiosis between the elites on these two separate tracks does not necessarily have to be a priori negative for the internal processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but each of the three ethno-national political corps from this symbiosis uses segments for confrontation with third parties and homogenization of its own ethnic corps. Bosnia and Herzegovina still does not have an established interstate border with the Republic of Serbia, the use of existing hydropower plants on the border river Drina is a matter of dispute, while projects for the construction of new joint hydropower facilities have been pending for several years primarily due to political disputes.

However, the biggest reason for political disputes between Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbours, Serbia and Croatia, is again the war legacy of the 1990s. The judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, as well as domestic courts, have undoubtedly established the involvement and guilt of the then leadership of Croatia and Serbia in the war events in BiH, mass war crimes, as well as political, military command and personal responsibility in dozens of individual judgments. However, instrumentalization, relativization, and even the rehabilitation and glorification of war crimes and criminals essentially nullify any success on the economic, cultural or other level of cooperation and building mutual trust.

The question of the final status of Kosovo is a critical point of regional politics that is reflected almost daily on the relations between political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The attitude of the Republic of Serbia towards the status of Kosovo, through not accepting any form of recognition of independence, has its identical reflection in the political circles of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity Republika Srpska, while on the other hand, Croat and Bosniak political circles advocate a completely opposite point of view, thus contributing to the burdensome regional context. The Western Balkans, as a neuralgic point of global international relations, has been a place of confrontation between global actors from the East and the West for many years, so the overall social relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina must always be placed in a wider, sometimes regional, and sometimes even global geopolitical and geostrategic context.

It is regional relations that are of crucial importance for understanding the relationship towards the NATO (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*) integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because as long as Serbia does not have an affirmative attitude towards NATO integration, so will the political elites, and consequently the majority of citizens, BH entity Republika Srpska be against integration.

Now it is partly easier to answer the questions why society has been trapped in the past for decades, why trust between people is at a very low level and finally, why diversity is still an obstacle, not an opportunity.

Apart from the historical legacy of the former socialist system, which is reflected in the hybrid socio-economic order with many recurrences of the now distant past and the associated narrative that is much closer to the older generations, the captivity in the past is primarily a consequence of a carefully shaped national construct by which political elites maintain a distance between the three great ethnic/national groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Widespread poverty, a high rate of unemployment, corruption and organized crime over a long period of time have become a characteristic of social relations, in which the low standard of living as a consequence of the aforementioned deviations is compensated by a nationalist, confrontational and collectivist narrative, according to which the culprit is always on the other side of the ethnic or state borders. Poverty, on the other hand, is an instrument for preventing or slowing down emancipation, so an impoverished, unenlightened, uneducated and manipulation-prone nation or ethnic group is a strategic and vital interest in maintaining existing power relations among political and other elites.

The existence of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which is de facto incorporated into the legal and political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, represents the most serious obstacle to the establishment of democratic sovereignty and the completion of representative democracy with accompanying mechanisms of political responsibility. It is an indisputable fact that the development of the legal and political order in BiH and a higher level of EU integration will lead to a reduction in the role and final transformation of the OHR from an active political to a monitoring mission of the international community in BiH.

No less important segment of the cause-effect analysis is the character and function of the educational system. By contaminating the educational system from the earliest stage to higher education, creating parallel histories and shaping threats coming from other ethnic groups, for almost three decades new generations of followers of such ideology and indoctrination have been raised. When you add to that the extremely intense contaminating political practice without public responsibility, reinforced by

media sensationalism and the culture of spectacle, it is clear that there is basically no political will or interest in internal social cohesion, pragmatic integration and unique policies aimed at a common and progressive future.

The organic process of connection and cooperation among ordinary people, especially on the economic level and in meeting the basic needs of life, is thus opposed in practice to the conflict and segregation narrative that is produced in a targeted, systematic and long-term manner by political elites. Latent apartheid becomes both a goal and a means to prevent faster internal integration, subordination and rapprochement with the European family of states.

We thereby prove that low trust among people is a dominant ideological-political construct, because by insisting on a complex of small differences, a very wide space has been opened for the elites to round up the unenlightened masses within the framework of their own particular interests and maintaining the status quo.

The wealth of diversity on which the idea of the European Union rests, due to its historical, cultural, ethnic, religious and ideological heritage, can and should be of capital importance for the new socio-political paradigm, if Bosnia and Herzegovina, its peoples and citizens, but primarily the elites, want to build a prosperous future. It is obvious, and three decades of stalemate prove it best, that none of the mono-ethnic national policies can win any victory at the expense of the other two, that hidden national goals, as a rule, derived from war goals, cannot be realized without radical legal – political interventions or a new mass conflict, for which there is no humane or any other capital. This then means that the state of cold political war, frozen conflict and maintaining the status quo for as long as possible is the common interest of the political elites, who through such a state can continue to usurp social wealth and the future of their own citizens.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a plural, but also divided and post-conflict society dominated by the perception of a conflict of national interests of Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. This conflict, or the dominant perception of it, can also be seen as religious, because Islam, Orthodoxy and Catholicism were the most important factors in shaping the collective identities of the three nations/ethnicities and the most powerful instrument used by political elites to prevent the building of collective trust. The connections between the three ethno-national elites and their own religious communities are the strongest social axes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which often form key social issues and even social divisions.

The party system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a consequence of the aforementioned lines of social cleavages and has centrifugal tendencies. They are reflected in

the opposition of the national-party blocs of Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, who cannot reach a consensus regarding the statehood and self-sustaining state organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially regarding its history and culture, and indirectly also its future. On the other hand, the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is building a tri-national and two-entity quasi-federation which, although complex and highly decentralized, has centripetal tendencies in relation to its party system.

Thus, centrifugal tendencies in the party system of Bosnia and Herzegovina came into conflict with centripetal tendencies and actors in its political system. This has made this country unstable and weakly functional, which is then fuel for political elites to deepen mistrust and negatively manage diversity.

This represents a theoretical anomaly, because logic and practice dictate that the party system, that is, the agreement of the elites within it, creates the political system as a product of their consensus. This theoretical oddity has its practical political consequences. They are most visible in the phenomenon of the failure of consociational democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regardless of the fact that it is a model of democracy suitable for divided societies, for which Belgium is a role model, the way it was established in Bosnia and Herzegovina was also the cause of its failure. The path to the realization of institutionalized consociationalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina was “imposed from above” (through the Dayton constitutional arrangement), not “consensus from below” (through the creation and acceptance of constitutionalism by the sovereign citizens and peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. their political elites).

Thanks to the conflict between the centrifugal in the party and the centripetal in the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a series of political and social phenomena occur that prevent the creation of a more stable and functional system. In such a setting of social and political processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a strong partocracy, clientelism, bad economy, lack of freedom is created, inequality, non-reciprocity, general dissatisfaction of citizens and apathy, which, as we explained earlier, is a targeted construction for the sake of particular party interests and maintaining acquired positions of power and further exploitation of social wealth.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS: IDENTIFYING FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF DIVERSITIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Diversity is the basic democratic value, the achievement of modern society and the success of modern political development. Having the right to diversity, in a wide range from the choice of clothing style, through the choice of gender orientation, to the choice of group identities at the worldview or political level, is an achievement and a basic characteristic of a pluralistic democratic society, as Bosnia and Herzegovina is, or aspires to be. Free highlighting of differences is the basis of social plurality, appreciation and recognition of the diversity of the “other”, regardless of whether this diversity is at the individual or group level. The right to difference is, and it is very important to emphasize, an anti-totalitarian and anti-authoritarian discourse, it is possible and achievable only in societies that have made a political transition from totalitarianism to liberal democracy. Our society is like that, no matter how dissatisfied we are with its achievements. Where there is unity, where there are no differences, Hegel would say that *we are in the night where all the cows are black* or, where unity reigns there is no opinion as provided in Beiser’s (Beiser 2005) interpretation of his philosophical ideas.

The right to difference is institutionally standardized, legitimized and legislatively guaranteed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and according to these provisions, Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state and as a society belongs to the category of democratic environments. The question is what are the boundaries of differences, who determines these boundaries, who establishes the so-called red lines, when can it be appreciated that in exercising one right, that imaginary line of endangering the rights of another has been crossed? On a personal level, in their moral sense, all individual citizens should know when insisting on their own right threatens the same right of another. People possess this moral feeling as anthropological beings of the community, as political beings according to Aristotle, by their own and family education, by humanistic and civilizational education and belonging, by their own tradition, by the positive influence of religious doctrines on our mutual identity relations.

Today, it is quite evident that at the local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is sustained self-regulation of the identity differences of the individuals who make up that community, and that all individuals, people, citizens, regardless of their group or ethno-religious affiliation, have what is important in common, a common package of values: personal and property security, a good standard of living, a basic set of so-

cial measures and rights, excellent and free education and healthcare, quality communal services, cheap energy, freedom of movement, freedom of choice, etc. At the individual level, citizens of the entire state and society prefer the same values. How to extrapolate that level to the general, social and state level is a key question, since forms of group identity appear on the non-individual level within which real or artificial differences occur.

The Bosnian-Herzegovinian society is very heterogeneous, both in terms of current and historically inherited conditions. This heterogeneity and these differences are neither possible nor wise to be leveled by any ideological means. Democratic forms of conversation, consensus and compromise, as well as modern democratic methods of building trust across the social vertical and horizontal, have been tested as means of confronting differences and harmonizing different interests. In such circumstances, the basic collective/group rights of all the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina are basically satisfied, there is less and less denial of identity, and no one forces anyone to any forms of assimilation, neither on the ethnic nor on the religious level of identity.

A large number of identity differences at the group level are artificial in nature, they are the work of political and party elites, ideologized narratives that in their essence stem from the lack of will, ignorance or inability of political elites to realize or fulfill the basic life needs of citizens, ordinary people, imaginary members of those groups' identity. Differences at the group level between peoples and their cultural expressions really do exist, but the problem lies in their instrumentalization and ideologization. Such a situation should be accepted as a starting point for any conversation about managing differences. In doing so, objective analysis can and should be used to identify objective differences, their contents and forms of expression, and analytically separate them from subjectivized, imagined and ideologized group differences that have become the refuge of nationalized policies.

In the initial phase of achieving greater stability and functionality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is necessary to adopt an evolutionary approach that implies the gradual construction of patterns of cooperation and trust in the conditions of a divided and post-conflict society. In the coordination process, the existing Dayton framework is the starting point, just as multi-layered plurality is an unquestionable characteristic of Bosnia and Herzegovina itself. However, plurality does not have to be a factor in the production of bad if it is channeled in the right direction. It can be useful because in conditions of high political awareness it is possible to build sophisticated models of political behavior that achieve greater agreement than that offered in classic representative democracies.

From a policy of high degree of consensus, it is necessary to give birth to several generational compromises, to create several essential assumptions for a sustainable and prosperous society of diversity that builds trust among different ethnic groups, social elites, political representatives and other actors of social importance using modern democratic methods. This series is neither chronological nor definitive, but can serve as a basis for a broader and more detailed analysis and public debate.

- To face the fundamental challenges of the democratic order, which even after 30 years of international recognition has not been completed in the political, legal and other forms of social organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fundamental challenges of representative democracy, which is the topic with which we opened this analysis, should be based on the paradigm of the new and functional political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first and fundamental prerequisite for a successful, democratic and plural society is the equality of all before the law. The rule of law, not the rule of individuals, is the presupposition of an order that will not generate injustice, discrimination or underrepresentation. Second, balanced and proportional representation at all levels of government and in all public institutions, which should be a constitutional and legal obligation, without geographical, ethnic or political limitations or stretching. And third, is the imperative of decentralization, local and regional self-government, up to effective autonomy within the limits of constitutional possibilities. Any strong centralization or unitarization without organic consent and logical reasoning usually produces resistance, autonomy and separatism, which can have fatal consequences for the internal coherence of society.
- The rule of law is the *conditio sine qua non* of any systemic reform undertaking. The transfer of power from institutions to political parties and other decision-making centers has disrupted the institutional order, and the first priority of any systemic reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the strengthening of institutions, their de-politicization and de-partisanization, and legal certainty, which are prerequisites for the rule of law and equality before the law.
- Education must not be a means of indoctrinating new generations with retrograde and confrontational narratives stemming from the war conflicts of the 1990s. The educational system, from preschool to university, must be a space of freedom, knowledge, excellence, nobility and (self) criticism. The educational system must be decontaminated from collectivist, totalitarian, nationalist and other negativist narratives that undoubtedly generate tensions, social frustrations and potential conflicts in a plural society.

- The media in the modern era have a crucial role in the formation of public opinion, so insisting on the educational function of the media, in addition to the informative and entertaining, is of utmost importance. In the era of wide availability of all types of content to everyone, the task of competent institutions is to regulate the media space in the function of building a culture of peace, tolerance, solidarity and nurturing diversity. Strict control of hate speech, and other forms of national, religious and other intolerance primarily towards all minorities, and then control of any media manipulation, production of fake news, and fake content, must not contaminate public space and must be reduced to a minimum. Media literacy of the population, especially at school age, must be ranked among the priorities in future development programs.
- Reconciliation as a prerequisite for managing diversity in a democratic, efficient and sustainable way is still a very live topic in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian context. Confronting the past, effective memorialization and building trust is the only way to overcome the malignant influence of politicization of public space and fabricated ethno-nationalism that have permeated all spheres of life, both public and private.
- The economy and meeting the living needs of ordinary people, improving the standard of living and economic integration from the inside and towards the external environment is a process that takes place despite, and not thanks to, the political elites. Policies that will improve the unique economic space, the flow of people, goods and capital, improve the environment for business and investment, and improve the position of workers and employers through the fifth industrial revolution, modernization and digitization, are the policies of the future and it is unquestionable that these priorities must dictate the reform agenda in the future.
- In recent years, culture and sports have contributed to positive branding of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as internal integration, more than any public policy. Modern country branding can therefore be framed by cultural, traditional, historical, religious, sports and other content that will emphasize the uniqueness and exoticism of a small but endlessly interesting European country at the crossroads of East and West, past and future.
- The role of non-political actors such as religious communities, watch-dog organizations, trade unions and other civil society organizations is probably of crucial importance, because precisely these civil associations have the highest degree of independence from political actors for an integrative social role in

the future. OHR as a quasi-institutional and quasi-political actor, in parallel with the consolidation of the legal-political order and the intensification of the EU integration process, in the future should be transformed into a monitoring mission of the international community, and its role must be taken over by domestic judicial, legislative and executive authorities.

- The electoral system, is a generator of slow democratization, partocracy and politicization of institutions, so the modernization of the electoral process is definitely in the order of priorities that would guide society into the future. The axioms are certainly primarily fair and honest elections, equal value of the vote, proportional geographical and ethnic representation, stabilization of parliamentary majorities, a simple process of implementing election results, the mechanism of extraordinary elections – i.e. the change of government, limiting the number of successive mandates in all directly elected positions, etc.
- Constitutional reforms are necessary for at least two reasons – the abolition of any discriminatory provisions or elements of the constitution that are not in accordance with the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the improvement of the constitutional structure of the state and its institutions so that decision-making and the upcoming process integration into the EU was as fast and painless as possible in the legal and political sense.
- Lastly, but still equally important – integration into the EU (and in the perspective of NATO), can undoubtedly contribute to internal stabilization, strengthening of security and mutual trust. No matter how much the political elites resist this integration process, it necessarily brings only good for the state, society and citizens, thereby strengthening the perspective of trust and effective management of diversity in a different, more certain and positive environment. Although there is no political or social consensus on NATO integration, it is inevitable that every step on the EU integration path will help NATO integration, and vice versa, and the regional context will determine when this issue will stop being a stumbling block and become a point of cohabitation.

6. CONCLUSION: NAVIGATING DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN POST-CONFLICT BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

This study hypothesizes that insufficient success in managing diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is influenced by the interests of political elites to maintain political power through ethnic divisions. By reviewing the historical context and through qualitative analysis of public discourse the study identifies that main factors that influence management of diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina are political system, socio-economic condition, role of media and education system among the most important. Hence, the journey of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards effective management of its diverse post-conflict society, as illuminated by a comprehensive mixed-methods analysis, highlights a nation standing at a crossroads between its divided past and a potentially unified future. Central to this transition is the cultivation of trust among its ethnic groups, which is paramount for healing and fostering a sense of national identity that transcends historical ethnic divisions.

Equally critical is the role of economic development and integration. Economic progress, characterized by inclusivity and equity, can serve as a bridge across ethnic divides, addressing the socioeconomic disparities that often underpin conflict. The process of EU integration, in which Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken significant strides, presents not only a unifying goal but also a catalyst for essential reforms. These reforms, in line with European standards, promise to streamline laws, drive sustainable development, and embed peace within the societal fabric.

Further, the establishment of a robust and just legal framework is indispensable for the flourishing of democracy. A system where equality before the law is not just a principle but a practice will instill confidence in governance and lay the groundwork for transparent and accountable institutions. Complementing these structural changes, educational reforms that advocate for multiculturalism and tolerance are vital. Such reforms are necessary to nurture a generation that appreciates the nuances of their shared history and values democratic principles.

Lastly, the media's role cannot be overstated in its capacity to shape public opinion and narratives. Media freedom, coupled with responsible journalism, is essential for creating an informed society where sensationalism and divisive rhetoric find no place.

In sum, Bosnia and Herzegovina's path towards managing its diversity and reinforcing its democratic framework is intricate and necessitates a holistic approach. The interplay of historical legacies with emerging opportunities for change presents a unique scenario. Through the concerted efforts in building trust, promoting inclusive

economic growth, upholding the rule of law, committing to EU integration, implementing educational reforms, and ensuring responsible media practices, Bosnia and Herzegovina can navigate its complex landscape towards a future marked by peace, prosperity, and inclusivity.

ABBREVIATIONS

- BH: Bosnia and Herzegovina
EU: European union
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OHR: Office of the High Representative

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ETNIČKE PODJELE I POLITIKA MOĆI: RAZOTKRIVANJE BARIJERA ZA UPRAVLJANJE RAZLIČITOSTIMA I DEMOKRATIZACIJU U POSTKONFLIKTNOJ BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI

Sažetak:

Ovaj članak kritički istražuje faktore koji dovode do stagnacije u demokratizaciji i opstajanju društvenih podjela u postkonfliktnoj Bosni i Hercegovini (BiH), s posebnim fokusom na ulogu političkih elita. Koristeći pristup mješovitih metoda, istraživanje kombinuje historijsku komparativnu analizu sa kvalitativnom analizom sadržaja političkih dešavanja, medijskih izveštaja i javnih izjava. Istraživanje otkriva da su političke elite u BiH sistematski iskorištavale i produbljivale etničke podjele kao sredstvo za konsolidaciju i održavanje vlasti, podržavajući hipotezu da na nedovoljan uspjeh u upravljanju različitostima utiču interesi političkih elita koje političku moć održavaju kroz produbljivanje etničkih podjela. Ovaj proces homogenizacije etničkih grupa radi političke poluge identificiran je kao značajna prepreka demokratizaciji i društvenoj integraciji. Studija takođe ispituje dugotrajne efekte bivšeg jugoslovenskog socijalizma i regionalnih geopolitičkih uticaja, posebno odnosa sa Srbijom i Hrvatskom, na oblikovanje političkog i etničkog pejzaža države i nacije. Glavni nalazi ističu da su namjerne akcije političkih elita, usmjerene na jačanje svojih baza moći kroz etničku polarizaciju, glavni doprinos neuspjehu demokratizacije i nastavku podjele društva. Studija naglašava potrebu za političkim intervencijama koje ciljaju na ključne uzroke etničke podjele, naglašavajući potrebu za političkim

reformama koje umanjuju moć elita u manipulaciji etničkim identitetima. Ovi uvidi su od vitalnog značaja za razumijevanje izazova u BiH i nude vrijedne lekcije za druga postkonfliktna i multietnička društva koja se suočavaju s izazovima demokratizacije i međuetničkog pomirenja.

Ključne riječi: demokratizacija i tranzicija; upravljanje različitostima; postkonfliktna društva; Bosna i Hercegovina; integracije u Evropsku uniju; nacionalizam i etnička pripadnost; socijalna kohezija

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