ARTICLE

NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION BY THE EUROPEAN UNION: LESSONS FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Abstract

This article analyzes the European Union's (EU) adoption of a liberal intervention approach within post-conflict regions, with a particular emphasis on the Western Balkans, notably Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The EU's democracy promotion initiatives in BiH center around priorities such as good governance, bolstering civil society, and safeguarding human rights. However, the efficacy of promoting civil society in nascent political systems raises a crucial question: to what extent does promoting civil society in the context of undeveloped political systems hinder rather than facilitate the consolidation of democracy? Despite the EU's efforts, influenced by Europeanization and the liberal democratic model emphasizing civil society, BiH faces inherent challenges at the national level. First, this study examines the dual role of the EU in BiH as a "peace governor" and a "democracy promoter," scrutinizing the intricacies of the EU civil society promotion mechanisms. Then, it analyzes the challenges and repercussions of civil society promotion on democracy consolidation in BiH. The article also addresses BiH's political and financial dependency on the EU, underlining the implications of Europeanization. It concludes with recommendations emphasizing a balanced integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches alongside BiH's self-sufficiency as an essential factor in its democratic progression.

Keywords

Bosnia and Herzegovina, civil society organizations, democracy promotion, self-sufficiency, European Union, Western Balkans.

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has intervened and been involved in post-conflict zones via various mechanisms. Major donors within the international community, such as international organizations, international financial organizations, and the European Union (EU), are principal actors. They tend to focus on governance mechanisms based on a comprehensive understanding of development. After the end of the Cold War, the development concept underwent a significant transformation. On a broader scope, development refers to reconstructing post-conflict zones through political, economic, and social frameworks. These frameworks include capacity-building programs, development projects, good governance, democracy promotion programs, and financial initiatives aligned with the neoliberal free market system and are consistent with the liberal peace understanding.[1] One of the main motivations of liberal peace is to pave the way for the liberal internationalization of post-conflict countries. Main motivations are characterized as: (1) ensuring democracy, (2) implementing economic reforms based on the international market, and (3) structuring new institutions and organizations parallel to the understanding of the "modern state."[2] Within this framework, Dillon and Reid emphasized that in the liberal internationalization project, in addition to developing the interstate system, the transformation of sovereign state forms through discourses such as, among others, civil society, civil rights, and judicial power, is effective.[3] In this respect, the EU has been one of the significant actors in the Western Balkans since the Dayton Agreement in 2005; for the last two decades, the EU has been involved in the region in various roles.

In some countries, notably Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the EU has acted as an "international protector" without excluding the use of its conditionality mechanism.[4] Like other prominent international donors, the EU adopts the liberal pattern of intervention in post-conflict zones, particularly in the Western Balkans. The core focus of this article is the EU's democracy promotion programs in BiH, which have a particular reference to fostering civil society. The EU's priorities are good governance, civil society, and ensuring human rights in its democracy promotion programs. This study's main research question is, "To what extent does promoting civil society in the context of undeveloped political systems hinder rather than facilitate the consolidation of democracy?" After the EU's attempts, which are shaped by Europeanization and the European liberal democracy model, including good governance and assured free elections, it is not necessarily feasible to expect a significant and fast change in democracy

level in BiH. Instead, it could actually hamper the process. Due to features that are not yet performing at the national level, Bosnia and Herzegovina strives to adopt "liberal democracy" despite its political and financial dependencies on the EU. For this reason, I contend that, notwithstanding the EU democracy promotion programs, the focus should be on bottom-up approaches rather than on the typically top-down approaches of the international context. In support of my argument, the first section addresses the dual and complicated role of the EU in BiH as a "peace governor" and "democracy promoter." The second part discusses the EU's civil society promotion mechanisms in BiH in detail. The following section focuses on civil society promotion in the consolidation of democracy by the EU in BiH in regard to its challenges and consequences in BiH. The last section addresses the future implications of the EU's civil society promotion in BiH with respect to an increase in political dependency, explicitly focusing on the impact of Europeanization and an increase in financial dependency. In the final part, specific recommendations about a balanced integration of top-down and bottom-up approaches and the BiH's self-sufficiency are presented.

The EU as a "Peace Governor" and "Democracy Promoter" in BiH

After the end of the Cold War, one of the most remarkable events of the 20th century was the dissolution of Yugoslavia. As this straitjacket of the 20th century gave way, it fundamentally reshaped the Western Balkans. Putting aside the emergence of new republics, the problems that came to the surface have to this day not been fully resolved. State-building is problematic as transforming and making comprehensive reforms regarding political regimes and structures is challenging. Aside from ethnic clashes within the societies, one of the most apparent problems has been the political characteristics of these countries favoring elitist approaches. The communist-led governments brought about more severe problems regarding democracy, governance, and civil society building. Good governance strategies, which involved civil society in a democratic environment, were obstructed by the political traditions of authoritarian, communist-led governments.

It is also worth noting that the 20th century could be considered the third wave of democratization across certain regions of the world including the Western Balkans. Thus, from the 1990s onwards, Europe's post-communist regimes had commenced dealing with democratization.[5] Throughout the third wave of democratization, so-called post-communist young democracies of the region

were labelled "defective democracies since they lacked a holistic approach… [and] [a]s such, they have sought systemic equilibrium."[6] Systemic equilibrium, though, has been mainly hampered by the circuitous nature of the political structure, which undermines civil society.

In 2000, the EU started the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) in Bosnia and Herzegovina which can be designated as the inception of the close engagement of the EU with the country. The European Council, meeting in Thessaloniki in June 2003, officially supported the aim of integrating the Balkan region into mainstream Euro-Atlantic organizations. This marked a significant change in the EU's approach to BiH, shifting from years of providing economic aid with limited conditions to recognizing that the future of the Balkans lies within the European Union.[7] Juncos recapitulates that "Europeanizing Bosnia" seemed more attractive than "Balkanizing Europe," which was also motivated by restoring the union's reputation after its failure to stop the war at the beginning of the 1990s.[8]

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This intense engagement of the EU with BiH is also related to the enlargement of the union's policies and principles. Through the democratization process aligned with the *acquis communautaire*, the EU has aimed to expand peace and security across the continent. In the words of Rehn, former European commissioner for enlargement, "Enlargement has proven to be one of the most important instruments for European security. It reflects the essence of the EU as a civilian power; by extending the area of peace and stability, democracy, and the rule of law, the EU has achieved far more through its gravitational pull than it could ever have done with a stick or a sword."[9] Enlargement is consistent with the Europeanization of the Western Balkans, which is transforming post-conflict countries in the region by expanding European identity. In other words, post-conflict state-building is understood as "the strengthening or the construction of legitimate governmental institutions in countries that are emerging from conflicts."[10] However, this also reflects the problematic aspects of the EU's international post-conflict practices: outside intervention is used to promote self-government, local ownership, and universal liberal values as a recipe for

local problems, which results in contradictions between short-term and long-term needs and past practices in post-conflict contexts.[11]

In BiH, the EU has a special representative (EUSR) responsible for tackling the post-conflict context by administering the Dayton Agreement's implementation that ended the war in the 1990s. These representatives differ from EU ambassadors, who have a special role in managing conflict-related problems. Johann Sattler is the current EU representative in BiH.[12] In addition, in 2004, nine years after the war ended, the EU launched military operation ALTHEA in BiH. The EU also deployed a robust military force (EUFOR), which is composed of twenty EU member countries and non-EU troop-contributing countries such as Türkiye and the United Kingdom. Besides the international actors' involvement, BiH's domestic political system is complex. The Dayton constitution established a highly decentralized state composed of two entities: the Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska (RS). At the state level, there is a rotating three-member presidency of Bosniaks, Croats, and Serb delegates.[13] However, the Dayton Agreement was signed in Ohio as a primarily American initiative, besides the US, the EU also had an active role in ending the war in BiH. Slye argues that the agreement represents "the institutionalization of ethnicity in Bosnia."[14] After the completion of Dayton, in December 1995, the Madrid European Council committed to the EU's contribution to the civilian implementation of the agreement.[15]

As mentioned above, the EUSR plays a very central role in BiH in terms of imposing and supervising issues of high politics. This is how the EU channeled Bosnia and Herzegovina as a weak state.[16] Chandler argues that the EUSR mandate includes the power to impose legislation directly and dismiss various elected government and public officials.[17] Furthermore, this representative system is externally designed and applied in a top-down, regulatory trend, led by high

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representatives who "set and imposed the political agenda and punished those local actors who did not implement it."[18] Unfortunately, this EU governance model discourages and voids the self-governance mechanisms of the Bosnian people. The intense EU engagement with BiH in the 2000s can also be

interpreted as characteristic of the important role played by the EU, which was marginalized during the Dayton negotiation, in the international policy response to BiH's swingback from the U.S to the Europe. The EU's attempt to "Europeanize Bosnia" is also related to BiH's location, which is in Europe, but outside the EU. The EU, therefore, assumes that it is responsible for expanding its regional footprint and securing the continent to prevent any upcoming violence. In the mid-2000s, the EU and other international actors started to promote the reforms of the Dayton agreements to increase the efficiency and functionality of the Bosnian state and make it possible to meet the requirements of the acquis *communautaire* as part of the state-building process. In February 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted its application for EU membership. After the Commission issued its opinion on the application in May 2019, the European Council reviewed the recommendation made by the Commission in October 2022. Subsequently, it granted Bosnia and Herzegovina candidate status in December 2022.

As discussed earlier, the EU has started to promote capable state administration, democracy promotion, and good governance in BiH, mainly through the SAP, which was launched in 2000. Regarding financial support, public administration reform and institution building have been priority areas of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), which was first launched in 2007. The EU pre-accession funds are a significant investment into the future of both the enlargement region and the EU. These funds support beneficiaries in implementing the necessary political and economic reforms, preparing them for the rights and obligations of the EU membership.[19] The first IPA, between 2007 and 2013, focused on transition assistance and institution building. The second IPA, between 2014 and 2020, concentrated on Country Action Programmes, and the last IPA, allocated for 2021-2027, focuses on Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes.[20]

Table 1: IPA Budget Allocation

IPA I Budget (2007-2013)	€11,5 billion
IPA II Budget (2014-2020)	€12,8 billion
IPA III Budget (2021-2027)	€14,162 billion

Source: European Commission[21]

As demonstrated in Table 1, the total IPA budget has gradually increased, reaching €14 billion for IPA III (2021-2027). The current beneficiaries of this assistance are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye.

Table 2: BiH 2014-2020: Instrument for Pre-accession (IPA) Commitments (Million Euros)
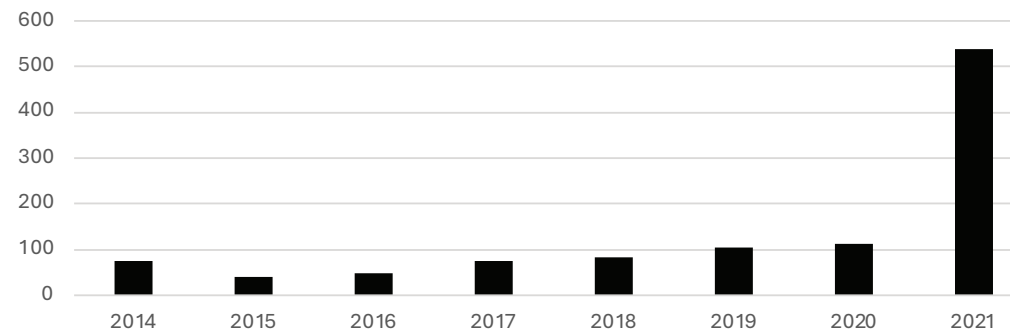
Source: European Commission[22]

According to Table 2, the IPA II funding allocations in the period 2014-2020 amount to €552.1 million, including funds for the Civil Society Facility (€ 9.1 million).[23] In this respect, the funds for civil society funds are allocated under "Democracy and the Rule of Law," which is a priory sector aiming to strengthen democratic institutions and reform the civil service. Whereas the total amount of funds for "Democracy and the Rule of Law" for 2014-2017 was €116 million, the fund's total amount for 2014-2020 is €223 million.[24] This pillar represents the second-highest fund of IPA commitments after "Competitiveness and Growth," which includes sectors such as environment, energy, transport, education, and social policies,[25] and exemplifies the EU's strong emphasis on supporting civil society, which is regarded as a potent tool for fostering democracy.

However, the problem is that the blurred lines between member state building and peacebuilding have left BiH in a complex position, and, at the same time, increased the debate about the EU's exercising conditionality after the 2003 Thessaloniki EU-Western Balkan Summit that "(t)he future of the Balkans is within the European Union."[26] The integration of the Western Balkans

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into the EU is now presented as part of a strategy of strengthening the union itself.[27] Since the 2000s, the EU has indeed used its foreign policy in the region regarding membership conditionality to promote reform. The EU enlargement and Europeanization policies are said to have extended peace and security to other areas of the continent through the democratization process fostered by adopting the acquis *communautaire*. Hence, the EU cannot escape the politics of state building because enlargement is an inherently political process that contains technical reforms and specific models of political, economic, and social re-organization.[28] Therefore, it is worth noting that Europeanization can be defined as a massive commitment to the values of the EU to reconstruct political and socio-economic frameworks. Generally, the EU has used "the membership carrot to further the process of central state-building to create an affordable and sustainable state capable of coping with the membership obligations."[29] Consequently, the EU's position has become much more ambiguous as in the meantime it aims to act as a "peace governor" and "democracy promoter." To sum up, the EU has been perceived as a "normative empire"[30] which is eager to impose its norms on other countries in the name of peacebuilding and democracy promotion.

The EU's Civil Society Promotion Mechanisms in BiH

This section addresses specific mechanisms of civil society promotion by the EU which has a particular focus and attention on building effective civil society in its peacebuilding and enlargement policies. Civil rights have been mentioned in all EU progress reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2005.[31] The EU has funded civil rights projects through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and IPA. From 2005 onwards, civil society has become one of the key EU topics and it is closely tracked in its progress reports.[32] The international community, including the EU, has aimed to promote democracy and good governance aligned with social groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The following sections will address the details of the EU's civil society organizations (CSO)-led approach. However, there are vital problems which should be addressed here. First, although civil society is a primary focus, the budget for BiH under EIDHR and IPA was limited.[33] For example, civil society and media funding was around €1 million in 2003, whereas BiH received €20 million annually between 2001 and 2003.[34] This example demonstrates that civil society was not a priority area for the EU's democracy promotion agenda. However, this changed after 2006, when the first IPA was announced and planned for 2007-2010. Second, the EU's initiatives in peacebuilding, state building, and democracy promotion are criticized as being

one-size-fits-all programs[35] that mostly rely on the technocratic mechanisms of regulation.[36] These problems demonstrate the inefficiencies of the European intervention and the limitations regarding bottom-up and localized practices.

Starting from the first IPA, the EU has concentrated on increasing the capacity of civil society, supporting CSOs and NGOs, and strengthening local democracy. Between 2011 and 2013, BiH received €8.5 million under this scheme.[37] Furthermore, the EIDHR, which is "the concrete expression of the EU commitment to support and promote democracy and human rights," was updated in 2014.[38] The difference between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 EIDHR is addressing new realities, and increasing the support of the EU for the development of thriving civil societies and their specific role as key actors for positive change in support of human rights and democracy.[39] The EIDHR's budget is €1,332,752,000 for 2014-2020 and is mainly channeled through civil society organizations whose projects are selected following calls for proposals (Delegations or Headquarters).[40] It is also important to note that the EIDHR complements the other EU external assistance instruments. However, according to Chandler, the EU is acting imperially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which also echoes "normative empire" arguments. Chandler states,

> The European Union has denied its power in the very processes of exercising it, through presenting its diktat in the language of 'partnership' and country 'ownership', internationalizing the mechanisms of its domination through engaging a multitude of external states and international organizations, internationalizing or Europeanizing the candidate state's core institutions of governance and through engaging with and attempting to create a policy-advocating 'civil society'.[41]

This statement shows the top-down style of Europeanization through reforming core local institutions. In fact, the power of conditionality stems directly from the asymmetrical interdependence between the EU and the candidate countries, particularly in economic terms.[42] Regarding the EIDHR, Belloni puts forth another problem, namely that the EU's state-building approach "reflects the same approach to regional development grounded on an external initiative that characterized international intervention for the best part of the last decade."[43] This approach makes Bosnia "the recipient of strategies developed elsewhere."[44] Put differently, the EU's approach to state building encounters a familiar contradiction in many international initiatives, stemming from the challenge of facilitating reforms and fostering self-governance externally.

The EIDHR is the EU's new civil society instrument, which aims to encourage a bottom-up democracy perspective. Although there are very significant critiques of the EU's approaches, as discussed above, this instrument is adapted to consolidate and support democracy through a powerful civil society, including fostering CSOs or NGOs that are non-profit and voluntary citizens' groups organized on a local, national, or international level. According to the European Commission,

> Work with, for and through civil society organizations will give the response strategy [of the EIDHR] its critical profile. It will, on the one hand, promote the kind of open society, which civil society requires in order to thrive, and on the other hand, will support civil society in becoming an effective force for dialogue and reform relying on the role of men, women and children as individuals with the power, capacity and will to create development.[45]

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According to this statement, as Kurki argues, "civil society becomes a sphere for co-opting and shaping of the right kind of rational conduct."[46] The EIDHR serves as a significant instrument that intersects with and enhances other external assistance mechanisms, yet it also stands apart from these aid endeavors. Operating within its own budgetary framework, it pursues its internal objectives autonomously. The EIDHR has five primary objectives: (i) enhancing respect for human rights in countries where they are most at risk; (ii) strengthening civil society in promoting human rights and democratic reform; (iii) supporting actions on human rights and democracy in areas covered by EU guidelines; (iv) supporting international and regional frameworks for protection of human rights and the rule of law; and (v) assisting and organizing electoral observer missions.[47] The EIDHR II (2007-2013) was reformed with a heavier emphasis being placed on strong civil society. The most striking part of the reforms was the heavier emphasis on strong civil society. The EIDHR's primary operating system is still the call for proposals, although some non-calls-for-proposal-based projects have also been allowed in the EIDHR II.[48] This instrument is a grant-based system with grants given primarily for specific project work by civil society organizations.[49] The CSO-led approaches of the EU democracy promotion programs, particularly the EIDHR, are based on this working

mechanism. Since 2015, the EIDHR has supported diverse civil society and human rights organizations in BiH that focus on different areas such as basic education rights for all children, education on gender-based violence, rural women, and inclusion of Roma youth.[50] The beneficiaries of these projects, which last from 18 to 30 months, are civil society organizations based in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is important to note that the EIDHR and these beneficiaries work as co-financers of the projects.[51]

Besides state building and creating a democratic state, one of the main objectives of the EIDHR is to promote reforms "from below". As such, the focus is on societal issues, and the target beneficiaries are civil society organizations. However, contrary to expectations, this EU approach can turn into a top-down political instrument that coerces populations and the state as well. First, civil society is defined as an entity that "defends fundamental freedoms which form the basis of all democratic processes." This means that the EU mainly selects CSOs to be part of the democratization process. In other words, in order to be selected as EU partners, CSOs must focus/propagate fundamental EU freedoms that will Europeanize BiH. These specific CSOs are expected to follow similar norms and principles with those adopted by the EU; however, this might risk local ownership of societal change in favor of change trickling down from/via the EU.

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Second, the EIDHR sees CSOs as an "autonomous" and "effective" change-inducing set of actors,[52] and therefore, CSOs have the intentionality and self-belief to see themselves as crucial democratizing actors. This vast role attributed to CSOs can challenge the political balance of BiH based on a fragile, already-existing rotating three-member presidency of Bosniaks, Croats, and Serb delegates. Hence, this EU democratization process can lead to a political clash between the political elites and the CSOs favoring EU norms and values, ending up in rising political dependency on the EU.

Third, the top-down EIDHR mechanism amplifies the role of CSOs as "service providers" in a typical liberal democratic state. Nevertheless, Bosnia and Herzegovina should not be perceived as a completely democratic state where

the government plays a diminished role, but rather as a setting where CSOs operate as "service providers," bridging the void left by the state. In addition to the critique leveled thus far at the EIDHR, analytical discussions will be addressed and expanded in detail in the later sections of the article.

The Promotion of Civil Society in the Consolidation of Democracy by the EU in BiH and Its Consequences

In addition to the discussions addressed above, this section provides a detailed analytical framework of arguments regarding civil society facilitation, its challenges, and its consequences in BiH. The fostering of civil society faces multiple challenges, namely that of little trust amongst the community and ethnic clashes, and, as a result, encouraging participation in political decision-making, which is an essential component of democratic consolidation, is likely to be hindered. Civil society is perceived as giving citizens incentives to participate widely and to encourage the public scrutiny of the states.[53]

In order to stabilize systemic equilibrium in the post-communist countries of the Western Balkans, civil society should be supported. The EU has attempted to promote civil society to bolster democratization; a weak civil society could severely influence democratic consolidation, as one of major risks for liberal democratic states. This, in turn, could lead to more corruption, ineffective legal systems, and socio-economic tensions, which are considered to be potential risks that characterize weak democracies.[54] In order to support this point, Diamond et al. argue that discrepancies in terms of ethnicity which are associated with socio-economic tensions are considered higher risks for the consolidation of democracy.[55] For this reason, as discussed earlier, the EU's primary goal has been to promote civil society to consolidate democracy in defective democracies and create liberal democratic systems in the Western Balkans through IPA contributions and the EIDHR. It should be borne in mind that civil society is the arena between the public sphere and the state that fills the vacuums left by authoritarian regimes and which should be far from the manipulations of elitist approaches. The ideal democracy should be the compound of bottom-up and top-down approaches. However, as evidenced by the top-down approaches of the EU, the latter has worked only to make recipients more dependent on it in a more asymmetrical political structure.

First, the EU has adopted a trickle-down effect in its promotion of civil society in the region. The EU's primary goal through the democratization of BiH has been to expand Europeanization by increasing transnational actions to make

the Balkans a part of the EU.[56] The EU started the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) in 1999 and an important part of this process was the integration of the Balkans by enhancing the influence of civil society.[57] In order to create a people-centered transformation process in BiH, the EU applied methods that relied on trickle-down effects such as top-down policy programs.[58] Improving the EU's transnational actions was supposed to facilitate a democratic system successfully; however, as mentioned earlier, rather than consolidating, it has undermined the local context and bottom-up approaches. One of the salient aspects of democratization programs illustrated by Dimitrova and Pridham is that these top-down approaches can neglect some of the domestic context's crucial details.[59] Dimitrova and Pridham explain this aspect as follows:

> For democracy promotion is often an asymmetrical exercise requiring 'donors' to export their experience, skills, and merchandise to 'recipients'; whereas, increasingly, there is a school of thought in the democracy-promotion literature that argues for local participation and bottom-up practices to complement traditional top-down procedures.[60]

The authors argue that they should be complemented by domestic bottom-up initiatives, which are also the primary sources of civil society. To ensure local participation and achieve an ideal democracy, these two approaches should be compounded. The EU Commission demands the implementation of a "one-size-fits-all" method to enhance reform in the Western Balkans.[61] However, the EU's top-down method neglects each country's intrinsic agendas and is not a feasible way to facilitate democracy promotion in the Balkans. As a result, despite the EU initiatives, BiH's asymmetrical conjuncture of rising elitist approaches and bipolar attitudes might innately continue to increase, potentially hindering the democratic transition process.

This brings us to another crucial aspect of these EU initiatives: the elitist approach to politics has become more dominant. The top-down mechanisms of democracy promotion rely highly on national governments as watchdogs of the internal process and national governments' will and their institutions as well.[62] It should be noted that the political atmosphere in BiH is fragile and not fully democratic. Therefore, the elitist components could easily manipulate the watchdog missions sent to observe national governments. The problems regarding elitist approaches and their dominance over the rest of society might pose a risk for democratization and lead to political imbalance. Unfortunately, the political and social atmosphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina has allowed

for external intervention by local elites in favor of their interests in the local political context. One of the underlying reasons is that the architecture of political regimes in the Balkans was mainly fostered by communist and autocratic regimes. For this reason, the transformation of BiH is unlikely to rely solely on the EU initiatives, which favor civil society, since these initiatives have tended to bring more advantages to elitist politicians. Therefore, to make the transformation

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process more effective, the elitist attitude of national governments should be eliminated rather than reinforced, and societal rights must be promoted, such as the demand for equal rights within the community engaging with civil society.

Secondly, the EU mainly focuses on the CSO-led approach, which is expected to improve civil society's engagement and attain ideal democracy; however, there are deficiencies in these initiatives as well. To begin with the importance of the CSO-led approach, CSOs and NGOs are important for bolstering civil society through a democratic approach and their participation. Since the communist regime collapsed in BiH, CSOs and NGOs have been considered the only international agencies that could channel aid to the region,[63] and were subsequently burdened with much of this responsibility. One of the fundamental concerns of these organizations has been to increase the capacity of civil society engagement in BiH, which is an essential component of democratization and democracy promotion, and, in this manner, to generate citizen empowerment.[64] This has been one of the vital parts of the reconstruction of the whole region after the end of the Cold War. Yet, in contrast to the expectations associated with the CSO-led approach, in the process of implementation of a new liberal democracy, citizens could not fully engage with the new democracies since they would need more channels to engage with it.[65] The focal point of these organizations is that they were supposed to improve their skills to respond to citizens and their needs by channeling them to various agencies. Instead, they mainly focused on competence among other international agencies, including the EU, in the international arena, which highly obstructed the democratization of BiH.[66]

In addition to the problems and deficiencies that stem from rivalry amongst CSOs and other international agencies, CSOs have decided to involve themselves in decision-making procedures and political initiatives.[67] In other words, the involvement of these organizations in the internal context was not only about promoting civil society but also about being one of the significant voices throughout the political procedures. However, this engendered more serious outcomes. To explain further, we can use the metaphor of a newborn child for BiH's civil and political structure: if the newborn is raised in a foreign culture, the child will grow up dissimilar to their biological parents. The vital point here is that these outside actors, who are not sufficiently familiar with the societal and political values of the local context, could likely fail regarding the promotion of democracy, which must be unique to each country and its traditional values and norms. Thus, one could argue that CSOs have insufficient local background and knowledge to bring liberal democracy to the people of BiH. In other words, the approaches of CSOs are limited to actions of Europeanization connected to EU enlargement policies shaped by ideas of "fundamental freedoms." As discussed above, such initiatives could create a more asymmetrical political context by undermining civil society participation during the policy-making procedures.

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and the poor coordination of CSOs and NGOs, which are likely to bring about more ambiguities in BiH regarding democracy promotion. CSOs, which are the EU's main instruments, have been deemed to alleviate the formality of international actors' top-down approaches through their involvement in the local political context.[68] However, know-how strategies could not be observed or improved during this assistance. Such strategies need to be in place in the early stage of democracy consolidation in order to increase and implement highly efficient methods for an understanding of the ideal, permanent liberal democracy according the EU standards. Yet, defective methods and initiatives have hampered Bosnia and Herzegovina's democratization process.

Bottom-up approaches are also important in this process. In other words, civil society should be essential in engaging the community and society. Furthermore,

grassroots-level initiatives might pave the way for self-expression values, which are a crucial part of a democratic order. Self-expression values could be the voice of Balkan citizens and are not merely crucial in providing benefits for the prospects of elite-challenging actions such as those undertaken by CSOs. Self-expression values play crucial roles in civic outcomes that strengthen democratic institutions.[69] However, the multiplicity of various CSOs, NGOs, and external actors have made Bosnians focus exclusively on these agents,[70] and as Bosnians had difficulties how to engage with these international donors in contrast to the citizens of liberal democratic states, unfortunately, this rendered the external actors' approaches meaningless. Hence, civil society has become an autonomous service provider to fill the state's gap. Ultimately, in order to engage a CSO-led approach to civil society development more efficiently, an institutional framework, local values and/or norms, and local political structures should be considered as significant elements.

Future Implications of the Promotion of Civil Society by the EU in BiH

1. Increase in Political Dependency

> [T]he heavy influence of the international community, the fragmented constitutional structure, and persistence of parallel and clientalistic institutions that perpetuate insecurity and patronage contribute to hindering the advocacy role of civil society and retard the transition to substantive democratization.[71]

As discussed above, it is very likely that the BiH democratization process is at risk of resulting in a highly fragmented structure created by interference from international actors, especially the EU, which favors clientalistic relations and a patronage system. In my opinion, this might bring about an increase in political dependency. Although BiH and many other countries are already under the significant influence of the EU regarding enlargement and Europeanization policies, this rising influence, which causes higher dependency, could hamper civil society and the democratization process. Another detrimental impact of the EU democracy promotion programs stems from the bureaucratic characteristics of the CSO-led approach, which the EU encourages.[72] This suggests that the administrative requirements of organizations are highly dependent on the bureaucracy and local political structures, which are not always accessible. At the same time, their influence can spread only if they favor the local bureaucracy. In addition, non-state actors are encouraged by the EU to participate in policy-making procedures to stimulate citizenship participation. Their involvement

in these procedures works to bolster the local actors' elitist approaches. The problem that arises from the EU's attitude is that the autonomy and self-determination of Balkan states, including BiH, in terms of controlling their policy-making procedures is highly overshadowed by the EU's political efforts in the Balkan region.[73] The reason is that the EU has accredited itself as a policy leader, peace governor, and democracy promoter. A salient point here is that the EU has emerged as a policy actor in fields of "hard power" rather than "soft power", such as the promotion and enhancement of civil society,[74] and has engaged in a revision of its neighborhood policy, putting at the forefront notions such as deep democracy and sustainable stability.[75]

In a nutshell, these EU approaches make Western Balkan countries more politically dependent on the EU, and local actors and NGOs have gained the impression that they are entirely dependent on the international community without questioning this dependency or the possibility of sanctions.[76] To illustrate this point further, the Office of the High Representative (OHR) served as the EU Special Representative to BiH. The OHR has been accredited by the EU with creating laws and contributing to the legislation process, which can define civil society's advocacy roles. The fundamental problem of the OHR, as an example of international intervention within a legal framework, is that it stimulated more attention from the international community; in other words, political dependence has unfortunately increased and the OHR could not remedy BiH's democratic deficit. Furthermore, this exacerbated the democratization process aimed at promoting civil society.[77]

Thus, I sustain that these complex EU tasks and initiatives have brought about more deadlocks within the political context of Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of policy making and citizen participation. In other words, these deadlocks have hampered citizens' engagement in political processes.[78] Consequently, it is ironic that despite the "considerable efforts of the EU, the position of the non-governmental sector in Bosnia remains very weak even now."[79]

According to the EU's enlargement policies, BiH must fulfil and follow Europeanized norms and values to achieve a democratic transition. According to the EU Action Document "EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021-2023" by the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, "Enhancing the Accession Process - A Credible EU Perspective for the Western Balkans" spells out that "a core objective of the European Union's engagement with the Western Balkans is to prepare them to

meet all the membership requirements. This includes supporting fundamental democratic, the rule of law, and economic reforms and alignment with core European values. This will, in turn, foster solid and accelerated economic growth and social convergence."[80]

Civil society, and fostering democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are seen as fundamental elements of Europeanization. In other words, the EU appears as a "normative empire" regarding its enlargement policies in the Western Balkans, having the responsibility to "prepare" and "make them" ready to be part of the European world. As mentioned earlier, civil society development has been seen as an essential component of this process. However, with respect to the EU democracy promotion programs in

> Civil society, and fostering democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are seen as fundamental elements of Europeanization.

BiH, what we perceive is, in fact, the imposition of Europeanization. This is to say, whenever the EU attempts to diffuse democratic norms within the various parts of Europe, this turns into an imposition rather than diffusion.[81] The example of BiH shows that if the country can follow the ideal democratic structure imposed by the EU and completes its candidacy procedure, it will continue to be more dependent on norms and values which are defined in the context of Europeanization. Yet, this might neglect the inherent natures of countries in terms of political and social contexts. In this respect, the underlying narrative is often based on Europe's own history in which intergovernmental institutions are vital actors of cooperation.[82] Through this "domestic analogy,"[83] the EU seeks to reconstruct an international environment based on it's the premise of its own self-perception.[84] In other words, through democracy promotion and civil society facility funds, the EU aims to implement its governance agenda. To achieve this, as discussed earlier, top-down approaches aligned with conditionality are employed.[85] Here, the EU designates the conditions to be fulfilled for a third country to receive predetermined material or symbolic benefits from the EU.[86]

Moreover, the efforts of the EU could pave the way for more participation of elitist approaches in the political contexts, which could hinder the development of civil society. The goals set for Europeanization could cause a fundamental backlash towards the promotional initiatives for democratization in BiH by the EU, and, in fact, demonstrate an ignorance towards the inherent nature and

culture of post-communist regimes. Whitlock points out that due to a lack of political progress, Bosnia and Herzegovina has suffered from a "dependency syndrome" that dates to the period of the Ottoman Empire.[87] In the current context, the dependency of the Ottoman period has been replaced by the significant impact of Europeanization, which has greatly dominated the political agenda of BiH. Hence, from my standpoint, the increasing political dependency on BiH caused by Europeanization could engender an even more circuitous atmosphere than that of the Cold War.

2. Increase in Financial Dependency

The second point relates to the increasing financial dependency of BiH on EU funding for the promotion of civil society. Civil society should be considered a cross-cutting issue, not a separate sector. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU is promoting the involvement of CSOs in consultations regarding the programing of EU funds (namely IPA I, IPA II, and EIDHR) and the preparation of the EU annual enlargement report.[88] The EU integration process will be a significant challenge for Bosnia and Herzegovina with a particular role for CSOs.[89] How this will threaten the facilitation of democracy depends on the increase in self-sufficiency, which could be a catalyst for democratic transition in BiH. After the 1990s, the EU emerged as a single major donor that promoted funding for the reconstruction of BiH.[90] According to the EU Action Document, while project-level impacts are visible, the broader impact from Civil Society Facility (CSF) funding in Bosnia and Herzegovina is less strong.[91] The document also noted that donor involvement is shrinking, leaving the EU as the main donor since the 1990s. The EU's major financial assistance program in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is based on Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development, and Europeanization (CARDS)[92] with BiH being the country that has received the most extensive funding from CARDS within the Balkan region. This funding has amounted to circa €295 million with 24% of it allocated to promoting civil society.[93] As mentioned above, this was replaced by Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). According to Table 2, the amount of funds for "Democracy and the Rule of Law" in 2014-2017 was €116 million, while the total amount of this fund for 2014-2020 was €223 million.[94] From 2007 onwards, funding for civil society development has increased under IPA, leading to BiH's increasing financial dependency on the EU.[95] In other words, contrary to expectations, the external funding will make BiH more dependent on the EU agenda and its granting of funds for civil society.

The future implications on BiH's political and financial dependencies can be summed up as follows: "In civil society and politics, as well as in the economic development of Bosnia, dependencies on the international actors have been created which limit the development of a democratic culture and render a transfer to complete self-rule more difficult."[96] Currently, one of the primary objectives should be to encourage local funding for civil society development to foster BiH's self-reliance, which could be considered a crucial part of becoming a democratic country. Otherwise, throughout the following years, the level of financial dependency of BiH on the EU will continue to increase sharply.

Conclusion

In light of the arguments above, this final section puts forth a set of relevant recommen dations. First, the main objective of donors should be to harmonize bottom-up and top-down approaches by considering the nature of BiH's local agenda. A horizontal system can be established in which there should be functional cooperation at diverse levels, including local actors and public, private, and EU actors. The transition should be considered a long and challenging process, and each step should be undertaken rigorously.

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Due to the high risk of manipulation by elitists under the CSO-led approach of the EU, bottom-up approaches, which could favor civil society rather than elitists, should be developed. Most Western Balkans countries, including BiH, have less favorable domestic conditions for effective international influence.[97] Therefore, the development and improvement of the institutional framework of BiH and Western Balkan countries should be considered a priority, as this is the foundation on which civil society can develop. This would lessen the risk inherent in the competitive CSO-led approach and reinforce the balancing of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Secondly, it is crucial to minimize the risk of the EU intervention becoming a permanent feature in the political fabric of Western Balkan countries. Once stabilized, BiH should be encouraged to manage its own responsibilities regarding its affairs and problems.[98] Self-sufficiency is an inseparable part of a

well-functioning democracy. For this reason, BiH should gain more experience in terms of being self-sufficient rather than depending on the EU regarding financial and political issues.

This article has underscored the complex and often unintended consequences of democracy promotion programs in the context of transitioning political systems, particularly in CEE countries like BiH. While these programs aim to bolster civil society and promote democratic values, it has been suggested that they may inadvertently hinder the consolidation of democracy.

Furthermore, this article has also addressed the fact that the predominance of CSO-led initiatives within the EU's democratization framework risks perpetuating existing power imbalances and reinforcing entrenched elites, thereby undermining the prospects for genuine democratic participation. This can lead to an increase in the existing asymmetrical order.

Finally, this study has revealed that the emergence of heightened political and financial dependencies further complicates the transition to liberal European democracy, especially in the absence of substantial improvements to local institutional frameworks. It is significant to reassess the efficacy of current top-down approaches and prioritize integrating bottom-up strategies. By fostering grassroots initiatives and empowering local actors, we can better address the structural challenges impeding democratic consolidation in BiH and other similar contexts. This calls for a nuanced and inclusive approach that recognizes the diverse socio-political dynamics at play and actively involves all stakeholders in a horizontal network that can shape the future of democracy in the region.

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