CONTEMPORARY POLITICS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: HISTORICAL DETERMINANTS AND POLITICAL EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The original foundations of democratic politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina were developed during the period of Austro-Hungarian occupation, and political pluralism was institutionalized in an incomplete form in 1910. The monarchical regime in the first Yugoslav state did not stimulate political development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, because fictitious political pluralism was introduced in political practice. It was not possible to achieve enviable political development not even in a second Yugoslav state, because it was built on the principles of socialist monism. The independent and sovereign existence of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is limited by ethnocracy and imposed stabilocracy. First, this article will investigate to what extent the post-socialist development of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which takes place in the stages after the multi-party elections in 1990, is determined by earlier political experiences, and above all by the original concept of incomplete democratic politics founded during the Austro-Hungarian occupation government.

Keywords: State, Politics, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Political Culture, Political Pluralism, Democracy, Ideology.

INTRODUCTION

Modern democratic politics was developed and conceived under the influence of Enlightenment ideas, which openly advocated political emancipation, the rule of the people, and the republican form of government. Bosnian experience of modern politics is connected with the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century as at the time Bosnia and Herzegovina – being under Austro-Hungarian colonial rule – had faced for the first time ever, an ordeal of practically enforcing and developing itself in accordance with liberal and capitalistic ideas that were meant to transform the essence of its then economic and political system that was based on feudal and theocratic foundations. The emergence of political pluralism, parliamentarianism, and an introduction of an elective system gave a crucial tone and a dimension to contemporary Bosnian Herzegovinian politics, which had already experimented with some forms of democratic politics at the beginning of the past century. Thematic research of this article belongs to the field of political science the history of political thought, and it concentrates on the complicated development of modern politics and statehood in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An institutional research approach was applied in this article, considering that special focus is placed on the development of political institutions, pluralism, and generally democratic forms of politics. When it comes to research methods, considering that this topic belongs to the history of political thought and that it reflects on contemporary political development, it is a necessity to use the historical and comparative method, but especially the method of content analysis, so the article prefers a qualitative approach in political science. Taking into account the contemporary political context in post-socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina, problems, challenges, and threats faced by ineffective state power, it is necessary to investigate whether the complicated constitutional-political development, especially in the post-Dayton period, was determined and conditioned by earlier political experiences. At the same time, special emphasis in the research will be placed on the political connections of the first experience of democratic politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the time of the Austro-Hungarian occupation government, and then the post-socialist concept of democratic politics, given that both political models were determined by the will of the ethnocracy and the stabilizing role of external political factors, which so far has not been adequately and scientifically researched at all.

Therefore, it should be emphasized that the modern character of Bosnian politics possesses not only its post-socialist experience but also its former political experiences. Furthermore, the contemporary Bosnian Herzegovinian experience of politics and political culture has its oldest and authentic foundations in the tradition and statehood of medieval Bosnia and the epoch of Ottoman reign over Bosnia, which had an imperial governance character. Namely, during the Middle Ages Bosnia enjoyed a free and sovereign state existence, with established governmental state institutions, like all other medieval feudal states at the time. Its existence as a free state owing to its being a medieval European state, ended with the Ottoman conquest of its territory. After that, the Ottomans performed radical changes concerning the social structure in its westernmost province (Trencsényi et al., 2016). However, Bosnia was never the Dark Vilayet – neither during the Ottoman reign in the region nor during the succeeding political epochs – a view also shared by the opponents of the Bosnian state and legal

development and Bosniak ethnic identity – rather it was represented as a cradle of libertarian and critical thought that did not conform to exorbitant cosmetic compromises with colonial and authoritarian governments.

The original Bosnian identity preserved its authenticity from immediate Ottoman cultural influences – they refined it and gave it a distinct tone but did not transform its essence – that is why the process of Ottomanization of Bosnian society, as active as it was, eventually did not work. The awareness of the territorial compactness of Bosnian territory and the common Illyrian-Slavic origin of Bosniak nationality that during the Ottoman reign had only been heterogeneous on a confessional basis (that comprised of Islamic, Catholic and Orthodox Bosniaks), has never vanished or been erased. Bosniaks of different religions cherished the spirit of convergent politics. Historical records and works of educated Bosniaks from this period of Bosnian history, witness the convergent, tolerant and brotherly relationships between Bosniak members of three religions and is made evident by the reactions and rebellions of educated Bosniak Muslim intellectuals against the Ottoman regime in cases when it performed unfair acts towards the non-Muslim Bosniak population. The Bosniak population was ethnically homogeneous up until the 1860s, when with the assistance of conservative policies coming from Serbia and Croatia, the struggle for religious rights of Bosnian Catholics and Bosnian Orthodox grew into a struggle for their ethnic rights, after which they began declaring themselves as Croats and Serbs. After that, the ethnic structure of the population in Bosnia was heterogeneous, comprising Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. This kind of ethnic structure of the Bosnian population – alongside with slight and mild modifications – has remained to today, keeping in mind that in the following decades, the original Bosnian identity sometimes faced various political bans regarding its expression. In the epoch of a sovereign Bosnian state existence, we may say that three constitutive Bosnian nationalities enjoy their ethnic rights mostly uninterrupted.

The processes of ethnicization in Bosnia had already been completed by 1878 – by which religious differences of the Bosniak population decanted into ethnic differences through a period of new political circumstances – after which Austro-Hungary completed its occupation, and with the decision of the Berlin Congress its historical name was altered as well. The name `Bosnia and Herzegovina´ has been in official use ever since. Bosnia and Herzegovina did not lose its territorial compactness, nor the critical spirit of its intellectual elite – who have always been guardians of Bosnian heritage, not even in the Austro-Hungarian period of rule. After establishing King Alexander's dictatorship in first Yugoslavia, the historical territorial integrity was violated for a short period. Ultimately however, by the decisions of ZAVNOBIH (The State Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and AVNOJ (The Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) during the Second World War, Bosnia and Herzegovina managed to restore the centurial statehood that enabled it to continue its sovereign existence in second Yugoslavia, and after that as an independent state in the era of global politics.

THE EMERGENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANISM AND POLITICAL PLURALISM: AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

After the setting up of the Austro-Hungarian form of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina, liberal political and economic ideas started to be used and applied in its political practice. Fortifying political pluralism – made possible by the introduction of the Bosnian Assembly and the election procedure – in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 1910 represented a true step forward toward the sphere of modern politics (Zgodić, 2003: 97). The established political parties – apart from the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which did not have its representative body within the Bosnian Assembly – were based on an ethnic principle that had respect for religious affiliation (Fejzić, 2012: 206). Bosniak Muslims at that time were predominately engaged in the Muslim National Organization as well as in the Muslim Progressive Party. Concurrently Bosnian Serbs generally supported the political actions of the Serbian National Organization, and at a much lesser rate The Serbian National Independent Party. Bosnian Croats were oriented to the Croatian National Community – which had greater support from citizens – and to the Croatian Catholic Association, which promoted the ideas of catholic clericalism and Christian democracy.

The breakthrough of capitalistic ideas into Bosnian space hastened the process of accepting socialist ideas and practices which were trying to humanize the work sphere and liberate it from capitalistic rigidity and inclemency. Bosnian Herzegovinian social democrats of the period offered original and functional solutions within the political, social, and national existence milieu, especially within a sphere with a preference for democratic governance, free elections, public voting rights, woman's rights activism, promotion of secular education, and a struggle for equality among all Yugoslav nation – primarily Bosniak Muslims whose ethnic indigenous status was denied by the official governmental regime (Fejzić, 2015). Settling the agrarian issue and eliminating agrarian relations within the economic sphere, which represented a feudal system relapse, mostly drew the attention of Bosnian political elites from within, and the Austro-Hungarian rule during the post-annexation phase in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regarding the resolution of the issue, Bosnian Herzegovinian political representatives at the time failed to reach a consensus since they diverged in their proposals of ideas. In that sense, Serbian and Croatian parties, together with the civic-oriented social-democratic political elite, hoped for a radical solution of the Agrarian Question, whilst political Bosniak Muslim representation advocated the politics of the status quo within the sphere of agrarian relations. The settlement of the Agrarian Question – in its distinct way – also complicated the politics of transformable ethnic pacting in the Bosnian Assembly because the conditions for permanent political alliances and negotiations were not provided.

During the Habsburg rule, Bosnia and Herzegovina began a vigorous process of secularization of politics, society, and education. As a result of the activities of educated intellectuals, ideology developed as a science of political ideas (Okey, 2001). So gradually Bosnia and Herzegovina's discourse had established a socialist, conservative, liberal, clerical, pan-Islamist, nationalist, and communist political thought. Under Habsburg rule Bosnia and Herzegovina had begun developing modern political institutions; it introduced the system of separation of powers, organized and conducted the first elections, adopted a capitalist

economy, established unions, created the first political parties, anticipated political pluralism, and brought changes in agricultural policy to end feudal system. In that political epoch, new scientific disciplines such as geopolitics, psychology, philosophy, and biopolitics had been developed. That political epoch had created minimal conditions for the birth of democracy in a multi-verse political milieu in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the times of Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the preconditions for a more dynamic development of social sciences, as well as for progressive reforms in the spheres of society, politics, and economics were created. With the acceptance of the Western European ideological worldview, a process of transformation of traditional and parochial Bosnian-Herzegovinian political culture within the political milieu began. After that, Bosnia-Herzegovina's politics gradually distanced itself from its traditional meaning and developed as a modern activity that claims to be based on conditioned and incomplete political pluralism and democratic forms of politics. However, in this period of political history, the political culture still had a very pronounced parochial character. The process of emancipation, liberalization, and democratization of society and the state in Bosnia and Herzegovina still persists and has no contours of authentic liberal-democratic politics.

INTERWAR POLITICAL CULTURE: THE CAMOUFLAGED ABSOLUTISTIC MONARCHISM IN ACTION

Bosnian Herzegovinian nationalities and their political leaderships had already predominantly supported, during the First World War – when discussions on creating the first joint state of Southern Slavs the course of negotiations leading to the creation of the state of the Balkan Slavs. Nevertheless, at the time there was also an opposing political stream that wanted to see Bosnia as an autonomous state, or rather, as a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, although they did not possess a strong political influence. After the end of the First World War, Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the union of the newly formed states of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs. The state in question was soon after renamed into a new state formation: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. In the newly established state of a monarchic type, a new statute was enacted – known as The Vidovdan Constitution – which was meant to regulate its political structure in accordance with the foundations of national Unitarianism and state-centrism. The Yugoslav national identity had been formed as a supra-identity for all of the South Slavic nationalities that supported the process of creation and entered the first Yugoslavian cluster. It should be particularly emphasized that the Yugoslav Muslim Organization – a political party founded in Bosnia and Herzegovina – succeeded in adding a specific amendment complement to the highest-ranked legal act of the newly founded state. As a result, article number 135 was appended to the Constitution (Imamović, 2003: 294). It guaranteed to preserve the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina within its historical borders in case of regional restructuring of the state territory.

The constitutional and political normative mentioned earlier were violated following the introduction of the Dictatorship in January 1929, more precisely, `The Law on the name and division of the Kingdom into administrative areas´,

by which the state was renamed, The Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The former internal political structure was now redefined and divided. With that act, the historical territorial continuity and the state-territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been broken for the first time. Afterward, the King destroyed the new Constitution and thus completely established his absolutistic rule. Another attempt to decant the state territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, occurred at the end of the 1930s. This political agreement should have resolved the Croatian question in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – the Croats asked for alteration of the state according to the federalist principles – and predicted the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia. The agreement was settled at the expense of Bosnia and Herzegovina because the Banovina of Croatia was supposed to also extend its territory to a part of Bosnian historical territory. After that, the dissatisfaction with the official governmental regime became more and more evident. This resulted in the emergence of augmented demands – by different social-political actors – for the autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina – young and progressive intellectual elites had the most specific demands – since it was the only certain way to preserve Bosnian Herzegovinian statehood and territorial integrity (Fejzić, 2015: 168). In the Yugoslav interwar political epoch, political pluralism had an ethnic-religious character and low democratic potential. An incidentally small number of political representations and parties had a civilian, working-class, or rather, trans-ethnic and trans-religious character. In this period of political history, Bosnian Herzegovinian political culture stagnated and still possessed a parochial character because, at that time, the monarchic governmental regime limited the process of political socialization and civilian participation.

SOCIALIST AND POST-SOCIALIST EXPERIENCE OF POLITICS

The system of political rule in the socialist political epoch was characterized by political monism. There was no system of liberal-democratic rule, political pluralism, or free elections, but also any preconditions for competition between different political elites. Nevertheless, in this period of Bosnian political history – under the influence of socialist self-government – a regime of economic democracy was developed in the spheres of work and earnings that had the markings of participative or, better said, direct democracy (Zgodić, 2000: 404). Therefore, even if the ex-Yugoslav political regime had the markings of political monism, there is a collaboration in the work sphere between actors of the capital – the state represents them because of the structure of owners' relations – and the union organizations as the representatives of the work sphere. This governmental regime was based on the politics of the worker's socialist self-governance. The former regime of socialist government was not established on a democratic dogma, but it did not prevent the practice of some reduced forms of democratic rule within the sphere of economic relations and direct political participation.

Direct civilian participation – and this should be particularly emphasized – that was approved by the communist regime – especially through the system of workers and social self-governance – often had fictitious political participation characteristics, and this was in political practice its greatest flaw and constraint. Thus, for instance, the fictitious political participation in Yugoslav political practice involved these forms of political civilian engagement: strikes, student

demonstrations, referendums concerning self-distribution, public discussions on law and changes, worker's and youth organizations' activism that was the communist party's extended arm, and finally, the united syndicate council. The communist ideologists had prognosticated that, in fact, the state would gradually perish away under the influence of the workers and social self-governance, but that process did not progress in accordance with the normative anticipations. In this governmental regime, this kind of political communication was, by rule, controlled by the political government. Therefore, the free fluctuation of political ideas never existed, which prompted this governmental regime to disassociate from liberal political aims. Therefore, the values of this political worldview were not in accordance with the fundamental values of liberal democracy. The then socialist political paradigm proffered the radical secular political pattern, within which the religious communities' activism was openly demonized. Socialist politics also proved to be inefficient within the sphere of national politics (Filandra, 2012: 453). The political culture in this political epoch had a minimalistic character and the traits of a servile culture in which free civic activity is minimized, marginalized, and reduced.

The political thought and practice in the post-socialist period in Bosnia and Herzegovina were marked by the re-introduction of the pluralist party system. The nationalistic parties in the first post-socialist multiparty elections received the biggest number of votes, and thus the political scene of Bosnia and Herzegovina was once again divided on an ethnoreligious basis after more than fifty years. After the successful referendum on independence, Bosnia and Herzegovina received official ordain and international recognition, but that was not sufficient to prevent the war against the state and the internal armed conflicts (Fejzić, 2021: 256). The democratic life was suspended, and the state of emergency was characterized by crude conflicts until the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina. With this agreement which ended the war, and its Annex IV respectively, the new foundations of Bosnia and Herzegovina were established. In expert literature, Bosnia and Herzegovina is often branded as the post-Dayton state formation. In its post-Dayton political epoch, Bosnia and Herzegovina is consisting of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of Srpska entities, along with Brčko District, which makes its political structure deeply complex. Besides, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity is radically decentralized and consists of ten cantons. The post-Dayton intrastate structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not rational, natural, and functional, which reflects on the state's efficiency in creating and enforcing internal and international politics.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a state in which some forms of consociational democracy are constantly being imposed and experimented with. Hence, during political implementations nondemocratic practices like dislocating a political process outside the governmental institutions are often preferred. The central political question in Bosnia and Herzegovina – better call it an existential one – is still the question concerning the state organization and its eventual reconstructions on some other bases. The existing state structure is non-functional, and unnatural, and is not founded on historical Bosnian regions, or rational economic presuppositions. That is why the reform of the current state establishment is necessary and has no alternative to it. The National Question and the question of economic recovery and prosperity are not the focus of Bosnian

politics, but rather find themselves as being in the shadow of possible models for reorganizing the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Post-Dayton political pluralism is ethnically polarized, and the democratic governmental regime – because of the usage of consociational arrangements – has an ethnocratic character (Pejanović, 2015: 121). The political culture of this political epoch still does not carry the mark of civilian culture, primarily because the ethnocratic governmental system creates a subjected mentality in its civilians.

A discourse on the character of the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European Union (EU) and other Euro-Atlantic organizations has prompted great polemics and perplexities in the local intellectual, political, and economic circles. To eliminate and unmask certain obscurities, it is necessary to thoughtfully analyse and scan the Bosnian-Herzegovinian political stage, then the institutional-political foundation of the EU, and finally the mass installation and negative implications of the `new forms of Eurocentrism´ in states which have recently joined the EU. It is especially important to explore to which measure a non-critical and conformist Europocentric discourse is present in Bosnian-Herzegovinian society, along with the question if it has already produced any kind of damage to Bosnian political culture. This conformist political approach needs to be prevented and has all its potential risks uncovered on time. However, Euroscepticism is not the political solution to be preferred because that kind of irreconcilable relation towards the EU would not bring anything lucrative to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Laughland, 2005: 204). It is rather better to choose the path between Eurocentrism and Euroscepticism that would guarantee the successful integration of the state but also preserve its authentic culture and political tradition. The EU as a supranational creation should not be sacralized at all because it certainly does not represent an ideal economic-political community in which all problems vanish. Therefore, Bosnia and Herzegovina need a conscious and sober integration – free from any misconceptions, unrealistic projections, and sacral expectations – into the biggest association of European peoples, and this path has no other acceptable alternatives.

While analysing the post-Dayton political discourse, it is plausible to conclude that the only acceptable political idea is the one that claims that we should not understand our advantages as our handicaps! That is the first step. Post-Dayton Bosnian daily life is marked by political obstructions and ethnonational verbal confrontations that trouble the process of making political decisions, and this is also directly reflected in the process of developing a stable state. Besides the undertakings in creating conditions for the Bosnia and Herzegovina integration process into the EU, simultaneous and permanent work on raising the awareness of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian people, of their common homeland, of their belonging to Bosnia and Herzegovina, while at the same time trying to find the `point of understanding´ for all Bosnian-Herzegovinian citizens, that will create conditions for their political dialogue and interethnic convergence.

Reconstruction of the state organization and constitutional reforms are fundamental conditions for future progress and democratic state consolidation. Most critically-emancipatory-oriented thinkers consider this problem the greatest impediment to any further progress and integration (Zgodić, 2006). Inter-Bosnian political disagreements should be absolved before joining the European Union – any other different outcome may have negative repercussions on the

state – to accept and overcome all political novelties brought about by European integration. Better said, it is necessary to actualize the discourse on Bosniakhood and Bosnianhood but also to work on developing the awareness of the historic inter-confessional convergence that has adorned Bosnia from ancient times to this day. It is necessary to refresh the memory of Bosnian political history and its values. Political consensus attainment in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina is made impossible due to the accumulated hatred and the constructed ignorance about us – for which mainly extremists of right-wing and expansionistic policies are guilty. Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose citizens do not possess a sufficiently developed sense about themselves, their collectiveness, and what they are historically – and this is an indicator of low political culture – cannot be a serious candidate for entering the EU. The subjected existence of citizens is not what our country needs in the Euro-Atlantic political epoch, but rather a self-conscious citizenry acting as a generator of democratic consolidation and economic prosperity. With these citizenry attributions and virtues, the fate and the perspective of our state are not at all questionable and uncertain.

However, the post-Dayton political existence of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is conditioned by various political threats and challenges that limit its possibilities and intentions in the field of practical politics. These limiting political processes and finalized solutions are often imposed on political distance. Their effects can be found exclusively in the sphere of internal politics, and that creates the impression that they have an intra-Bosnian character (Bieber, 2006). The apostrophized consequences are, as a rule, the result of global interdependence and transnational polycentrism in the sphere of political decision-making that, for example, has permanently changed and transformed the political process in democratic countries. However, this trend does not have the same intensity in all countries – it is usually conditioned by the possession of different forms of power - and is particularly expressed in political communities that have limited institutional capacity and transitional state creations. In this regard, it is possible to assume that globalization policy largely makes a model, defines, and directs Bosnia and Herzegovina's development and political capabilities – as new, post-socialist, and transitional democracies – while minimizing the democratic capacity of its political institutions. In other words, the effects of globalization that can be found in the political milieu and social sphere of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian state give its political person a completely different form, role, and meaning. In fact, there are more indicators that unambiguously indicate that are endangered the political stability and economic sustainability in post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina.

CONCLUSION

A relic of traditional collectivism can still be detected and identified in Bosnia-Herzegovina's politics - in the post-Dayton political era it is particularly expressed in the depersonalizing linkage of individuals to ethnic and religious identity, whereas in times of socialist politics, for instance, individuals found refuge in a class identity whose homogeneity was preserved by the Communist Party. This has been a major obstacle to the emergence of participative political culture and the development of true democracy based on the system of civic representation. The development of social and political thought in Bosnia and Herzegovina had

been permanently marked by a longstanding colonial subordination of the state and the various forms of authoritarian collectivism within a political practice. Therefore, it is quite evident that dysfunctional politics and government in post-socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina were established and developed under the influence of early, complicated, and illiberal political experiences, which had a pronounced collectivist character, which is at the same time an answer to the research question.

The dominant determinants of the contemporary political epoch are – besides globalization and the neoliberal worldview – supranational policies and Euro-Atlantic integrations. Bosnia and Herzegovina have already been overtaken by waves of globalization, neo-liberalization, and Euro-Atlantic integrations. It is not erroneous to say that its future and existence are bound to the EU, but it should not put itself in a subjected position towards the EU in an idolatrous, inferior, and conformist way. Therefore, politics that follow the principles of partnership, equality, and respect should be preferred and advocated. However, one of the key problems is that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina lack a developed awareness of belonging to the state, without which it is impossible to attain the self-respect that is a fundamental part of every developed political culture. Consequently, during a phase of democratic transition and consolidation – in which Bosnia and Herzegovina still is – it is important to eliminate any misconceptions, unrealistic expectations, prejudices, and stereotypes regarding the essence and functions of the EU as a supranational creation and build a basic consensus on a functional state that will reflect the wishes and interests of all its citizens.

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