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A Comparative study: Populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia

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Introduction

We all witness the growth of populism in Europe today. In the most developed member states of the European Union, populist parties have experienced much success in Europe over the past several years and are gaining an increasing number of supporters. Easily noticeable are their xenophobic views, incendiary rhetoric, restrictive policies, and general discontent with the current state of affairs. Some of them are openly against further European integration. The country that fell under the influence of populists with disastrous results in Western Europe is Great Britain who is now in a state of uncertainty due to Brexit¹. Also, the negative effects of populist policies in Poland, Hungary, and Italy are also apparent in the fact that these states are getting a bad reputation of being European troublemakers as they openly refuse to show solidarity with their European neighbors and take their share of immigrants who were hit by the crisis and were forced to leave their countries.

Populism has been making gains in several members of the European Union, and although this is an interesting development the focus of this thesis will be on the Balkan states of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. These states have been selected due to their political situations and constitutional arrangements which could prove to be suitable for populist politicians, albeit for different reasons. Most of the politicians currently in power in these two states have been in power for a significant amount of time, varying from 8 to 15 years. I will be taking a closer look at the political situation in these countries by looking at the leaders of the major political parties and attempt to identify if any populists are currently present in their political life. If we take into account that these countries do not seem to have achieved any significant progress that would have a major impact on the quality of life of citizens, it seems quite peculiar that the same political leaders are in power. This may be indicative of populists who use various tactics in order to remain in power.

¹ Although the UK has left the EU on the 31st of June 2020, a formal agreement between the EU and the UK has not been signed.

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have been chosen for a multitude of similarities. First of all, these two countries have recently passed through post-communist transition, it would seem that the transition process has not yet been finalized. Twenty years of democracy have been hard and with few concrete results, given the sub-par living conditions in these two countries, considering that the quality of life. Even after twenty years, Freedom House categorizes Bosnia and Herzegovina as “partly free”, while Serbia experienced a decline in the past several years and got demoted from “free” to “partly free” this year (Freedom House 2019). This is indicated by recent data on the purchasing power of citizens conducted recently by GfK as well as Eurostat, where both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are classified as countries with very low income and purchasing power. According to Eurostat, the two countries can be found at the very bottom of the list. Out of the forty European countries where purchasing power was measured, Bosnia and Herzegovina occupy the 39th position and Serbia 37th (Eurostat 2019; GfK 2018). More important still is that both countries experience some ethnic and religious conflict and cleavages that prevent the healing of society. It is extremely important to recognize how these cleavages are used for political purposes. By understanding the cleavages we will be able to differentiate between political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If a political party has to exploit these ethnic and religious cleavages it makes it a clear indicator of the type of political party it is.

The central question around which this master thesis was built is: Are Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia under the rule of populist politicians, and what are their main strategies of maintaining power? I hypothesize that the political parties currently in power in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are using incendiary and controversial rhetoric that maintain cleavages in the society that were created at the end of the 20th century. The thesis consists of the following sections. The first one will tackle the theoretical conceptualization of populists and their causes, ultimately adopting an adequate theory of populism. Thereafter, a brief presentation of the methodology used in the paper is presented. Then, we will introduce the two cases. First, a contextual analysis of the current state of affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, second, provides the same analysis on Serbia. This is meant to show the populist tactics used which allow them to stay in power. This will be followed by the conclusion where the findings of the analysis will be presented. And at the end of the paper, the bibliography listing the

sources of information and works which influenced and were used in the writing of this paper will be found.

Methodology

This section presents the methodology used to compare the two countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. I will be comparing the two case studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia by taking into account their economic state, EU integration process, constitutional arrangement and political scene by focusing on ruling parties. Now an explanation of why I chose these two countries to uncover what makes them so susceptible to populist tactics. Both countries were previously a part of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. They shared a common identity and for the most of the 20th century they were a part of a joint state, both countries had internal conflicts that were put to a stop by outside intervention. Their similarities do not end here, both have profound ethnic cleavages and poor economic performance. Despite this, these countries have been ruled for a substantial period of time by parties, headed by charismatic strongmen, that one could call populist. Their path to EU accession has been slowed and their prospects of becoming member states of the EU weakened because of their overall unsatisfactory performance, weak rule of law, freedom of the media and journalists, weak civil society, and so on.

The reason why Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are interesting cases for the study of populism is that they are states in transition and according to literature transition is a fertile ground for populist leaders to grow strong which is why they need to “*prolong transitional situation*” (Albertazzi, McDonnell; 2008). This situation allows political leaders to stay in power longer by manipulating their “people” or voters and turning them against others within the state. Those others are parts of the population that can be identified by their political, ethnic, or religious particularities.

These are also profound differences between the two countries. The two states seem to have different kinds of social cleavages. Even though both states are multi-ethnic the structure of the population of the two states greatly differs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina for instance,

although there are more than three ethnicities, only three are guaranteed rights and representation by the constitution and the three are dominant in numbers compared to the others, still, none of the three main ethnic groups is large enough as to overpower another. In Serbia however one ethnic group is dominant and can overpower others although, as history can attest, that might not be the best course of action. Bosnia and Herzegovina's social cleavages were created when the country started its route to independence, further deepened by the war that lasted for 4 years, from 1991 to 1995. The peace that followed was a result of outside intervention and significant diplomatic effort by the USA to broker a peace agreement between the warring ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country's current constitution, the General Framework Agreement for Peace signed in 1995, has been characterized as a "strait-jacket" as it could be said that it helped keep the cleavages open. Serbia, on the other hand, lacks the kind of cleavages that Bosnia and Herzegovina face. The go-to political issue that Serbian politicians exploit is the issue of Kosovo and its independence. The constitution of Serbia defines Kosovo as part of Serbia and not as an independent state.

The utilization of comparative politics as "*comparison is a fundamental tool of analysis. It sharpens our power of description, and plays a central role in concept-formation by bringing into focus suggestive similarities and contrasts among cases.*" (Collier 1993, 1). By using most similar case design I will compare the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia to better understand and explain the roots and factors of the success of populist parties in these states by looking within the two states to explain in detail why and how cleavages emerged within those societies. Both countries are multi-ethnic, post-conflict states who share a common history, language, and traditions. Before the comparison, an analysis of the situations within each of the states and then proceed to the comparison. Comparison is used, as this method will provide us with a far greater and more relevant understanding than would a single case study.

We will look at the overall progress of the two states on their road to EU accession. In order to analyze the progress, the two countries have made on their EU accession path yearly EU reports will be used, statements from high-ranking EU officials, and leading national experts on the subject. It is important to be aware of the fact that becoming EU member states is a common foreign policy goal and should serve as a powerful reform incentive for both states. The EU accession path is important because of the general reform frame and because it helps the countries implement necessary changes in order for them to finalize the transition.

Also, and perhaps most important of all I will look at the political actors that have been in the positions of power the most and which leaders use populist rhetoric when they appear in media or interact with the public during election campaigns. I will be looking at their statements and narratives which they represent, as *“narrative analysis focuses on stories that told by participants. The story aspect is seen as a complete entity in itself with a beginning, middle, and an end.”* (Mohajan 2018, 8). This means that political practices and statements made by the leaders of the major political parties that took power in the last general election of both states. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, I will analyze the statements made, and actions carried out, by Milorad Dodik and Bakir Izetbegović as they are the leaders of the country’s two most powerful and paradoxically stable political parties. Dodik is the leader of the Union of Independent Social-democrats and Izetbegović is the leader of the Party of Democratic Action. These two politicians are also important, as they have been occupying the state’s highest, most powerful, and important offices for the past decade. In Serbia, I will analyze the statements of Aleksandar Vučić as he is the current president of the Republic of Serbia and the president of the incumbents - Serbian Progressive Party, considered by many in Serbia to be a fully-fledged populist party. Also, I will be looking at other prominent politicians of these political parties. Special attention will be given to the statements made by these politicians during the previous campaigns.

As mentioned earlier, these two states are both transition states, that is a great opportunity for the state and its society yet it may also be a great danger as the President of the Czech Republic noted when he wrote the following: *“After the democratic revolutions, the structure of political power has changed in the Middle European countries. But the deeper behavioural patterns of the population are nearly the same. From that point of view, these countries are still intoxicated by the totalitarian poison. The risk is that in the transition process a fertile hunting ground exists for populism...”* (Zeman: 1992).

Zeman argues that transition to a democratic system may have happened on the state level, meaning that a new constitution was adopted and that adequate changes to the governing system were made, yet the change of mentality amongst the various strata of the population did not occur. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the war may have forced a new reality onto many yet the peace that followed by signing the Dayton peace accords did not. The Dayton

accords effectively stopped the war, yet they did not usher in a new reality for the people. In many ways, it has stopped armed conflict yet failed to stop the political one. In other words, the war rages on in different ways. Most notably by the emphasis and deepening of ethnic and religious cleavages. With cleavages open and ready to be exploited, Bosnia and Herzegovina proved to be a state which was perfect for populist politicians. Milorad Dodik is not the only populist politician in Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet he is by far the most successful.

In Serbia, however, things are somewhat different. After their internal shift, the fall of Slobodan Milošević, and the rise of new/old actors, they have been under control by a new generation of politicians. Calling them a new generation might be an overstatement, it would be more correct to call them reinvented politicians. These people, not unknown to the public in Serbia, have been able to create a new image of themselves. In many aspects, they are textbook populists and are being able to manipulate their way into positions of power. A clear example would be today's president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić.

Only by identifying their methods and tactics, will we be possible to understand the reasons behind their appeal. Also, it is important to interpret and gain insight into the reality constructed by the populists to understand the potency of the phenomenon. Among others, a political scientist must expand knowledge and inform the populous of dangerous trends and where they might lie to mitigate the effects of bad policies. These states show little progress of any kind, Bosnia and Herzegovina especially are beginning to get a bad reputation as the black hole of Europe according to by international poles and measures. Perhaps the best indicator of the failure of the politics in these two states are the even higher numbers of people who are migrating from them and finding better opportunities abroad. As recorded by the state statistics office of Bosnia and Herzegovina the overall number of people able to work has decreased dramatically over the past several years. In 2010 the statistical offices recorded that there were as many as 3 million people able to work actively in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that number in 2018 has dropped to 2 369 000. To save these countries from losing a critical mass of their population, we need to usher in change, yet change is impossible without understanding the problem. These states appear to be captured or trapped in a unfavourable state by, more or less, the same politicians who created the state in the first place. Their management, or mismanagement, of the state ad its policies and resources has led to the downfall of human,

and other, resources over the course of their rule. This is the main reason behind my choice of topic and cases.

Theoretical contemplations of populism

Different understandings of populism

When one turns on the news or reads online news portals a recurring theme across the western world seems to be the rise of populism. A considerable amount of media attention and academic thought is given to the phenomenon of populism, populist rhetoric, populist parties, and populist leaders. Yet it is not only the media who devote attention to this occurrence, leaders of other political parties, influential individuals as well as the public, in general, seem to be fascinated and concerned with this phenomenon. Grasping the true meaning and understanding of populism seems to be quite the undertaking. It seems like every news outlet has its own definition of who and what populists are. And even if they do identify some of the characteristics of populism there is no guarantee that journalists can identify populists as such

The media in Bosnia and Herzegovina are *“polarized along ethnic and territorial (entity) lines. Their reporting is thus contingent on the part of the country they are based in and the ethnic group to which their audience belongs”* (Džananović & Karamehić 2016:5)

To understand what populism is and how it operates we need to start by reviewing already published literature. Mudde, Cannovan, Albertazzi, McDonnell, Mair, and others, who have been researching the phenomenon for several decades and are thus the most relevant ones regarding populism as a political and social phenomenon. In addition to these authors, I have also taken up certain aspects of populism proposed by regional authors such as Šalaj, Grbeša, Ostović.

One way to look at populism is that it is *“a claim to legitimacy that rests on the democratic ideology of popular sovereignty and majority rule”* (Canovan 2002, 25). According to Canovan populists are individuals with the most basic understanding of democracy. These individuals thus call for the return to the “original” democracy, also this democracy should be led by “the people”, a very important term used by populists all across the globe. In essence, populists base their understanding of democracy on Abraham Lincoln's famous words (spoken at the 1863 Gettysburg address) as a “government of the people, for the people, by the people”, and they take it quite literally. Obviously, democracy has evolved quite a bit since Lincoln's time and is no longer that simple, if it ever was, although it would seem that the populist would like a return to basics. Yet this is how Canovan looks at populism, I shall also review other authors' understanding of the matter at hand before accepting a final definition.

Another way to look at populism is that it is *“an ideology that divides society into two antagonistic groups, an ordinary people and a corrupt elite, and which claims that politics should be an expression of the will of the people”* (Cas Mudde 2004, 543). Right away it is clear that even the academics cannot agree on how to define populism as there are profound differences and similarities to the first two definitions. Mudde thus understands populism as an ideology, this is an interesting point of view that requires further contemplation and I will revisit this later on in the text. Mudde is not the only author that claims that populism is an ideology, yet there are a number of academics that disagree with him on this matter. This is why this question requires additional contemplation. Mudde does identify populism's attempt at dividing society into two groups opposing groups, which are clearly labelled. One group the ordinary and pure people and the other the corrupt elite. This is the similarity between the two definitions, both authors see populists as people with the most basic understanding of democracy (Cas Mudde 2004).

If we were to adopt Mudde's understanding of populism, it would be quite limiting. For instance, the “corrupt elite” mentioned by Mudde is most certainly the political elites in power at the time of populist rise. This is true as the contestants always use their followers as a tool to combat the incumbents, this is true for every democracy. However, I find this limiting as we can see that populists today use several issues that are currently active in their respective states to gain power. Albertazzi and McDonnell offer a bit more encompassing than the previous one.

"...an ideology that pits a virtuous and homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous others..." (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008: 3). Here we can see that Albertazzi and McDonnell have expanded on Mudde's understanding, no longer are things so black and white when looking at populists. It is no longer only the elites that the "true people" are pitted against, now it is also the "dangerous others" that have also appeared. This is a more complete understanding of populism as the "dangerous others" mentioned are different from state to state. Depending on the state the dangerous others can be migrants, members of different religious groups, various ethnic groups, minorities, or even foreigners by which I mean diplomatic missions from "hostile" countries or international organizations. The definition proposed by Albetrazzi and McDonell is better suited for cases experiencing ethnic cleavages.

"A form of political mobilization in which it seeks to mobilize marginalized sectors of society and create political power from them, using nationalist and anti-intellectual rhetoric that exalts ordinary people" (Jansen 2011: 75). Here it is apparent populism can be considered a strategy for political mobilization that can be adopted by political parties rather than an ideology. Also, it would seem that populists are quite adept at grasping the potential of marginalized groups that the mainstream parties have neglected. The use of anti-intellectual rhetoric seems to imply that their supporters are individuals who are economically disadvantaged and come from working and lower economic classes. They are also individuals from the middle class who believe that there is an imminent danger to their wealth and lifestyle. This is not hard to imagine as the middle classes in most western states have been paying ever more taxes and have had to battle the rising living costs. The fear of losing financial ground moves them closer to populists.

After reviewing the literature, it becomes clear that populism has some clear attributes, yet simply pitting one group against another can hardly help us identify populist parties. Some authors mentioned the special rhetoric that populists use to mobilize people. These are not the only characteristics that define populism.

Some of the other characteristics of populism can be found in the fact that *"populism simplifies complex developments by looking for a culprit...the populist answer to the complexities of a*

more and more pluralistic society is not multiculturalism” (Wodak, KhosraviNik & Mral 2013, 8). They also “*construct a non-existent ethnonational purity to defend it against those who seem to jeopardize such fictitious purity. But as long as there is a tendency to believe in the non-existent homogeneity of 'us', there is enough energy to defend “us” against 'them'”* (Wodak, KhosraviNik & Mral 2013, 8). Here we see that some populists are highly concerned with ethnonational purity, it can be deduced that they only consider ethnically pure people as the “true people” migrants who have gotten citizenship are thus perceived as enemies, as those who soil their land and society. They also tend to oversimplify the political issues present in states which is another means of mobilizing their supporters.

Another way to look at the phenomenon is the understanding that “*in practice, populism consists of a combination of powerful rhetoric (concern for the public good), actual non-action (tactical waiting which avoids mistakes and hasty actions) and unrealistic goals (which are not meant to be achieved anyway).*” (Ostović 1996, 13). Unrealistic goals, or overambitious promises, are a new populist characteristic not yet mentioned. Many populist leaders are quite vocal about certain issues that they have oversimplified, oversimplification of an issue allows them to present an unrealistic “simple” fix for the problem. By oversimplifying issues, they are effectively convincing certain members of the public that they can easily fix their problems with a rather simple, quick, and painless solution. Such was the case of Brexit and the populist Nigel Farage who retreated from the spotlight as soon as the British public voted to exit the European Union. Knowing that exiting the EU is no small task and requires a lot of dedication, work, and knowledge Farage retreated leaving Great Britain to find a way to deal with its newfound problems. Brexit can be considered a case of populism going too far. Therefore, it is important to gain an understanding of this phenomenon before other countries fall victim to the charade called populism.

Brexit has shown that populists and populism do not have an end game. There is no final goal to achieve, it is merely a hoax put forth by populist self-centered politicians to achieve personal short-term goals. Those goals are more often than not, simply the seizure of power. Even now when Brexit has been “finalized”² and when Great Britain has left the EU we can see some

² A formal agreement between the EU and the UK has not yet been signed.

major issues emerging. Almost immediately after the Brexit was finalized, Scotland politicians announced that they would soon be holding a referendum on the future of their country. That is whether it will remain a part of Great Britain or acquire independence as they see themselves as part of the European family.

Nigel Farage is a prime example of a populist politician and he is also indicative of another important aspect of populism, which is that most populist parties have a charismatic leader. A charismatic leader is important as they possess the necessary skills to present and popularise certain issues that the populist perceive as a clear threat to society. In this sense populism “*is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalist leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, un-institutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers.*” (Weyland 2001, 14). Charismatic leaders are good public speakers able to effectively spin the facts and evade critical questions that are intended to put them in tight and awkward spots that would discredit most politicians. This stems from the fact that “*independent of their ideology, the leaders of populist movements and political parties often have features in common that clearly contribute to their popularity and political appeal: in most cases, they are charismatic figures and possess a great deal of media savvy*” (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008, 49).

As we can see there are many aspects of populism and by all accounts even more definitions. Choosing what populism really is will be rather challenging and I will reach my final decision at the end of the theoretical contemplations of populism. I can say with certainty that the most important characteristics of populism seem to be exploitation of existing or creation of new divisions combined with powerful rhetoric and overambitious promises.

Populism – A Thincentred ideology

“In theory, populism is an independent ideology, unattached to any particular other ideology. In practice, populism is almost always combined with one or more other ideological features.

Which ideological features attach to populism depend upon the socio-political context within which the populist actors mobilize.” (Mudde 2011, 2)

Some scholars, politicians, journalists, and others view populism as an independent ideology separate from others. This is not entirely correct as it is my firm conviction that populism needs an ideology to combine with to gain momentum. Now the ideology that populism will be tied with depends on *the “socio-political context within which the populist actors mobilize”* (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2011). This is why we have different types of populism, as it shapes itself around pivotal issues in society and as no two societies have the same issues so no two populisms are the same. Also, populism in Europe uses identity issues to find support among the population. That is to say that populism or populist parties present the national identity or nation as being in danger of being overrun or changed to the point that it cannot be recognized anymore.

After examining the literature available on the subject I have come to consider populism to be *“a thincentered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people”* (Mudde, 2004). The concept of “the pure people” refers to a domestic national or ethnic group, and “the corrupt elite” is the current ruling class (but not the populists themselves). The concept of “the corrupt elite” can be understood more widely and does not only refer to a political elite, but to economic, academic, and other elites that can be found especially if they are members of another ethnic group within the country.

The reason for making this differentiation is that unlike full-blown ideologies that provide a way for its followers to interpret the world and all that happens within it, populism cannot offer answers or instructions for all current and relevant political, social and economic questions. Thus, its only way of surviving is to tie itself to a stronger more structured ideology. Populism in this sense is more like a parasite that latches on to a host to survive. This is why populism is often combined with other ideologies and political directions such as conservatism and

nationalism. These are the ideologies who are most often combined with populism or to be correct to which populism embraces to gain momentum on the political scene within Europe.

Different types of populism

It is important to differentiate between different types of populism they need proper classification and to be able to positively identify the type of populism that is present in one country of society. Not all are the same, although they do seem to appear in similar circumstances and do share some characteristics. To understand populism in the Western Balkans we first need to identify its characteristics, this, in turn, will give us a better understanding of the state of affairs in these states, and even what courses the politics in these states might take in the future. Populism in today's Europe is proposed by political parties who can be found primarily on the far right of the political spectrum. Populism can also occur on the left side of the political spectrum, although it seems that the populists of Europe favour the more right-leaning side of politics. As populism is a thin-centred ideology it needs to link itself to other ideologies, therefore we cannot find “pure populism” in Europe or anywhere else for that matter. In other words, populism needs a partner in crime and in Europe at least its partner is often nationalism, nativism, conservatism, and so on. Therefore, it seems highly logical and possible for it to link to other ideologies as well. Like for instance liberalism or socialism who are found on the left side of the political spectrum. This sort of populism is not often found in Europe, yet in Latin America, it is rampant. Unlike European populism which exploits nationalism, nativism, and ethnocentrism, Latin American populism exploits economic issues. Thus, it seems like populism is universal, it is a sort of political parasite able to attach itself to any fully developed ideology.

As such European populism is more focused on “...*exclud[ing] certain groups (e.g., immigrants) from the polity, while Latin American populists might succeed in the inclusion of underprivileged groups (e.g., the poor) within society*” (Mudde 2011, 11). This does not mean that European populism does not also emphasize economic issues to gain followers. As Reinhard Heinisch noted in his work the Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs) exploited the increasing number of Austrians who were left jobless after economic

reform while framing migrants and others for “taking” jobs from true Austrians (Heinisch, 2013). It simply means that its main economic issues are usually cultural or ethnic. This is one way to classify populism, based on the left-right axis.

Another way to discern among the different types of populism is the way Šalaj did when he made his classification of populists, no doubt heavily influenced by Cannovan. He identifies two interesting subtypes, the first-named populist democracy, and the second reactionary populism. “*The first sub-category of political populism is called populist democracy, which is based on the advocacy of the political participation of citizens through the instruments of direct democracy*” (Šalaj 2012, 4). This does go hand in hand with what I mentioned earlier, that is that populists have a very basic understanding of democracy and direct democracy is seen as the purest form of democracy. Also reactionary populism “*...gathers on the basis of intolerance towards certain minority groups*” (Šalaj 2012, 4). This is something we see across European populist parties, they are unwilling to accept new people into their country. Reactionary populism may also be achieved in multiethnic societies where it is easy for political elites to open cleavages and/or spark grievances between opposing ethnic groups.

How is populism created-fertile ground for populism

There is a certain set of preconditions that are necessary for the facilitation of populism. First of all, populism needs a social cleavage burdened by current political or other issues to exploit. Heterogeneous societies are thus at higher risk of a populist infestation than homogenous societies or states. Secondary, to get their point across populists need a vessel that will carry their message across. In modern society, the ideal vessel is the media who have a wide reach and influence in society. Third, there has to be some kind of problem with the efficiency of the legitimacy of institutions. These preconditions are important mainly because they give us an insight into the state of interhuman, or intercommunal, relations within a state. That is whether a society is fragmented or not, a fragmented society is a fertile ground for populism and the level or amount of fragmentation will allow us to give a rough estimate regarding the strength of populism.

I would call populism an unscrupulous opportunist political strategy. The reasoning behind this statement is actually quite simple. The main reason is that populism occurs and flourishes in states and societies that have some kind of social cleavage burdening the relations among a certain number of the overall population. Meaning that group A has an issue with or is profoundly different from group B, a populist party is likely to appear as they can emphasize the issues and differences to gain group A as potential sympathizer/voters. In short populist parties exploit social cleavages wherever they find them and often exaggerate the issues that lie within those cleavages.

Yet what are social cleavages, based on the research of Yonhyok Choe, who herself was influenced by Douglas W. Rae, Michael Taylor, and Hans Daalder, I have realized that there are several definitions who that are not mutually exclusive and are often complementary. Social cleavages are criteria for the division of society and that those divisions are not fixed, they change alongside society. This view makes perfect sense as societies grow and become more complex so do social cleavages grow and become more apparent. This is why in every society has political, geographical, ethnic, racial, religious, economic, and others that occur over time. Some of these cleavages also disappear or become less relevant over time. We can consider the crumbling of socialist systems at the end of the 20th century proof of this, class divisions (which are social cleavages) that helped carry the socialist revolutions in Europe became less important as time progressed which undoubtedly contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Block.

Hans Daalder identified the following social cleavages “(1) *class or sectional interests (the landed versus the moneyed interests; parties representative of industry or commerce, labor or agriculture); (2) religion (modernists versus fundamentalists, Catholics versus Protestants, clericals versus anticlericals, Anglicans versus nonconformists); (3) geographical conflict (town versus countryside, center versus periphery); (4) nationality or nationalism (ethnic minority parties, extreme-nationalist movements, parties having their real allegiance to another nation-state, etc.); and (5) regime (status quo parties versus reformist parties, revolutionary or counterrevolutionary parties)*” (Daalder, 1966:67-68).

The classification provided by Daalder still holds today, although it could be expanded even further, the basic classification and the logic behind it is clear and understandable. Having this in mind the 5th social cleavage that Daalder identified as a regime cleavage. Regime cleavage implies that the main division is between well-established political parties that uphold the existing regime and revolutionary forces. At the time Daalder was writing his book this division was valid, it fitted the times that he researched. Today it is a similar setting, populist parties are quite vocal about certain issues yet their willingness to solve the issue is questionable. They are parties without an end goal, they are contradictory in the sense that they live because of the sustained existence of the status quo yet they get into power by vowing to change the status quo, even though they do not make any concrete moves towards the changing of that status. That is why once they come into power they are quickly exposed as frauds as they do not actually do anything. Their only defence, in that case, is rhetoric. If they are able to create a state of perpetual crisis, they are able to create an environment in which they can rule for a considerable amount of time.

The media, as stated previously, are instruments for the populists. They are one of the most efficient ways for populists to get their message across. When speaking of the media we have to be aware that there are at least two types of media actors, the media that work on informing the public on current events and the tabloids. The latter puts its focus rather on sensationalism than actual unbiased reporting. Also, the media today have several communication channels. Almost 40 years ago the printed media dominated the scene, today the printed media is dying out as the web-based news portals have taken their place, it is to say that new technologies have provided the opportunity to get instant news that is available 24/7 for as long as one has a smartphone and internet access. New technologies have reduced the social capital of the average individual and to a certain degree alienated them from the rest of society. As Tristan Calridge states “*social capital is lost or damaged by anything that reduces feelings of goodwill or disrupts networks.*” (Calridge, 2014). And that damage can be found in sensationalist news created in such a manner to antagonize individuals with opposing beliefs.

Even if we do not focus on tabloids, we will find that today's media are ever more sensationalist. As the media business is growing so too is the competition among different media houses to produce materials (news segments, exclusive interviews, talk shows, tv debates, etc.) that will

attract the most viewers. Populists seem to be heaven-sent for the media, as they are constantly making controversial statements and public outcries that by their very nature attract a lot of people. The leaders of populist movements and parties do not shy away from the media. Does this mean that the media are working with the populists? No, at best we are looking at a symbiotic relationship the media are attracted to the populist statements as they are some of the best content, they can emit via their communication channels. Today's media is business-driven and focused on the bottom line, simply put keeping populists on the country's public agenda is good for business. The media report about the populists, their messages are conveyed to the public via its many communication channels (social media accounts, online news portals, television broadcasts, online streaming of content, online radio transmissions, etc.) provide an ideal infrastructure that can convey the populist message to the masses.

The reasons for the appeal of populists remain different. Some of the best reasons would be the fact that they create the most appealing speakers with “good” content. In comparison to the traditional way politicians, experts, and academics present issues in the news, they present it in a very unappealing strictly professional manner often using complex words, the populist's sensationalism breaks the mould and introduces some much-needed vigor. This type of presentation makes people believe that certain issues really are that important, passionate presentation makes for great news content. In conclusion *“the media have a far greater preference for stories about real people than for boring speeches or abstract issues presented in a bureaucratic style. Populist leaders, ..., are all strong personalities that perfectly fit the news medias demand for the spectacular and emotional treatment of social reality, including political life”* (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008, 53).

Also, it is important to note that there are several tactics that populists can use to get as much out of the media as possible. The most notable tactics include playing the victim or underdog, political rallies, staging events, strong critique on select media (usually those who are adamant in their attacks on populists), and the already mentioned sensationalism which serves as free face time with the public. Populists have proven to be an evasive target for the media as they can easily spin the attacks and critiques in their favour. They aim to present themselves as understanding individuals close to the people and their supposed suffering.

As far as the crisis of institutions is concerned, we have to be aware that every political system is in danger of entering an institutional crisis at some point. Strong institutions are the ones who can change and adapt to the problems present in the current time. The oldest democracies have strong institutions that can function properly and with a high degree of effectivity. This stems from the fact that those countries have a strong bureaucratic staff, clearly defined jurisdictions, bureaucratic rules and procedures as well as a long tradition. However, young democracies are known for their instability and tendency to reverse to prior political systems who are not compatible with democracy. Such democracies are more susceptible to populists who have the intention of creating clientelism after seizing power. This is why young democracies are especially vulnerable to populist influences.

Both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are still young democracies compared to the rest of Western European states and even East European states due to the war, as such they are much more susceptible to populism than stronger democracies. This does not mean that populists cannot seize power in older more stable systems, yet acquiring and maintain a grip on power in those systems is far more difficult in those systems. On the other, in these younger systems, it should be far more feasible for populists to acquire power and maintain it. These preconditions for populism show us what is imperative for its formation and its perseverance within a political system.

Populism as a threat

As is clear by now populism seems to be a potential threat to democracy and democratic systems across Europe and the rest of the world-s democracies. There are many reasons that populism is considered dangerous. Right-wing populists, the kind present in Europe, are perceived as dangerous because of their nationalist, anti-migrant, anti-integration, conservative views. European states seem to think so as well, the first time a strong populist party came in power in a small European state other European member-states imposed sanctions upon it. I am of course referring to the first time that the FPÖ under Jörg Haider entered into a coalition government in Austria back in the year 2000. Almost overnight EU member states imposed certain sanctions, the sanctions imposed isolated Austria as punishment for putting Haider in

power. The seriousness of the situation was so great that the Belgian foreign minister, Louis Michael, stated *“It's too simplistic to say we must keep Austria in Europe at all costs, Europe can very well do without Austria. We don't need it.”* (The Guardian). The sanctions also limited Haider's ability to travel freely and were often met with protests wherever he went. It is important to know that populism is presented to the people as a chance for a better tomorrow, in all actuality it is not so. The situation in the Western Balkans seems to be a perfect example of just how dangerous populism can be, as it seems to prolong stagnation.

I argue that the vast majority of populist parties started their existence as niche parties. By definition niche parties *“emphasizes policy areas neglected by its competitors”* (Meyer & Miller 2015, 261). Niche parties focus and specialize in areas that were neglected or perceived as unimportant by the mainstream political parties. The “Greens” are a clear example of a niche party. So too are populist parties, they start life off as niche parties, they identify an issue that was neglected and emphasize its importance to establish themselves as the only ones who can resolve the select issue at hand, in the case of the Austrian FPO it was the attack on Austria and the Austrian national identity from incoming migrants. Most populist parties share this trait with the FPO as they present themselves as the defenders of their respective national identity.

Still *“while all parties aim at emphasizing issues on which they are perceived as being competent, they also need to adapt their policy emphasis to the necessities of the political market”* (Meyer & Miller 2015, 260). Mainstream parties might choose to fight niche parties by adopting their issue and offer their own solution, their success is another matter entirely. If the niche party survives it can be considered a mainstream party as well because it was successful at pushing its issue or agenda into the political spotlight. This can be perceived as giving legitimacy to the issues populists emphasize which can have far-reaching consequences as the case of Brexit proves.

Populist leaders do much for the cause that the party is fighting for as a *“populist leader promises solutions,...clearly identifies enemies, attributes responsibilities and offers reassurance”* (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008, 25). As the case of Trump in America shows, a simple slogan and the constant attack on migrants and the political rivals Trump faced during

his election campaign were effective. Yet what was especially appealing to his voters is that he presented himself as someone who fights for the “regular Joe”, the everyday hardworking American. His self-made millionaire status also bolstered the legitimacy of his claims. At this point, only time can tell what repercussions America will have to pay for his erratic behavior on the international political scene.

The appearance of populism, or better yet the success of populists within states, is also indicative of major flaws within a state of democracy. This means that we can learn from the success of populism within a state and see what flaws allowed the populists to seize power. Populism and the way it swept across EU member states and further shows us that various democratic systems have serious issues that need resolving, populism might very well be a way to identify those issues. This is another reason why the research of populism is important. All populists were elected in free and fair elections. This can be seen in many European states where populists were elected simply by exploiting issues like migration. It would be far wiser to focus on identifying the root of the problem which could be found in the political system, economy, education, or certain segments of the state’s society, exactly where remains to be seen. In this sense, it is safe to say that the occurrence and success of a populist party indicate that there are serious flaws and issues within the state that need correcting.

Regardless of whether democracy is young or old, they all have flaws, whether those flaws are built into the system or not remains is another matter entirely. By looking at the cases of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina I will be able to see what are the shortcomings of their systems and which flaws are exploited by political actors and to what end. It will also show me the type of political actor that chooses to exploit flaws.

Recap - what is populism

After all has been said and done, we have a pretty good understanding of what populism is and how it occurs. I cannot settle on a single definition mentioned above by the various authors. I cannot settle on a simplistic definition of populism as populism is not a simple occurrence, it

is rather complex and has multiple aspects attached to it. It is important to clarify what populism is, in the context of Western Balkans, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In other words, populism has different components, not all are equally important in all states. Here I will be focusing on those components or aspects of populism which are relevant for the political reality of these two Western Balkan states. For the Western Balkans I will be looking for strong rhetoric, actual non-action, historical revisionism, charismatic individuals and exploitation of ethno-religious cleavages.

Populists often start their life as niche parties and popularize a topic that was overlooked by mainstream parties. If they survive the early phase of their life and indeed gain a foothold in the political scene of a country, then they may become a mainstream party.

In order to persist for a longer period of time „*populist activity utilizes the propagandistically understood dimension of the future (its subject is promises, not results), but at the same time requires the absolute domination of the present and short historical memory, so that it can hide the fact of unfulfilled promises.*“ (Ostović 1996, 13).

Social, religious, ethnic, or language cleavages are exploited to gain power. This is why populists do not perceive the people as the *Demos* but rather as the *Ethnos*. They perceive the people as a specific subgroup of the whole population of the country. They often refer to true people instead of the population. In a complex multi-ethnic and multi religious state such as Bosnia and Herzegovina utilizing cleavages is rather easy. With social cohesion badly damaged by the war, the various groups have a great deal of distrust for each other. Such groups, already pinned against each other, are being aggravated further by irresponsible ethnic leaders. Serbia has a similar issue. Most of Serbia is populated by ethnic Serbs as much as 80%, while the rest is populated by Hungarians, Bosniaks, Roma, Albanians, and others. Serbia does not have major ethnic clashes with any group except the Albanians populating Serbia, or to be more specific Kosovo which has unilaterally declared independence in 2008. This declaration of independence over ten years ago has put much strain on already severely damaged Serbian-Albanian relations and has created a perfect cleavage that populists can exploit.

More often than not populist movements and parties have a strong and charismatic leader who is able to take the party to new heights and who can exonerate the party from bad press. The media as well provide a useful tool to get their messages across to the population, also the media might not always be populist inclined media sympathetic to their cause, they may be absolutely unaware of the fact that they are helping the populists rise. Even though most media are not inclined to a populist movement or leader, the mere act of reporting on the issue means that they are helping the populists in conveying their message across to the masses. The more media attention a movement or leader gets the more “popular” they become. Even if populists are scorned for their views and actions in the media, they are masters of “spin” and are able to turn the situation around in their favor.

An interesting characteristic of populism that I will also be looking at is the actual non-action concept presented by Ostović. The lack of action by political actors might be indicative of their populist intent.

Finally, populism is not a full-grown ideology, it is a thin centered ideology that needs to find a suitable host ideology or political view in order to survive. They often use aspects of other ideologies to gain acceptance among the people.

In this paper, I will look for flaws of the political systems in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the political actors which exploited those flaws. The political flaws will also become apparent once I take a closer look at the political leaders and the way in which they operate. Where actual non-action can be found and for what purpose. The relation of politicians to the media and the kind of messages that are relayed via the media is also of major importance, as well as the statements they make and how they impact the political scene in these societies.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Legacies of Dayton and its impact today

There are many attributes that can be used to define the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it is a post-conflict former socialist state which has had a rough transition period, and some would argue is still in transition, inhabited by three large ethnic groups pinned against each other by politicians since 1991 to the present day. One can view it as a semi-functional country with a peculiar constitutional arrangement and kept in check by the Office of the High Representative which is appointed by the Peace Implementation Council. A country that is aspiring to become a member of the European Union yet is constantly failing accountability tests and expresses the need for international actors to provide help in the form of finances or political intervention. All that is previously mentioned is true, the division of power is complex and often confusing which in turn leads to numerous issues. Identifying problems is a rather simple job, identifying the right problems is not that easy. It is almost unfathomable that war could occur in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was by all accounts a multi-ethnic and multireligious society where neighbors lived with each other for generations, still, it happened and that war created wounds and opened cleavages that did not heal to this day.

Keeping this in mind, the best place to start might be by taking a look at a country's constitutional arrangement in order to gain insight into the political system of a country and the potential for cleavages. An argument could be made that says that Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitution is a product of war, upheld under the watchful eye of the international community. I say this because the constitution is a part of the larger "General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina", this document is commonly known as the "Dayton Peace Agreement" that effectively stopped a four-year-long armed conflict that was waged among the three largest and thus most powerful ethnic groups that live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The peace agreement has cemented the borders carved out by the entities during the war, by doing so the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina got 51% of the total territory of the country while the Republic of Srpska got 49%. Together they consist Bosnia and Herzegovina, but more than territory the entities got a lot of jurisdiction. The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina

has jurisdiction over foreign policy, foreign trade policy, customs, monetary politics, control over the airspace of the country, inter-entity transport management, implementing and maintaining communication services, creating immigration policy, financing institutions and international obligations of the state. The constitution did not mention the state's jurisdiction over the armed forces, that's because no armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina existed until 2006 after defense system reforms. Until then Bosnia and Herzegovina housed three separate armies, two belonging to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the third one to the Republic of Srpska, each accountable to governments of their respective entities. This is perhaps the best example of just how powerful entities were, and to some extent still are. The conflict is in a sense reflected in the Dayton peace agreement and acts as a „straitjacket“ trapping Bosnia and Herzegovina in a never-ending downwards spiral. Despite all of this the Dayton peace agreement has proven its worth given the fact that it has ended a bloody conflict and saved countless lives, for some it came too late. The Secretary-General of NATO was noted saying “...*in Bosnia 20 years ago, two decades ago there were three armies, a Bosnian Army, a Croat Army and Serb Army fighting each other. Now there is one multi-ethnic army in Bosnia, I am not saying that everything is fine in Bosnia, but I am saying at least they have one army which is able to work together in Bosnia.*” (Jens Stoltenberg, 2017). His statement is somewhat true, although the current army of Bosnia and Herzegovina is made out of the three ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) it is not without its problems and ethnicity still plays a major role within the armed forces, not to mention that political leaders have shown to have significant influence over its members.

The reason for calling the Dayton peace agreement a „straitjacket“ is mostly because of the complex power-sharing system that was put in place. Inclusion of all ethnicities when forming a government was a major concern which is why state level and entity level governments have to include all three ethnicities in their governments. Given that political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina are divided among ethnic lines, meaning that there are Bosniak, Serb and Croat dominated political parties, grand coalitions need to be created in order to form a government. “*In Bosnia, at the state level, in entities and most cantons, each community has the right to veto decisions by parliament that may negatively affect the community.*” (Bieber 2006:44). Although the right to veto was envisaged as a tool intended to help ethnic groups protect their interests it soon became a tool used for political punishment of other ethnic groups.

One obvious reason for the ethnic cleavages present in Bosnia and Herzegovina is that *“by the end of the war, the population of Bosnia was largely concentrated in three ethnically homogeneous territories...the country had been transformed from being highly intermixed in 1991 to nearly full segregation of the three nations”* (Bieber 2006:29). As much as a million people were displaced within the country, and an additional one million outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Dayton peace agreement envisaged the return of the displaced population to their homes after the war, yet that plan did not go according to plan as *“... the entities and cantons ... the primary function remains to secure the autonomy of the different groups, a consequence of the population distribution.”* (Bieber 2006, 45). Meaning that many of the early refugees who returned to their homes were not welcome, as returnees were poorly protected by the authorities. Today sporadic attacks on returnees still occur which helps keep the cleavages open.

These cleavages remain open for a many of reasons. War crimes and their acknowledgments holding people accountable for their crimes, attacks on returnees and on religious institutions, controversial statements of state or entity officials as well as businessman close to the ruling elite help keep the cleavages open. These cleavages have been exploited by political leaders continuously over the past twenty years. Often, they construct a political discourse in which they present their ethnic group as endangered by the other two. Political leaders lay claim to land and property on behalf of their ethnic groups and demand certain „inalienable rights“ of their ethnic group. Political leaders are able to do this because *“their predominantly ethnic electorates identify both party leaders as authentic ethnic group members, and as trustworthy and capable of delivering multiple benefits to their ethnic electorates.”* (Hasić 2019, 14). Also, it is the *“constitutional framework and residual effects of the violent conflict [that continue to] facilitate the perpetuation of incumbent parties by means of (re)producing differentiation, fear, conflict, and “endangerment discourse” to mobilize voters.”* (Džananović & Karamehić 2016, 8).

Also, political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina are quite fond of engaging in historical revisionism. In this sense *„revisionism is commonly associated with the manipulation of certain historical events for political ends”* (Cattini 2011, 32). This seems to be a favorite tactic

of local populists and an integral part of their strategy. The historical revisionism is done by all three of the major ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or by the political leaders to be more precise. Revisionism is utilized to reinterpret the events that transgressed during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Second World War and the role of various parties and individuals. This was also noted by the Office of the High Representative in one of its reports stating that *“It is regrettable that many in BiH continue to promote revisionist narratives about the conflict and to deny the genocide in Srebrenica, which was confirmed by two international tribunals.”* (Office of the High Representative 2019)

Another unique legacy of Dayton is the existence of the Office of the High Representative and the Peace Implementation Council. The high representative is elected by the majority vote in the Peace Implementation Council. These were a part of the Dayton peace agreement, included in Annex 10 of the agreement. Their main objective was, and still is, to safeguard the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, oversee the country and intervene when necessary. Up to this point in time, there have been seven High Representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They have helped maintain the peace and stability of the country by intervening in critical situations when the political elites were facing an issue over which consensus was unlikely and political gridlock threatened the country. More recently however the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with them, the High Representative decided to take a step back and not intervene as much in the internal affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina as was once the case. This institution is often used as a punching bag by populist politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the current High Representative, Valentin Inzko an Austrian diplomat, is often criticized as being too ambivalent. Populists often belittle the institution and call for the Office of the High Representative to be terminated, this institution will remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina until such a time has come that the country’s leaders can be held accountable for their actions. In a sense, this institution is babysitting an entire country and waiting for its society, institutions and politicians to mature to the point where they will not be a threat to themselves.

Populist politicians often make a target of the constitutional court of Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the unique way in which constitutional judges are elected into office. Unlike most constitutional courts around the globe, the constitutional court of Bosnia and Herzegovina has three judges that are essentially foreigners, ergo they do not have citizenship of Bosnia and

Herzegovina. The court has nine judges in total, four of which are picked by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and two by the Republic of Srpska. That leaves three judges to be elected by the President of the European Court of Human Rights after consulting with the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The foreign judges cannot have citizenship of Bosnia and Herzegovina or any neighboring country, thus assuring their impartiality. Still, the presence of these foreign judges has been used in an attempt to discredit the court, polarize society along ethnic lines. As we will soon show their ousting from the court was demanded on more than one occasion, in short, they provide much-needed munition for populists. The politician which frequently criticizes the court is Milorad Dodik the leader of the biggest Serb party in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the current Serb member of the Presidency. One of Dodik's most harsh remarks regarding the Constitutional Court was made in 2012 when he said that *"The ugliness of BiH is most reflected in the Constitutional Court, which has acquired the right, under the authority of certain international structures, to make decisions based on the political will rather than the law"* (Klix 2012). At the same time, he also said that the court is *"political body of foreigners and Bosniaks"* (Klix 2012). Here we can see Dodik attacking foreign judges, the OHR and other organizations of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Bosniak political leaders (the SDA party in particular).

The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina is an institution with considerable history and tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is a pre-war institution although it has been heavily modified by the Dayton Peace Agreement. It was established back in 1994 and had nine members to represent the various ethnic groups of Bosnia and Herzegovina including the Jewish and Roma population. After Dayton, the Presidency has three members that represent the major three ethnic groups Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. The Roma and Jewish segments of society are no longer represented in the Presidency. The Presidency is, actually, the collective chief of state and the most prominent institution with massive outreach and considerable power. It provides its members with a unique opportunity to send their messages across to the population, unfortunately, it can be used to convey populist rhetoric as repercussions seem to be lacking.

Furthermore, the Dayton Peace Agreement also envisaged a peacekeeping mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina whose official task is to support the country's newfound peace and transition

while upholding the peace agreement. In reality, there have been numerous peacekeeping missions assigned to Bosnia and Herzegovina by the United Nations Security Council, one of the first was United Nations Protection Force which allowed the Dayton Agreement to be negotiated and signed as it monitored the ceasefire. After Dayton was signed the United Nations forces withdrew and were soon replaced by the NATO-led multinational peacekeeping Implementation Force. After the mandate of the Implementation Force expired a new Stabilization Force took its place. These missions also detained and arrested individuals accused of war crimes and delivered them to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Today the European Union Force is present in Bosnia and Herzegovina which is ensuring the peace and stability of the country. Most of international forces are located in the Butmir military base on the outskirts of Sarajevo. The base is home to the European Union Force, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization headquarters and others.

All of these particular cases show how strongly the resolve of the International Community is towards ensuring that Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes a prosperous peaceful democratic country. Also, some politicians utilize populist rhetoric because of the strong international forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to build their careers and legitimize their policies.

Bosnia and Herzegovina on its path to the European Union

“I make no apology for concentrating on the Balkans. They are on our doorstep. The security of Europe depends on stability in the Balkans. They are also a test-case for Europe's enhanced Common Foreign and Security Policy. Nowhere more than the Balkans is the EU expected to deliver.”

Javier Solana 2001

This speech by the former High Representative of the European Union for the Common Foreign and Security Policy reflected the attitude of Europe at the time. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the rest of the Western Balkans, was a top priority. BiH was also making significant strides towards European Union membership, at the time Bosnia and Herzegovina

was closer to the European Union than any other country of former Yugoslavia. Since then Bosnia and Herzegovina has stagnated significantly and is currently the least successful regarding European Union integration in the region of Western Balkans. The progress towards the European Union has almost stopped, and the European Union's attention has shifted as well. This is what Ostović called “actual non-action” (Ostović 1996, 13). Also unlike their colleagues in European countries, populists in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not Eurosceptics, they constantly reaffirm their commitment to bringing the country into the fold of the EU.

Perhaps the most striking reason for this lack of progress is the lack of coordination within the country regarding reforms. There is no state level reform agenda that everyone supports. Having this in mind one should not be surprised that *„the entity [Republic of Srpska] continued to separately work on harmonizing its legislation with the European Union acquis and developed its own approximation methodology, which foresees the adoption of annual approximation action plans by its Government, without cooperation with other levels of governance across the country.”* (European Commission, 2018).

The EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina has even been vocal recently criticizing the Bosnia and Herzegovina politicians. Referring to the latest problem Bosnia and Herzegovina has been facing that is creating a new ruling coalition and implementing the results of the last election:

„We call upon all political parties to refrain from political maneuvers in order to turn their attention to the real problems facing Bosnia and Herzegovina. Polarizing ultimatums and moves, including reviewing the constitutional framework of the country, will not ease the formation of power at a crucial moment for the road to the EU” (EU Delegation to BiH: 2019).

It should not come as a surprise that the European Commission noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina has not made much progress on its European Union ascension path. The EU yearly report is quite grim regarding BiH and its progress. The report states that *„frequent political stalemates impede progress with long-overdue structural reforms.”* (European

Commission 2018). BiH has a number of structural problems. A discriminatory constitution being one of them, that is minorities not being properly represented a clear breach of the European Human Rights Convention. Little to no progress was made in the fight against organized crime, public sector reform, and judicial reform as well as the fight against corruption. Not to mention that „*the adoption of legislation stemming from the Reform Agenda, including the adoption of the excise tax legislation, was negatively affected by tensions between ruling coalition parties and obstruction by opposition parties in Parliaments at state and entity levels, leading to a slowdown of the reform pace.*” (European Commission 2018). The reports state that some progress was made in improving the country's respect for human rights, yet when it comes to gender-based violence and freedom of speech no progress was made.

The report compiled by the European Commission is rather soft, wrapped in a more diplomatic tone, no harsh criticism was made towards political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the way they are approaching their ascension path. For instance, Bosnia and Herzegovina has, for the past decade, been trying to build a Thermo-electric power plant in the city of Tuzla. The truth is that Bosnia and Herzegovina possess substantial potential in the field of generating energy and that investments are needed in this sector, yet it is also true that Bosnia and Herzegovina should be following the European Union in building green energy potentials. Instead, Bosnia and Herzegovina is investing one billion and two hundred thousand convertible marks in an electric plant that is not up to code, and for which the European Union is sure to impose sanctions. The truth is that the „*development policies of Bosnia and Herzegovina are following a different logic*“ (Nedžma Džananović-Miraščija 2019) than those of the European Union. This is why the European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn raised the issue of the new power plant being built in March of 2019 during a visit to Sarajevo. The problem with the plant is that it is going to significantly pollute the air even outside of the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the country would have to pay fines for the pollution. This, and other events, are indicative of stalling the EU integration process, and even more concerning that they are not fully committed to it. In addition, the EU has issue fourteen priority requirements that Bosnia and Herzegovina has to complete in order to stand a chance of starting negotiations, none of the requirements has been met as of yet.

Arguably the greatest challenge for the country on its accession path will be to carry out the necessary reforms in the judiciary and public administration sector. As Inela Hadžimešić has noted “...since 2003, no one has calculated how many people are employed in public administration, so that we can see how many people are employed in public administration, and we see that we will be tackling the reform of public administration. So, in my opinion, this is just an illusion of reforms that did not bring anything to citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Initiative for Monitoring the European Integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018).

Following the submission of application for EU membership in 2016 Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, gave to the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina a Questionnaire containing over three thousand questions. This questionnaire is a crucial part of the accession procedure which is given to a country after it has submitted its membership application. Obviously, a questionnaire of this size cannot be handed back quickly, any state would have difficulties gathering the necessary data for the fulfillment of the questionnaire, still, Bosnia and Herzegovina needed two years to complete the questionnaire and deliver the first version to Brussels. A couple of months later the European Union sent follow-up questions that were answered in a year's worth of time. As much as thirty-five working groups had to be assembled in order to answer the questionnaire, this again can be contributed to the legacy of the Dayton Peace Agreement as it created a large and complex state structure with a massive bureaucratic apparatus where jurisdiction boundaries are not always as well defined as they should be, causing confusion and slow response times to larger challenges of which there are many.

It is safe to say that Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long way to go, considering that it is the only state in the Western Balkans without a candidate status. I could argue that no major steps on the integration path were made since the verdict was given in the „Sejdić-Finci“ case by the European Court of Human Rights. Dervo Sejdic and Jakob Finci are two prominent individuals from Roma and Jewish minorities living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they sued the state as they were discriminated due to being their ethnic background. Only Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks have the right to be elected into the highest state institutions such as the Presidency. The constitution recognizes all the rest of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina as “others”, which

do not enjoy the same rights as the constituent people that are Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. The court ruled in favor of Sejdic and Finčić as the constitution was violating basic human rights and demanded that the state and the entities create spaces for the minority communities to be represented. One judge has stated that *"The ban on minorities from participating in elections has no objective and reasonable justification, and is therefore contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits discrimination."* (Radio Free Europe 2019). To this day Bosnia and Herzegovina has not implemented the necessary reforms for minority representation with the exception of the Sarajevo Canton. When it comes to fighting corruption and having a functioning prosecutor's office within the judiciary system within the state things are rather pessimistic again. The newly appointed chief prosecutor Gordana Tadić stated that *„...there is corruption, but I do not think it's a systemic problem.“* (Gordana Tadić 2019). This is a rather shocking statement made by a high ranking official despite the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina scored poorly on the Transparency International Corruption Index. When compared to the rest of the European countries Bosnia and Herzegovina is far worse. Bulgaria, for instance, scored 77 on the corruption index which is the highest score of any member country of the European Union, while Bosnia and Herzegovina scored 89. Furthermore, Transparency International in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been monitoring the anti-corruption strategy adopted by the Council of Ministers. They have concluded that most of the document was not implemented fully, some actions weren't even started and that there is the only fictive fight against corruption at best. These and many more cases show that the integration process of Bosnia and Herzegovina is blocked for the time being.

Still, not all is so dire, there is some good news. The Directorate for European Integration is the state's main body for the integration process. It also conducts public opinion polls and one such poll was conducted in 2019. The public still strongly supports the country's European accession path with 78% of the respondents answering that they would indeed vote „YES“ in a referendum to join the European Union. Still, there are some concerning developments if one looks closely into the data. The support for joining the Union is far greater in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (86,5%) than in the Republic of Srpska (58,9%). Still compared to the last two years the support for the integration process has increased quite a bit. There are also diverging reasons for wanting to join the European Union. While the citizens of the Federation want to join because they believe that the Union will bring lasting peace and political stability, the majority of the citizens in the Republic want to join because they believe that the Union

will guarantee freedom of movement of goods, people and capital. Still, citizens in both entities agree that the number one problem the country is facing at the moment is corruption and that efforts to fight corruption should intensify (BiH Directorate of European Integration 2019).

The country's path to the EU is perhaps the best example/indicator of its stagnation. It is true that the people do want to be part of the European family and when asked the political elites do want to make that a reality. Their actions, or better yet lack thereof, are apparent and quite indicative of false and characteristic of overambitious promises.

The current economic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The economic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is far from perfect and is showing no significant improvement over time. *“Bosnia and Herzegovina is still at an early stage of establishing a functioning market economy and of becoming competitive within the common market... economic governance is prioritizing maintaining the status quo, which further slows down the formulation and implementation of overdue structural reforms.”* (European Commission 2019: 10). It would be no exaggeration to say that the economic growth of Bosnia and Herzegovina is slow-paced at best. In 2015 the country's Council of Ministers adopted the „Strategic Framework for Bosnia and Herzegovina“, a document that owes its existence to a set of remarks and recommendations of the European Union. The document prescribes necessary steps the country has to take to develop its economy and stop what many have come to call an „exodus of the population“. The document focuses on smart, sustainable, integrated and inclusive growth as these pathways are seen as necessary. Integrated growth focuses on the promotion of regional trade and investment, smart growth on innovations, digitalization and youth mobility, sustainable growth on balanced regional development and inclusive growth on employment through skills development.

The need for new technologies, innovations and foreign direct investments were some of the most ambitious goals set forth by the document. Foreign direct investments seem to be rising according to data provided by the central bank. In 2015 foreign direct investments amounted

to 326 million euros, followed by a sharp decline in 2016 with investments amounting to 288 million euros. Then a large increase in foreign direct investments occurred in 2017 totaling 398 million euros. In 2018 an estimated 409 million euros of foreign direct investment entered Bosnia and Herzegovina, the final number is still unknown as data is still being compiled, also no estimates were given for 2019 as of yet (Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019). Still there is no way to monitor the implementation of new technologies. New technologies are barely adopted as Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only country in Europe without a functioning 4G telecommunications network. E-banking is also underdeveloped, with foreign banks such as Raiffeisen and Sparkasse being among the few ones to even give the basic of e-banking services. The public administration services are only accessible by direct visits to local municipalities or other relevant institutions. As far as innovations go Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a knowledge-based economy, most of its exports in the automotive sector, which is quite large, is because of the low production costs of semi-finished products. Almost no innovations occur within private companies or universities as investments in this sector are almost non-existent. In fact *“owners/managers [of companies] have limited (professional) knowledge, and because they themselves often have a technical background, they lack marketing and management knowledge”* (Voluntary review 2019:38). The SDG report (Voluntary review), written by Price Waterhouse Coopers, has also determined that *“improvement of equipment, tools, machinery and the knowledge on the new technologies”* is necessary for the development of the industry to occur (Voluntary review 2019:45). It was also Michael Schickhofer, the Deputy Governor of the Province of Styria in Austria, who gave an interesting statement during the Sarajevo Economic Forum in 2019. Schickhofer said that Austria does not mind the trade deficit it has with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the main reason being that Austrian companies get semi-finished products from Bosnian companies which they in turn complete and go on to sell for a significantly higher price than the actual purchase price (Schickhofer 2019).

The exodus of the population mentioned earlier refers to a large number of skilled workers and young people leaving the country due to many reasons, yet the main three reasons are: 1. Lack of employment opportunities; 2. Bad working conditions for a meager salary; 3. The bad political situation and thus living conditions (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2017). These three reasons are dominant among people leaving the country according to the media and studies conducted on the subject by international organizations and domestic institutes. Youth unemployment is a glaring issue within the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina has the world's highest youth

unemployment rate in the world, with 46.7% of youth being currently unemployed according to the data gathered by the World Bank (World Bank 2019). Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing a large issue in this regard as the future of the country is literally leaving its borders in search of greener pastures. Most young people are leaving for Germany, Austria and Sweden and see themselves in these countries. And a country that has lost almost one million inhabitants in the last twenty years due to the war and subsequent migration needs every young person for its existence. Still despite this issue, the authorities do not keep records of how many young people have actually left the country, with numbers ranging from 50 to 200 thousand in the past decade by various news reports and non-governmental organizations.

According to the World Economic Forum, the main problems that one faces when doing business in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an inefficient government bureaucracy, corruption and tax rates together with political instability. It should come as no surprise that if you want to start a new company you need as much as eighty-one days and a visit to 13 different institutions (WEF 2019). The amount of bureaucracy one needs to fight through in order to start a company is scary at best and discourages many from even trying to start a company or learn how to. Even though the annual GDP growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last several years has not been lower than 3%, with is respectable the economic situation is still dire. The average wage in the Federation is 914³ BAM in 2019, and the cost of the average consumer basket (factoring in food and beverage) for a family of four is twice that (Federal Bureau of Statistics 2019). The average wage in the private sector is roughly 879⁴ BAM (BiH Directorate for economic planning 2019:16) lower than the official average wage meaning that a family of four (two adults and two children) have a small chance at decent living. Although no data for the Republic of Srpska for 2019 is available the situation is similar. The minimum wage if the Federation is 410⁵ BAM while in the Republic the same is 415⁶ BAM, when factoring in the price of the consumer basket we can see that the situation is quite bleak. The World Bank mission present in Bosnia and Herzegovina stated that the economy needs restructuring in such a way that the creation of new jobs needs to be handed over to the private sector with a minimal public sector footprint.

³ 449.42 EUR, according to the middle course 1,95583 as of 30th of May 2020

⁴ 409.03 EUR, according to the middle course 1,95583 as of 30th of May 2020

⁵ 209.62 EUR, according to the middle course 1,95583 as of 30th of May 2020

⁶ 212.18 EUR, according to the middle course 1,95583 as of 30th of May 2020

Even though there are some encouraging signs like the increase in industrial production, still this might soon be overturned as one of the country's biggest enterprises „Aluminij“ has ceased production in June of 2019. This is a massive hit for the economy as a further nine hundred workers will be left jobless. Overall it is the bad economic state in which Bosnia and Herzegovina is in which prompts people to leave the country.

The political scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the 2018 general elections

The 2018 general election in Bosnia and Herzegovina was among the most uncertain ones since the country's independence. With tensions at an all-time high result of the elections have shown the degree of polarization present among the three main ethnicities, also the more left oriented parties created a de facto alliance in an attempt to curb the incumbent nationalist parties in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They even had some degree of success, at least in the Sarajevo Canton, where they help power for some time. Still, populist nationalist parties have taken a decisive victory, especially Dodik's party which was the decisive victor both within its entity and the state. Not a lot has changed on the entity level, while these are some striking changes on the state level. As far as election results are concerned the three dominant political parties are still on top. From the Federation of BiH, the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica or HDZ) and the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije or SDA) have won the majority of the votes. In the Republic of Srpska, the Union of Independent Social Democrats (Savez Nezavisnih Socialdemokrata or SNSD) not only won but strengthened its position and emerged as the strongest political party not only the Republic of Srpska but in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The pre-election campaign was described as „chaotic“ by the Coalition „Pod Lupom“ (Under the Magnifying Glass) which is a domestic organization for free and fair elections funded by the European Union⁷. There also seems to be irregularities when voting via the post. People who have not actually voted are registered as having their vote cast as their private information

⁷ The coalition monitors all processes that are linked to the election process.

is being misused. Considering that there have been over seventy-seven thousand voters registered for voting via the post this is quite a large discrepancy.

Public resources or funds have been used to fund a certain political campaign. A total of sixty-four cases was registered. Out of the mentioned sixty-four thirty-one was carried out by SNSD, twelve by HDZ and ten by SDA. In this sense SNSD was registered as pressuring public sector employees to give them their vote, this was done either by threatening them or by organizing field trips, free doctor appointments, distributing care packages containing food, paying for their vote or other means. State-owned cars and busses were often used for the campaign and, in some rarer cases, public funds were used to pay for various activities. All of these actions were illegal and punishable by law, still, few were ever prosecuted. The leader of SNSD Milorad Dodik was quite vocal as he was filmed on a pre-election forum in Gacko that all who do cast their vote to the competitors of SNSD and their coalition partners would lose their jobs. Also, quite interesting, although not illegal the authorities of the Republic of Srpska decided to raise salaries of government employees and pensions, this move is interpreted as an attempt to gather votes for SNSD and its political leaders and coalition partners.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina noted that *“with a few exceptions, contestants oriented themselves towards their own ethnic communities.”* (OSCE 2018). This should not come as any surprise considering the fact that SDA and HDZ can be considered wartime parties whose leaders were active in either the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina or the Croatian Defence Council. These parties build upon ethnic divides that were put up long ago. They often call upon “patriotism” and portray the victories and sacrifices taken by their sides in the war. They present themselves as defenders of their ethnic community just like they were in times of war, such portrayal gives them much attention and resonates among a large population of voters. The SDA especially emphasizes its role and presents itself as a party which saved the territorial integrity of the country. If we look at the statements made by the party leader Bakir Izetbegović at a press conference prior to the election we can see how he references war:

“We face great challenges, the context is not good, some war ideologies have begun to open the door to the sovereignty of BiH to try to equalize the sides of the war. One cannot fight these problems without experience with these things.” (Izetbegović 2018)

He is positioning his party as defenders of the state and its sovereignty as well as portraying its members as experienced warriors, both on the battlefield and in politics. Although he did not mention any names or attack any opposing party the implications are clear to the voters, the state is at risk of being lost to the inflammatory rhetoric and ideology of SNSD and HDZ who at the time were seen as forming a political alliance.

Furthermore, Izetbegović has made a number of extravagant claims which can not be substantiated by evidence. On another rally, he recalled when during the 2014 local elections he promised to open one hundred thousand jobs and stated that in the federation, alone seventy thousand were opened and in the entire country as much as one hundred and one thousand jobs were created. There are three problems with this claim, the first is that people who have been removed from the unemployment list are counted in the system as being employed hence the supposed job opening appears. In fact, some of those people removed from the unemployment list might very well be individuals who left the country and found jobs in Germany, Austria or other states. Secondly, given the complexity of the political system of the state one political party cannot make claims that they have done something by themselves, especially if encompassing both entities. Thus he misrepresented data in an effort to create a public image of himself and his political party in the best way possible.

The party is using patriotism in order to motivate its voters. It is important to note that patriotism in Bosnia and Herzegovina differs from group to group, which is also an indicator of how fractured the state is and that cleavages left after the war are still wide open. SDA presents itself as a defender of the state and in this sense, it lays claims to the entire country. This would be completely acceptable if it were not for the fact that it is an ethnic party that represents only one of the three ethnic groups in the state. Because of that they, during the election campaign, unveiled their own patriotic song called “Homeland” (“Domovina”) on stage in Zenica together with a choreography that included the flag of the Republic of Bosnia

and Herzegovina⁸ (a white flag with a shield and golden lilies). This flag is viewed as undesirable and even hostile by the other two ethnic groups. Milorad Dodik even commented on its use a year earlier and described it as a war flag.

These are not isolated incidents, Izetbegović often makes remarks to populism and that the Bosniak people with him as the leader will defend the country and its legitimacy whatever the cost. Often Izetbegović uses a subtle tone when making such statements, yet he also has been known to use a more direct one stating in an interview for Deutsche Welle that he is ready for war and that everyone who loves Bosnia and Herzegovina should be prepared for anything when the territorial integrity of the state is concerned. In another interview, he mentioned that SDA is a party distinct for two things, first that it leads processes within the state, and secondly that it is ready to do anything to protect the state even if that means bad ratings. In a meeting in Gornji Vakuf he states that much like the Bosniaks who fought for the country the SDA also fights and takes on the greatest of challenges, yet never brags about it and that *“We must gather strength, a difficult period is about to follow. What Dodik says is not harmless. The situation has changed, and global one and this in the Balkans. Everything is filthy, they are all tougher. Only a strong party, with a strong leader in the Presidency, can stop it.”* stated Izetbegović.

The campaign was not focused on problems that are facing the country, only superficially were there some remarks made on the accession path and necessary political and economic reforms. The SDA leader also referenced issues that he found pressing while in Banja Luka stating the following:

“You will never split Bosnia and Herzegovina, and never Srebrenica, Kozarac, Brcko⁹, and other places of civilian suffering, there won't be anything else but BiH” (Izetbegović 2018)

⁸ The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was the official name of the state when it gained independence in 1992 and the white flag with a shield and golden lilies was its official flag. Both the name and the flag have been outright dismissed by Croats and Serbs living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and have been a stumbling stone ever since they were introduced. Since the signing of the Dayton peace accords both the name and the flag have been changed. Today the name of the country is simply Bosnia and Herzegovina and its flag has a blue background with a yellow triangle (roughly representing the state) and white stars going along one side of the yellow triangle.

⁹ These places were locations where some of the most horrific war crimes were committed during the war, ranging from forceful displacement and ethnic cleansing to genocide.

When it comes to historical revisionism the SDA political party has been waging a battle of what they see as historical injustices. An elementary school name might be the most recent case of this particular phenomenon. SDA members in Sarajevo decided to rename an elementary school and give it the name of a highly controversial historical figure named Mustafa Busuladžić who was executed after World War 2 by communist authorities because he was a known Nazi collaborator and had preached ideas that were considered radical by the socialist state of the time. The story even got regional coverage and many reported that it was the resurrection of fascism. The decision was later retracted after public backlash as well as critique from other political actors.

Izetbegović is also very reluctant to take on any responsibility for his actions or actions of his political party. Back in 2014 when he was still a member of the Presidency, BiH saw its largest protests in the past twenty years. The protests started peaceful yet ended in a riot that saw government buildings burn in several cities of BiH. In an interview given to AlJazeera Izetbegović condoled violence yet stated that the people have a legitimate reason for protests and dissatisfaction. When asked directly if he feels responsible, he chose to dodge the question and later on to blame social democrats for the discontent in the country, he was able to say this because at the time before the protests started his party was in a coalition with the socialist party of SDP (Socialdemofratska partija). Also they had dissolved the Sarajevo Canton Government because of poor performance on behalf of the socialist party. He stated that in spite of the fact that he and his political party have actively participated in the formation of governments for over a decade and a half. He even made remarks that were supposed to delegitimize the protests further stating that the protests were made in order to topple governments in parts of the country where Bosniak's are the majority and that they were orchestrated. Truth be told the same narrative was used in the RS where officials claimed that they were designed by those in the FBiH to topple the RS.

Another pillar of Izetbegović's populist power is his personal relations to Turkish president Erdogan. They can often be seen together and Erdogan also stated that "Turkey will stand as a mountain behind Bosnia" to prevent the suffering of Bosnia's like they experienced during the war. Erdogan helps him legitimize his claim as a great leader. It is also important to mention

that Bakir Izetbegović is the son of the late Alija Izetbegović who was the wartime leader of Bosniaks and the first Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the war and is beloved by many Bosniaks to this day. Izetbegović often references his father and his struggle vowing not to throw away what was gained in the war.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina noted correctly that *“the tone of the campaign was largely negative and polarizing, blaming opponents for the lack of progress. Emphasis on nationalism and personal attacks were notable features of the campaign, in particular for the presidential races, at times overshadowing socio-economic issues, such as corruption, unemployment, migration and education.”* (OSCE 2018). This is true not only for the SDA and its leader but for other political parties and leaders as well.

Milorad Dodik is one of the political veterans in Bosnia and Herzegovina whose rise to power was somewhat of a surprise for all. He started his political career at the first democratic elections, during the early 1990s, in the country as a parliament candidate on the Reform Forces of Ante Marković (Reformske Snage Ante Markovića), which was a pro-Yugoslav liberal party determined to bring about market liberalisation and increase private capital into the economy. In 1996 he founded his political party and has battled the then present nationalist forces in the country, often praising the international community and calling for a creating of a new kind of politics that would not be based on ethnic grievances. He was vocal and supportive of the joint future and state-building in front of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he denounced crimes and those who committed them, most notably when attacking Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. He expressed no separatist tendencies and even said that *„it is better to be an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina than a province in Serbia“* (Dodik 1997). He was also a stark opponent of Slobodan Milošević who was the president of Serbia at the time. And perhaps most positive of all he did not refuse the rulings of the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia when it delivered its verdict on Srebrenica stating that genocide was indeed committed there.

Around 2006 the politics of Milorad Dodik took a sharp turn for the worst towards radicalism. In an attempt to stay in power for a longer period of time Dodik started using nationalist rhetoric, combined with attacks on „foreign agents“. Once a strong supporter of reforms Dodik now does everything to stop them, even vowing to bring back jurisdiction lost from the state level back to the entity level, a practically impossible move. He has accused foreign ambassadors and organizations of interfering in the internal affairs of the state and entities several times and has openly accused the former American Ambassador Maureen McCormack of interfering in the 2018 elections. He has also refused to meet the former German Ambassador Christiane Hofmann accusing her of working against Serbs.

Under his rule, the Republic of Srpska and its police forces did all they could to stop migrants from staying within the entity and deporting them to the Federation. On several occasions he said that he would not help the state authorities in Sarajevo, nor will he accept financial and material help for their housing provided by international organizations, they are Europe's problem and an attempt by his opponents do destabilize the Republic of Srpska:

„This is a deliberate act of the political Sarajevo, together with the security service headed by the SDA to import 150 000 migrants into BiH before the elections.“ (Dodik 2018)

Dodik is quite fond of conspiracy theories, clashes with international subjects present in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as vulgar and demeaning language. Dodik also used the migrants as an excuse for forming the reserve formation of the entity's police forces in order to „protect his citizens“. Many were quick to criticize this move as it was interpreted as an attempt at creating some kind of military force because Dodik critiques the fact that the Republic of Srpska willingly gave up its military. The reserve was supposed to be made up of one thousand young people up to 25 years of age, they should have been well trained and armed. As a response the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, under minister Aljoša Čampara from the SDA, announced that it was going to do the same thing, if one entity is arming itself then so will the other. Luckily both decided not to pursue this course of action as it was seen as unnecessary or too big of a hassle.

Prior to migrants, Dodik spoke quite convincingly about forming a large police reserve force. That force would serve as a de-facto military which would solidify his rule and make it appear as the Republic of Srpska has regained its security forces which it has „lost“ when forming the unified Armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the end, the reserve force was not formed because of the mounting pressure of the international community, neighboring countries and ever-rising concern and dissatisfaction from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Not to mention the inability of the entity to finance the forces it supposedly needed.

For a long time, he has been stating that he will oust the foreign judges from the constitutional court as he believes that they are biased and work against the interest of the Republic of Srpska. This was further problematized when the constitutional court ruled the public holiday „9th of June“, the day of the founding of the entity, as unconstitutional because it is discriminatory towards Bosniaks and Croats living within the entity. The holiday is still celebrated in the Republic of Srpska as the authorities do not accept the ruling of the court, especially since the case was brought to the court by Bakir Izetbegović. They used these occurrences as proof of the bias of foreigners in the country accusing them of working only for the Bosniak national interest disregarding the Serbs and their interests.

Dodik has also been threatening to organize a referendum of independence for years, often using it to scare his adversaries. He uses this tactic even though he is currently a member of the Presidency and holds no office in the Republic of Srpska. Dodik stated on several occasions that genocide was not committed in Srebrenica stating instead that a horrible crime was committed there. Dodik seems immovable on the subject and reluctant to change his mind despite ever-mounting internal, regional and international pressure. Even the EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn stated that „*there is no room in the European Union for those who negate crimes*“ (Hahn 2019). The High Representative has also mentioned the possibility of imposing a law on the state level which would forbid the negation of genocide and other crimes, to this Dodik responded by threatening to hold a referendum of independence.

SNSD has emerged from the 2018 elections as the single most powerful party in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It had effectively defeated the opposition in the Republic of Srpska and

dismantled them as it offered some of their members to join the ruling coalition, which the leader of the Peoples Democratic Movement (Narodni Demokratski Pokret or NDP) Dragan Čavić accepted even though he was a stark opponent of Milorad Dodik and his party prior to the elections. In the Republic of Srpska SNSD is left to rule unopposed, which is why the new government of the Republic of Srpska was formed in record time.

On the state level, the new Council of Ministers has just recently been formed as the major deal breaker seems to be the integration of the country into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Dodik refuses to go on with further integration as NATO was engaged in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and targeted the Bosnian-Serb military forces. Instead, he opts for the continuation of the partnership with the organization but not to become a member. This could be interpreted as a classical nationalist move if not for the fact that the SNSD agreed for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a member of NATO back in 2005. When confronted with these facts Dodik responded with „stances change“. Dodik refused to sign the Membership Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina for a long period of time, until the official name of the document was changed. The contents of the document signed was never publically released yet further NATO integration has been made possible, Dodik now refuses to make the document publicly available.

He is also skeptical of the future of the country and is often heard referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina as „impossible“. He also stated that one day the Republic of Srpska and the Republic of Serbia will be one. The Republic of Srpska is also referred to as a self-sufficient „country“ by Dodik where it is only a matter of time before independence is proclaimed and recognized. This is how Dodik uses the patriotic card. And it works because according to a study of public opinion in 2017 showed that out of the three ethnic groups, 20% of Serbs do not perceive Bosnia and Herzegovina to be their country at all. I believe that this is due to long term exposure to separatist and nationalist rhetoric that started in 1990 and continues to this day. Still, it does help explain why politicians such as Dodik are elected into power year after year although they have little to show for their work.

One could also state that Dodik is a charismatic leader of sorts. He is often recorded when attacking journalists or giving vulgar statements, he referred to himself as the „top dog“ in his entity and can be seen more often than not singing folk songs. Sure this might not strike most people as the characteristic of a charismatic person, yet he is the personification of a „Balkan strongman“ and as such is charismatic and appealing to a significant number of people. Dodik also has very close ties with Russian businessmen and politicians, who can be regularly seen visiting the Republic of Srpska. Dodik also went to see president Putin several times in order to attain financial aid and political support. Fraternising with the Russians has a positive effect for Dodik as Serbs, in general, are quite fond of Russia which also adds to his charisma and affirms his legitimacy.

Dodik tested the limits of his power and the patience of the international community when he called upon Serbs in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina to wear the uniform once worn by the Military of the Republic of Srpska. This was another way for Dodik to undermine the state level and make himself appear more powerful than he in fact is. His statement was preceded by months of rhetoric aimed against NATO and reminding the people which jurisdictions the RS gave up in recent years, vowing to bring those same jurisdictions back to the entity level.

Dodik's relation to media is also interesting, not only does he verbally attack journalists or media outlets that do not perpetrate his view, but he also controls public outlets and has his own. Dodik put the Radio Television of the Republic of Srpska (RTRS) under his control, thus making sure that it never published a story that would portray him in a negative light. This public service television turned into a massive media machine which served one man and one political party, as noted by Stanisavljević who stated that „*RTRS converted itself into service of the Republic of Srpska government instead of a public service of the Republic of Srpska citizens; with any larger political “issue” arising in the abundance in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian political space, unlimited space was given to all members of the ruling party who skilfully portrayed them to the public as protection of vital national interests of the Republic of Srpska*“ (Stanisavljević 2010:100) It also serves as a platform to criticize his political opponents and the international community. The government of the Republic of Srpska spent as much as 3,6 million BAM on private media that are tied to high ranking SNSD

officials in the form of grants for various projects without ever conducting a proper tendering procedure. News and media companies, including television stations, radio stations and printed media, all get some funding. Also, Dodik has been very successful at repressing media that criticize his work and portray him in a negative light, the most notable is the case of the BN television station which is no longer readily available to the population. He also has direct links to one of the most powerful printed media in the Republic of Srpska called „Nezavisne Novine“ which he founded back in 1995 but sold soon after. These and other news stations, radio stations and printed media are used to portray him as a great leader who serves the Serb people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was made possible by an *“underdeveloped market, meaning that there is a lack of available funds for both commercial and public media. Political parties largely influence advertisers (through connections with managers and owners) and are thus in a position to channel the advertising share to their preferred media outlet* “(Džananović, Karamehić 2016:6). Simply put, the media are forced to work in favor of the ruling political parties as they are the ones keeping them in operating and in business.

When it comes to historical revisionism Dodik openly negates the crimes committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The genocide in Srebrenica is not acknowledged as such, yet it is referred to as a „great crime“. Furthermore, during his rule, the authorities decided that a newly built student dormitory in Pale, a settlement near Sarajevo, was named after convicted war criminal „Radovan Karadžić“¹⁰. He is also present at annual gatherings of anti-fascist movements, for instance, he was present at the commemoration of the Kozara battle on the Kozara mountain. At the gathering he stated that „Kozara is an epic story of the suffering of the Serbian people“, this statement totally neglected the fact that the Partisans were a multi-ethnic force. These kinds of public speeches by Dodik are intended to forget about the fact that there was a time when the three ethnic groups worked together successfully thus hindering reconciliation efforts.

In recent years Dodik has faced one of the biggest obstacles to his rule. This obstacle did not come from rival nationalist parties in the RS or FBiH, it came from the people of RS or to be more precise mostly the city of Banja Luka which is the de facto capital of the entity and the seat of his power. A murder of a young man, named David Dragičević, spurred mass protests

¹⁰ The man who created and led the Republic of Srpska during the war in Bosnia

in Banja Luka which called out for justice to be satisfied. The police and other authorities were reluctant to investigate the case, causing many to speculate and start posting conspiracy theories which explain why was the young man murdered, the only thing that is known is that the case is still unsolved and the killer has not been found. Dodik showed little compassion for the family's loss and did not support the protests, in addition to this day no one was questioned and no police personnel was sanctioned for bad police work and the break of procedures. Dodik stated that neither the state nor its institutions would bow down to certain policies and demands made by the protesters, which led many to believe that he was involved in some way. During the election campaign, he made direct threats to the father of the murdered young man and to the protesters stating that he will disband the protests and that they should not mess around with him. And so it was the police started to break apart the peaceful protesters while the father was forced into hiding and supposedly left the country for his own safety.

Also important to note is the Croatian Democratic Union or HDZ (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica). This political party, representing the ethnic Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a major player on the political scene of Bosnia and Herzegovina even though its power is disproportionate to the number of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The number of ethnic Croats in the country is in a constant and even sharp decline yet the HDZ as a party still holds a third of the state power. Its leader Dragan Čović can also be considered to be a populist politician who has been able to stay in power thanks to damaging rhetoric and by manipulating the ethnic Croat population of Bosnia and Herzegovina by continuously perpetuating the narrative of a „third entity“. This third entity is supposed to belong to the Croats, as in the view of HDZ Croats should have gotten an entity similar to that of the Republic of Srpska. This third entity should be comprised out of the cantons where ethnic Croats are the majority, which are primarily in Herzegovina. This also means that all Croats who live in the rest of the country are essentially written off. Even though that is impossible in Bosnia and Herzegovina without a major constitutional reform the dream lives on. This „dream“ has done much to deteriorate the relations between the Bosniaks and Croats over the years, keeping the cleavage alive and allowing both the HDZ and SDA to gain political points, as they are able to present this as a „us“ versus „them“ situation. This is of course not the only issue where they disagree. The HDZ has created and cemented its position as the only „true“ representative of Croats living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which created the narrative that only its candidate is „legitimate Croats“. This is the major source of political strife in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

as the HDZ wants to introduce a sort of ethnic voting mechanism and has requested a change of the election laws on several occasions. The reason why the HDZ requests a change of the election laws is that Dragan Čović was pushed out of the tripartite Presidency by Željko Komšić, a Croat politician who was elected into office by Bosniak votes, as well as some Serb and leftist non-nationalist votes. In the eyes of the HDZ and its supporters, Komšić is not a legitimate representative and is, in fact, working against Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both these cases, third entity, and electoral changes, Čović enjoys the support of Dodik whom he sees as a political ally. Although he is not known for making public outburst as Dodik, he is not without his share of controversy as he was „*removed from his position as a Member of the BiH Presidency [in 2005] by the Office of High Representative after being indicted with severe criminal charges*“ (Hasić 2019:10). He was also removed by the OHR in 2001 from the position of Minister of Finance because of the abuse of power.

Bosnia recap

If one looks carefully enough at the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina a symbiosis of political subjects may be spotted. To elaborate, by now I have given you a glimpse into the political life and constitutional arrangement of Bosnia and Herzegovina. By all accounts, it is not perfect, so it must be imperfect. The imperfections within the system are exploited to create a state of constant unrest, and that state is created by the two largest political parties SDA and SNSD who claim to represent the two largest ethnic and religious groups. The political moves of one side are viewed as a provocation, a provocation that helps the other side gather cheap yet effective support. For instance, when Bakir Izetbegović brought the case of the public holiday to the constitutional court, Dodik and his political party portrayed it as an attack on Serbs and an attempt to take away their identity. Meaning that Izetbegović created the perfect opportunity for Dodik and his party to position themselves as the defenders of Serbs within the country. The same goes for when Dodik refuses to accept the genocide in Srebrenica, Izetbegović is then given the perfect opportunity to position himself as the defender of Bosniaks within the country. Ergo the politics have to be centered around harmful remarks in order for parties to maintain their grip on power because without that kind of rhetoric they do not have anything worthwhile to give to the people.

As can be seen from the examples above populisms in Bosnia and Herzegovina is tied to nationalist parties. These parties all have charismatic leaders of sorts that have larger than life personas and are able to “get away” with behavior that would be unacceptable for most, much like Albertazzi and McDonnell foresaw. Their rule over the media and overall presence allows them to spread their populist rhetoric thus securing their relevance in the political arena. They keep old wounds open and exploit them in order to win elections. Daalder identified cleavages which can be clearly seen in Bosnia and Herzegovina as they are kept alive by denying recent history and not to mention historical revisionism of the events that took place at the beginning and middle of the last century. They focus more on prolonging a state of political crisis, which is easier thanks to the complex power-sharing system, which allows them to sway the public attention from more pressing issues, such as economic reforms or the country's EU path. This also prolongs the transition period which never seems to end and favors politicians as Zeman described. It is also apparent that there is a fair indication of reactionary populism present within the country. Inflammatory statements, portrayed by Jansen, of politicians generate instant political points and antagonize opposing ethnic groups, these statements may not be long-lasting yet their frequency generates a state of continual crisis. Given that it has been over 20 years since the end of the war it is interesting that more or less the same statements still generate strong reactions. I suspect that the reason for such strong reactions lies in the fact that reconciliation efforts have all but stopped, and the little that was done on reconciling the once warring ethnic groups has been undone by inflammatory rhetoric on behalf of the aforementioned politicians. And there are also the major political moves announced and newer carried out, the actual non-action of Ostović. This may best be seen in the case of Dodik and the reserve police force, even if there was no political issue with the decision its realization was always questionable given the fact that financial resources were never secured for this major undertaking. Still, the mere announcement of this formation was enough to score political points, and the subsequent “brawl” with politicians from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina also showed beneficial as both the SNSD and SDA parties which profited from it in the form of political points and support from their respective ethnic group.

Serbia

Constitutional arrangement and legacies of the 1990s

Unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Serbia (henceforth Serbia) has a much more streamlined constitutional arrangement with clearer boundaries and jurisdictions. This does not mean that the constitution of Serbia is without its troubles, as will soon be apparent. Serbia has a modern constitution that incorporates the tried and true principle of power division among the executive, legislative and judiciary power, with guarantees that the judiciary power is independent. It is important to note that it is written in the constitution that Serbia also has two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina being one and Kosovo and Metohija is the other, which have their own representative, legislative and executive power bodies.¹¹ Suffice to say that Serbia is also a multi-ethnic state with a sizable Bosniak minority, as well as others. Serbia's constitution is more centralized than that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet the existence of the autonomous provinces is a clear indicator of the limits of Serbia's centralization.

The National Assembly serves as the supreme representative body and its two hundred and fifty members are directly elected by the citizens of Serbia and can only be dissolved by the President once he had received an elaborated proposal from the Government. Then we have the Government of Serbia, which is elected by the National Assembly, is the executive power in the country. It is headed by the Prime Minister proposed by the President and consisted of at least one Vice Minister and other ministers.

Finally, we have the President of Serbia directly elected by the people to represent the interests of the country domestically and abroad, as well as being the personification of state unity. The President has to swear an oath in front of the National Assembly when taking up office as is

¹¹ Despite being included in the constitution Kosovo has been de-facto independent since 2008. The EU has even harboured negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia in order to normalise relations, stabilize the region and secure Serbia's recognition of Kosovo. *"This new phase aims to conclude a fully comprehensive and legally binding agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, in line with international law and EU acquis and acceptable to EU Member States and the region"* (European Commission 2019: 53)

common practice in many countries of the world, yet the oath that the President of Serbia swears offers a glimpse into why this position lays the foundations for populist exploitation. The oath states that:

"I do solemnly swear that I will devote all my efforts to preserve the sovereignty and integrity of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, including Kosovo and Metohija as its constituent part, as well as to provide exercise of human and minority rights and freedoms, respect and protection of the Constitution and laws, preservation of peace and welfare of all citizens of the Republic of Serbia and perform all my duties conscientiously and responsibly."

This oath is relatively new, it was introduced back in 2006 after the state union of Serbia and Montenegro dissolved and it was necessary for Serbia to adopt a new constitution, the constitution was never amended even after Kosovo's declaration of independence. The oath does not acknowledge the independence of Kosovo, instead stating that it is a part of Serbia. This part of the sentence will prove to be a perfect catalyst for populism on part of the Serbian President as will be shown in the rest of the paper.

Before going further, it is important to emphasize the different roles of the President and the Prime Minister of Serbia. Although both positions hold considerable power and jurisdiction it is the Prime Minister that holds more power, according to the constitution. The Prime Minister is the head of the government and deals with the National Assembly on a regular basis, while the President's main obligation is, among others, representing Serbia abroad. Historically it is the President who had more media attention as the institution of President is more appealing to the citizens. Aleksandar Vučić is currently serving as President, yet before that, he was Prime Minister. In that time he was the most vocal Prime Minister Serbia ever had. He attracted media and public attention far more successfully than the President of Serbia at that time, Tomislav Nikolić. Vučić was able to position himself as a person who gets things done, and does it efficiently, which is why he got the media attention that he did. He continues to do so to this day. Vučić used his time as Prime Minister to gather a lot of international support from prominent figures, ranging from Angela Merkel to Vladimir Putin. Considering that it is the President that recommends the Prime Minister to the National Assembly we can also consider

the appointment of Ana Brnabić to the position of Prime Minister by Vučić and his party as a populist move. Ana Brnabić is not only a female political holding a powerful office, she is also the first openly gay female politician to hold such a prominent position. Her appointment caused quite a media sensation and has been seen as a certain „Europeanisation“ of Serbia. She was handpicked by Vučić for this role as she was a non-party expert member of the government and given all of this a pro-western individual. This all made her an ideal candidate for Vučić in order for him to present a new face of Serbia.

Kosovo is a sore subject that plagues society and politics in Serbia. It is also a dark cloud looming above Serbia's path to EU accession. A lot of it has to do with the historical significance of Kosovo has a lot to do with its impact on politics and society of Serbia today. It is regarded Kosovo had been a part of what some have come to call „Old Serbia“, or regions that Serbs inhabited before the emergence of modern states. Once the Serbian Empire started collapsing under the attack of the upcoming Ottoman Empire in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Serbs also started migrating to the north, a migration that would be intensified after the subsequent Austro-Turkish conflicts. All this time other ethnicities settled in Kosovo while Serbs were leaving it. Fast forward to the times of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, which was a part of then Yugoslavia, the provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo had been given a certain level of autonomy in order to put the ethnic minorities minds at ease. It allowed them to govern themselves, still following „*Tito's death in 1980, the manifestations of Albanian nationalism became more frequent*“ (Bieber & Daskalovski 2003, 15). Ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo began opposing the authorities and called out for independence, as time progressed their demands grew and attacks on Serbs and their property were more frequent. These events combined with the „*coming six-hundredth anniversary of the famous battle of Kosovo created an atmosphere conducive to the rise of Serbian nationalism*“ (Bieber & Daskalovski 2003, 16). These events were preceded by almost a century-long state-led policy to forcefully displace the Albanian population and settle the region with ethnic Serbs, it is said that “*the Serbian Orthodox Church, intellectuals and leaders have intended to invade the land of the Albanians*” (Bieber & Daskalovski 2003, 16).

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) formed in 1993, created in order to fight for Kosovo's independence after its status as an autonomous province was abolished by nationalist leader

Slobodan Milošević. Kosovo got its independence after the western powers intervened in the Kosovo conflict, and using their air superiority, inflicting massive damage to the Serbian state and military apparatus. The Serbian political elite saw this as the West taking up the side of the Albanians and the quick recognition of the state of Kosovo by most Western powers served as a justification of their views.

No doubt Kosovo's historic relevance is rather large, yet the myth of Kosovo and its perceived importance has grown even larger (Judah 2000). So large in fact, that it has made its resolution almost impossible. Today Serbian politicians are still reluctant to recognize Kosovo's independence and consider it a territory that is currently not under their control. Kosovo has remained in the collective consciousness of Serbs as the place where they suffered their greatest defeat, the battle of Kosovo in 1389, as well as the place where the oldest Serbian monasteries are located which is why it is seen as a cradle of the Serbian state and its people. Anyone who would even dare suggest the recognition of Kosovo would be branded as a traitor. This is the reason why Kosovo is still part of Serbia in the country's Constitution, it is also why it is a perfect populist theme. Given the current state in international affairs, it is safe to say that any chances of Serbia getting Kosovo back is nothing more but populist rhetoric. There is no political party which is willing to recognize Kosovo's independence, the Kosovo question serves as a mobilization tool for Serbian populists, as it is perceived to be a cleavage between the Serbian and Albanian people within Serbia the way the Constitution describes Serbia.

Kosovo is also hampering further constitutional reforms, as explained by the President of the Prosecutors Association of Serbia Goran Ilić *“Unfortunately, citizens have no particular interest in the process of changing the provisions of the Constitution on the judiciary. They only get confused when it is hinted that constitutional changes could also be affected by the preamble to the Constitution, which stipulates that Kosovo and Metohija have the status of a province with essential autonomy.”* (Goran Ilić 2019).

Yet this is not the only cleavage that can be found in modern-day Serbia. There is also the issue of the Sandžak region. This is a lesser-known, yet still an important region in Serbia where the majority of the Bosniak and Muslim communities live. Sandžak does not enjoy autonomy and

is not clearly defined, if you look at the map of Serbia you would be hard-pressed to identify the region. Still, historically the region has been underdeveloped and repressed by the state. With the wars of the nineties opening a whole other set of issues for Serbia the „Sandžak question“ came to prominence. The region has the potential to open up another cleavage yet that cleavage is being treated by the state today by turning open a new page in the region's relation to Belgrade and central authorities. The new president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić and the new “...*Serbian government maintains closer connections with the Islamic Community of Serbia (Belgrade), despite the ruling SNS party being in coalition with Zukorlić's*¹²*Party for Justice and Reconciliation (SPP). The Islamic Community in Serbia has become quite established, particularly in its base in Novi Pazar. While there is no official data, it is commonly understood that the Islamic Community in Serbia enjoys support from the majority of mosques in Sandžak, where most of Serbia's approximately 250 official mosques are located.*” (Perry 2019, 33). This at least shows that President Vučić has no intention of increasing internal unrest among Serbia's different ethnicities and wants them all backing the state. Vučić also stated back in 2016 when he was prime minister that he wants Bosniaks to know and feel that Serbia is their home and that there will be an increase in investments in the region.

Serbia on its path to the European Union

Serbia's path to EU accession has not been easy given the country's recent history, still, Serbia seems to have made significant progress on its EU path. Serbia is officially a candidate for EU membership, this was decided by the European Council in 2013. The year 2014 marked the start of accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU. To this date Serbia has opened eighteen out of thirty-five chapters, it also closed two of the chapters for the time being (European Commission 2019). With this in mind, some speculated that Serbia might join the EU by 2025. Still with the recent initiative of the French president Emmanuel Macron in which he asked for a new methodology to regulate the accession path of non-members this date might be pushed

¹² Muamer Zukorlić is a Serbian politician and the former Chief Mufti of the Islamic Community in Serbia which is mostly comprised out of Bosniaks living in a region known as Sandžak. Vučić chose to make a political alliance with Zukorlić and his political party in order to present himself as a fair leader and present Serbia in a new light.

back indefinitely. Even though the path to accession seems to be going well for Serbia there are a number of issues that might push back the expected date of entry into the Union.

First of all, the public does not seem to be as supportive of the country's EU path as they once were. These are annual polls carried out by the Serbian Ministry of European Integration. According to official polls, only 55% of the population answered „YES“ when asked if there was a referendum asking the question „Do you support our country's effort to join the EU, how would you vote?“ in December of 2018. This is a significant drop in public support as only ten years prior as much as 67% of the population answered „YES“ on the same question. Also, 25% answered that they would not support entry into the EU, the main reason being that they do not see the benefit of joining the Union. They also cited the loss of identity, blackmail on behalf of the EU, the bombardment of Serbia and the loss of Kosovo. When asked what was the main stumbling block which is slowing down the negotiations most answered a policy of constant conditioning and blackmail that the EU is exerting on Serbia. Still, most support the reform process and should continue regardless of the EU (Ministry of European Integration 2018).

Secondly, the EU has noticed some negative changes within the political scene in Serbia that are a cause for concern as they might slow down the reform process and hinder democratic development in Serbia. Serbia has developed a highly polarised political scene that will negatively impact democratic institutions. It is already negatively impacting the parliament as the opposition abstaining from attending the parliamentary sessions as they do not see any way for meaningful participation. This stems from the fact that the ruling coalition has been hindering the proper functioning of the parliament's legislative function. Which „... *included merging unrelated laws under one discussion point, and proposing hundreds of amendments irrelevant to the content of legislation. These practices, which aim to use up the allocated time for debate in the plenary, have been employed systematically since December 2017*“ (EU 2019). It has also been noticed that the process of overseeing the work of the executive branch of government is still rather weak, and some constitutional changes are also necessary for the accession.

Third, chapter 35 will be the single greatest hurdle that Serbia, or rather its leadership, will have to face. Chapter 35 refers to the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia are taking place under the patronage of the EU. Despite support from the EU, the negotiations did not harbor much success, in fact, the negotiation process seems to have stalled completely after Kosovo decided to implement economic sanctions in the form of 100%¹³ tariffs on goods originating from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The end result of this chapter will surely be the recognition of Kosovo on behalf of Serbia, a tall order for the political elite in Belgrade.

In addition to these issues, there are also some other less pressing yet concerning issues. Serbia harbors close relations with the Russian Federation which is under EU sanctions after 2014 and the annexation of Crimea. Serbia failed to align its foreign policy with EU sanctions, instead opting for intensified economic, military and political relations with Russia. While the EU does not prohibit Serbia from seeking relations with Russia, the EU countries would certainly like to see the alignment of Serbia's foreign policy with that of the EU. Some foreign officials, like German Ambassador in Serbia Thomas Schieb, stated exactly that. When it comes to the degree of alignment of Serbia's policies with those of the EU it was noted that *“Serbia has supported the EU Global Strategy, but in 2019 its alignment with the EU CFSP was merely 53%.”* (Džananović 2020, 13). Serbia also increased bilateral relations with China and Turkey, both of which are at odds with the EU at the moment. Serbia also attempts to maintain a balanced foreign policy, balanced in the sense that it maintains good relations with the West and East. In doing so mimicking what SRF Yugoslavia did in the last century. Whether Serbia has the capacity to maintain such a foreign policy remains to be seen, yet it is clear that the Western powers do look at this form of foreign policy with concern given that *“Serbia has been specifically warned that bilateral agreements signed during a multi-day visit by China’s top state delegation in 2016 should be in line with EU standards, particularly concerning state aid, public procurement, railroad safety and interoperability.”* (Džananović 2020, 14)

¹³ Since the implementation of tariffs the Kosovo government was under a significant amount of pressure by regional governments, the EU and the USA. After the arrest of Hashim Tachi, the Kosovo prime minister, for war crimes the sanctions were completely lifted for Bosnia and Herzegovina and are gradually being lifted for Serbia since the beginning of April 2020.

The current economic state of Serbia

Although Serbia did not experience war on the totality of its territory, in the same manner, that Bosnia and Herzegovina did, the economy still suffered greatly. If the wars that were raged weren't costly enough then the subsequent sanctions imposed by the UN, EU and USA and the much later NATO bombing were. The economy was already in a slump at the beginning of 1990 yet the burden of the reign of Milošević put on significant stress on the economy and thus living conditions. In the period ranging from 1991 to 2002 as much as 98 000 people left Serbia and emigrated to the USA, Canada and Australia alone and as much as 414 839 people were registered as temporarily working abroad in 2002 (European Commission 2011). According to Eurostat data in 2017 in Austria alone 120 000 individuals from Serbia were legally residing in the country by obtaining residence permits (Eurostat 2018) These bad effects are still something that Serbia is struggling with today as „*In 2015, Serbia's GDP was 27,5% below where it was in 1989*“ (CIA). The NATO bombing campaign has done massive damage to the infrastructure of Serbia with estimates ranging from 30 to 100 billion USD.

Still, it is important to note that the Serbian economy has been going through some significant reforms lately. The IMF stated that Serbia has implemented crucial public finance reforms. These reforms resulted in the reduction of the budget deficit and achieving targeted inflation as well as stabilizing it. The reforms were not completely successful as privatizing state-owned banks is still an issue. Despite this, the budget deficit has gone down. According to the EU country report, the country has made some success in creating a functioning market economy and is moderately prepared. Still, the private sector is underdeveloped „*hampered by weaknesses in the rule of law, in particular, corruption and judicial inefficiency, and in the enforcement of fair competition*“ (EU 2019). Perhaps not surprisingly the state's footprint in the economy is still rather large, an issue that needs to change is Serbia is to have a functioning market economy.

The economy has recorded a record 4.8% growth rate in 2019, highest in the past ten years, indicating that the reforms are taking effect. Also, according to official statistics, the average wage in 2019 reached a record high amounting to 55 380 Dinars or 470.96 EUR in May of

2019. Still, it takes 1.3 average wages in order to cover living expenses and the average consumer basket. When it comes to Foreign Direct Investments, Serbia seems to be doing quite well in fact. As of 2019, the country can boast that it has gathered investments from 105 nations worldwide. Those 105 countries amounted to 4,1 billion USD in Foreign Direct Investments which is a 43% increase according to a UNCTAD report (UNCTAD 2019).

Despite these positive trends, it would seem that Serbia is also facing a significant immigration problem. Young people, in particular, are increasingly leaving Serbia and going to Central European countries like Germany. This is concerning, especially if we consider the fact that only 16% of the population aged 15-24 are unemployed. The EU noted that the emigration of young people and skilled workers, combined with the steady population drop, is among the biggest challenges in the long run for Serbia. Serbia does not keep statistics related to emigration yet according to an OECD report titled International migration outlook 2019 as much as 41 000 people left Serbia yearly in the period of 2007 to 2016. By 2017 the number rose to 48 000 (OECD 2019: 79). What the number is at this time is unknown yet by looking at previous migration patterns the number has probably risen. A research project funded by the UK Government found that the top three reasons young people decide to leave are: 1. The inability to find employment in the select profession; 2. Low pay in the select profession; 3. Low living standards. Because of this emigration, it is estimated that Serbia loses up to 1.2 billion euros a year (Westminster Foundation 2019). That price represents the cost of bad politics. Despite an increase in FDIs and implemented economic reforms young people are still leaving the country, all of the aforementioned reforms might prove to be too little too late.

As to what hinders business in Serbia the World Economic Forums research seems to indicate that the three biggest problems are: 1. Tax rates 2. Access to financing 3. Government Bureaucracy with corruption coming close at 4th place. Serbia is addressing these issues with reforms yet it should tackle these issues with more efficiency and effort (WEF 2019).

If the state of the economy is indicative of anything it is that Serbia's, like Bosnia and Herzegovina's, political elites do little to nothing to further develop their national economies and make them ready for the EU market. Bad working conditions are among the main reasons

that drive people to leave these two countries and migrate to EU countries. Their lack of action is best explained by Ostović and his “actual non-action argument” (Ostović 1996, 13).

The political scene in Serbia and the 2017 presidential elections

When looking at populism in Serbia it is impossible not to mention Aleksandar Vučić and Ivica Dačić, who are political heavyweights in Serbia. Both have been present on the political scene of Serbia for at least twenty-five years. Aleksandar Vučić is perhaps the most controversial political leader on the Balkans. Similar to Dodik, Vučić also went through a transformation. While Dodik went from a progressive politician open to dialogue and co-operation to a right-wing nationalist, Vučić went the other way around. Vučić was a member of the Serb Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka - SRS), established and led by convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj, during 1990. He was known for his hat filled nationalist speeches and extreme stances, yet today Vučić presents himself as a progressive politician and is himself the leader of the Serb Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka - SNS). Polish professor Dominika Mikucka-Wójtowicz noted an interesting change in attitudes of the members of SNS. SNS was established in 2008 predominantly by former members of the SRS, the change of attitudes is reflected by the fact that SNS members started supporting the country's EU path, something they did not do while in SRS. Dominika Mikucka-Wójtowicz noted that these changes were probably motivated by pragmatic reasons, which is the ability to capture more votes and possibly participate in power formation (Mikucka-Wójtowicz 2017). It seems that this tactic worked, sufficed to say that the SNS today is the dominant political party in Serbia. The last election that took place in Serbia was the 2017 presidential elections where SNS leader Aleksandar Vučić took the majority of the vote. To be precise he took 55% of the vote, far outperforming any of his competitors. The person who came closest to Vučić was Saša Janković who had 16% of the vote.

It is important to note that prior to winning the presidential election Vučić was already holding office, although that of the Prime Minister of Serbia. Many accused him, rightfully so, that he was using his position to promote himself. Vučić attracted additional media coverage because he was already holding the Prime Minister function. The media followed him throughout the

country and reported on his activities at the time. He was going throughout the country opening stadiums, factories, attending high-level political meetings including those with Angela Merkel, EU officials, Vladimir Putin and others (Janjić & Valić-Nedeljković 2017). In fact, *“this covered different geostrategic locations in less than ten days, which supported the thesis of Serbia's European path, while at the same time not renouncing cooperation with Russia. In the context of media representation, it can be concluded that it is these events that have afforded the ruling party candidate [Aleksandar Vučić] an unattainable advantage over the opposition candidates.”* (Janjić & Valić-Nedeljković 2017, 75).

The Bureau for Social Research completed a detailed analysis of coverage by different TV stations. The stations in question were the state-owned Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), and private televisions like Happy TV, Pink TV, N1, B92, and Prva. They concluded that all stations, except N1, covered Vučić far more than other candidates and also positively portrayed him, with little to no criticism.¹⁴ Also, it is very important to note that *“a large number of right-wing candidates have conditioned that issues of relations with the EU and Russia and the status of Kosovo and Metohija are again at the top of the electoral agenda.”* (CESID 2017, 33). This should come as no surprise considering that these are the issues that are among the most pressing in Serbia. An OSCE report found that *“All private national television channels displayed preferential treatment towards Mr. Vučić in their news programs, in particular, Pink, which openly promoted Mr. Vučić”* (OSCE 2017, 13)

Vučić does not shy away from the camera yet his public appearances are carefully planned. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Vučić is a frequent guest on Happy TV where he often joins the talk show “Ćirilica” presented by Milomir Marić. The show lasts anywhere from one to two hours where the two talk about the last political successes of the president and his government, his struggle for Kosovo as well with the EU or neighboring countries. He also demonstrates his vast knowledge of both recent and distant Serbian history, as well as mentioning the impossible amount of work that he is dealing with for the people. Vučić refrains himself from using harsh language yet often presents as a concerned exterior using mild

¹⁴ N1 is the official partner of CNN in the region of the Western Balkans, as such it is entirely independent and impervious to local politicians as it has secure financing that is not connected to the state apparatus of Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina

language to express his astonishment when things went awry. Not to mention Vučić is also fond of calling out opponents and mocking their stances.

He became a calculating sly politician, which is also reflected by the fact that *“Mr. Vučić chose, as was his right, not to participate in televised candidate debates. However, this deprived other candidates of an opportunity to engage on the basis of equal conditions, in open and direct discussions with Mr. Vučić.”* (OSCE 2017, 12). Yet Vučić that we know of today is a far cry from Vučić from twenty-five years ago who was quite hard. Back in 1995 when addressing the parliamentary assembly Vučić stated clearly that *“kill one Serb, we will [kill] one hundred Muslims, then we will see if the international community will bomb Serb positions”*. To this day Vučić has issued no apologies for his role and rhetoric during 1990. Vučić was even complemented in a way by Vojislav Šešelj, his former party boss when he stated that during his time in the radicals when Vučić was trying to make a name for himself it was noticeable that he was quite intelligent but too harsh and quick to act. This has obviously changed as Vučić today is quite calm and collected, on the surface at least.

He has been known to “lash out” when faced with negative critique, yet even his outrage is civil even pathetic. For instance, when he attended negotiations in Brussels designed to resolve the Kosovo question back in 2015 Vučić stated that he slept on the floor because the room he was in did not have any stools or benches, he also did not eat as the Europeans did not provide suitable sustenance. In this sense, Vučić is playing the role of a victim and essentially said that the Europeans are bad hosts. He resolved to this measure after a confrontation with Kosovo Prime Minister Hašim Tači. He also complained about the food served stating that they were given sandwiches of the lowest quality no one alive would eat after twelve hours of negotiations, so he gave money to his people to go and buy salmon and tuna so that they would feel like humans (Blic 2015). There is also the case of Ramuš Haradinaj the President of Kosovo who resigned because he was summoned by the court for war crimes. Vučić soon stated to the press in which he very calmly, yet with a strange combination of passion and humility, explained that justice would not be satisfied and that Serbs should not rejoice because international community won’t allow for Haradinaj to be indicted for war crimes. If anything, they should be concerned for the Serbs still living in Kosovo as Albanians will become more radical and extreme than they were before, as proof he presented the outrage of intellectuals

who see Haradinaj as an honorable national leader. There is also the recent closeness of Kosovo and Albania who seem to be merging according to Vučić.

His government was also known to incite provocations by attempting to send an unauthorized train from Serbia to Kosovo which was intersected by Kosovo police forces. This happened in 2017 a new train painted in the theme of the Serbian flag and carrying the faze “Kosovo is Serbia” in twenty-one languages was sent to Kosovo. The train never made it to Kosovo yet it gained not only regional but global attention. After the train was stopped, Vučić called for an emergency meeting of the Bureau of Security which is another tactic he uses often in order to bring much-needed drama to the Kosovo issue. These moves attract a lot of attention which in turn provides him with valuable media exposure. In addition, it provides him with the perfect opportunity to present himself as a martyr and a great leader who holds the unyielding tides of international pressure to work. A perfect example of this is his recent address to the Parliament regarding Kosovo. In May of 2019 he stated that *“After seven years of negotiations with Pristina, I can tell you that we have not lost anything that has not already been lost and we have not traded anything that has not been sold for a long time”*. From this statement, we can see that he has maintained the status quo for seven years and presents it as an achievement worthy of praise. He also suggested that a compromise should be reached in the next five to ten years and if they would not reach that compromise Serbs and Albanians alike would face dire consequences.

Vučić often presents himself as a well informed and wise leader. He often urges caution when dealing with Kosovo. In the middle of speaking to the media in the town of Ruma in Serbia, a helicopter flew overhead, Vučić simply turned to one of his officials and told him to see who was flying and why, while keeping a cool and collected exterior. He also stated, rather shockingly, that he was going to present definitive proof of foreign powers interfering in the elections in Bosnia, that proof never saw the life of the day.

Furthermore, a major base of Vučić’s power structure is his close relation to president Vladimir Putin of Russia. Putin was the star guest at the 2014 military parade in Serbia and was awarded some of the country’s highest awards. He was also given a hero’s welcome in his 2019 visit to

Belgrade. The armed forces of the two countries are also enjoying more frequent military exercises and the two presidents brokered a military aid package consisting out of fighter aircraft and tanks to Serbia. Not to mention that Russia supports Serbia in the UNSC and has blocked Kosovo from becoming a fully-fledged member of the UN by constantly vetoing any decisions regarding Kosovo. This is one of the major ways in which Russia expresses its informal alliance with Serbia and shows that it supports its points of view.

Another popular populist politician in Serbia is the aforementioned Ivica Dačić. He is the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička Partija Srbije - SPS) which has been the party of Slobodan Milošević. Dačić has been a politician for a long time. He has even stated that *"the SPS that I lead has not renounced Milošević, but it is a fact that SPS has reformed"*. (Press 2010). Dačić is perhaps known for his interesting approach to diplomacy, as he currently serves his second mandate as the countries Minister of Foreign Affairs. Ivica Dačić has a habit of singing various songs to visiting delegations during official dinners. He sang to Federika Mogerini, Angela Merkel, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Sergei Lavrov, and many other high-ranking foreign officials and believes that this unique approach yields positive results. These events are widely publicized and gain much media attention. Next, to this, he is also quite vocal about Kosovo and has even, quite undiplomatically, verbally assaulted Kosovo diplomats in the UN Security Council. If that wasn't bad enough Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs does not speak proper English, apparent when he holds speeches in international organizations. In this sense, Dačić is another example of a Balkan strongman and thus similar to Dodik and his style of populism. Still, Dačić lacks the kind of charisma that is necessary for him to ascend to the level of Vučić, still, he has proven quite capable of leading a political party which is still one of the parties that rule Serbia. In fact, Dačić and his party were a member of all coalition governments since the fall of Milošević.

There is also the matter of historical revisionism. In the case of Vučić, he is quite good at pretending that Serbia and its political leadership did nothing wrong during 1990. The persecution of Albanians in Kosovo or persecution of Croats in Vojvodina is hardly ever mentioned. There is also the unfortunate event of the court rehabilitation of World War 2 Chetnik leader Draža Mihajlović, who was a known quisling and Nazi collaborator and was sentenced to death in 1946 sentenced by communist authorities of Yugoslavia. This decision

divided public opinion and resonated in the region as well. Although Vučić and Dačić cannot be directly linked to rehabilitation in the sense that it was one of their policy goals, the fact remains that they did not publicly condemn of the court's decision to rehabilitate Mihajlović other than stating that Serbia does not need more divisions.

All of this does not mean that Vučić is unopposed or that a significant part of the population has fallen under his influence. Some still oppose him, a certain number of citizens have been staging protests against his rule. The exact number is unknown yet different sources speculate that anywhere from 5 000 to 40 000 people attended the protests in Belgrade, the country's capital. Vučić decided to start discrediting the movement by calling out the opposition leaders among the protester and accusing them of being in contact with criminals, using force, wanting to bring down legitimate representatives and more while expressing a general disregard for the constitution and laws. When asked about the demands that the protesters were making, he answered that he heard no reasonable demands but he did hear the protestants chant "Vučić thief" which was preceded by a more hurtful chant where they chanted that he was a homosexual. Calling someone a homosexual is perceived to be a harsh insult in the conservative region of Western Balkans. He also connected the protests to Kosovo authorities when stating that he *"thought Haradinaj was joking when he said he was going to oust me, but now I see"*. He also stated that he isn't afraid of them and that he is a "tough nut" and that he is "proud of my police officers, they have removed fascists and tycoons in the most peaceful way.". Vučić has categorically denied any responsibility and has done everything that he can to delegitimize the protests and present the participants as enemies of the state, while still presenting himself as the state's leader and savior.

It is quite apparent that Vučić is using a full-blown version of populism. He keeps the conflict with Kosovo alive while at the same time presenting himself and his party as martyrs who are doing everything in their power to resolve Serbia's issues. They are also attempting to balance between the EU and Russia and China. When asked they claim to be openly working towards the Europeanization of Serbia, yet are carefully fostering relations with Russia who are at an all-time high. Thus, the perception of the public is highly distorted, the citizens of Serbia perceive Russia as the greatest friend and investor to Serbia while in fact most of the FDIs come from the EU, as well as IPA II funds which Serbia has access to. Vučić has all but buried

his past and has reemerged in the political scene as a new leader, he proved his worth during his time as the Prime Minister and has come to dominate the political scene in the country. Vučić is quite successful at what he does and he also has partners like Dačić to back him up. His decision to put Ana Brnabić as the new Prime minister is another classical populist move that is intended to present him as a great open and forward-looking leader, as Ms Brnabić is Serbia's first openly gay female Prime Minister. She also supports the president and is sympathetic to his endeavors. Thus, it can be said that Vučić is the most successful populist politician in the Balkans as his rule remains unchallenged.

I also have to add here that there is an interesting relation between Aleksandar Vučić from Serbia and Milorad Dodik from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both are powerful leaders with a wide reach, yet they also combine forces in a cross-border populist rant. They express support for each other frequently. Dodik also frequently visits Serbia where he continues his populist rant. The RS and Serbia also have a special relations agreement called “Special and Parallel ties agreement”¹⁵, this agreement is used mostly as a propaganda tool in order to simulate the closeness between the two subjects. The two even formed a united front in a high-level political meeting in Tirana when Vučić stated that:

“It was easier for me today because I was with Dodik and we could together, side by side, protect the interests of Serbia and Srpska, so we have done it, it seems to me, in a more open and relaxed way than we used to do”

The two politicians also decided that they will mark important dates and events together. This was seen recently when they orchestrated a joint memorial day for the victims of the “Oluja” military operation in Croatia where many Serbs lost their homes and lives. In a joint effort, they vowed not to forget the ones who fell and to assure that such events would not happen again. They accused Croatia and its leadership of war crimes and lack of political will to face the issue. Dodik also stated that BiH has not been able to manifest itself as a country, while the

¹⁵ Under the Dayton peace accords and the current constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina the two entities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska are allowed to establish and maintain special ties with neighboring countries. They are not allowed to form the states foreign policy which is outside of their jurisdiction.

Republic of Srpska did and that he hopes that one day Serbia and the Republic of Srpska will be one. Such dangerous rhetoric is not what I would call responsible politics and is meant to mask the fact that for his long rule Dodik has no results to show the people.

Serbia recap

What is apparent from all of this is that Vučić and his party SNS indeed fit the description of populists well. Vučić combines strategic choices with dangerous rhetoric and a sort of charisma that allows him to subdue voters, as Albertazzi and McDonnell wrote charisma is quite important for a populist politician. His strategic choices are reflected in the fact that Ms. Brnabić is the acting prime minister of Serbia, as well as open dialogue and cooperation with powers other than the EU. Primarily Russia and China, where cooperation ranges from trade deals to joint military exercises. Such events do much to bolster his persona and win sympathies with the voters. It is also apparent in his joint events with Dodik, where Serbia or Vučić are presented as the big brother of the Republic of Srpska. This is beneficial to both politicians. Dangerous nationalist rhetoric is often present when speaking about Kosovo or when some actors dare to oppose or question his rule. Of course every one of his public speeches is carefully planned and executed, which helps him present himself as all-knowing and makes him appear charismatic. Kosovo is also the most prominent place that actual no action of Ostović can be seen. Even when nothing is done about the subject the political elite presents it as a win. Unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is public discontent with the rule of Vučić, most notable among them are the protests and political satire TV/internet shows of Zoran Kesić and Milan Milanović which have gained support in recent years. Whether these actors will have much impact on general public opinion and populist rule only time can tell.

Conclusion

Give all that was presented it is safe to say that the politicians and political parties mentioned in this paper are indeed populists. Similar to their European colleagues, found in countries of Austria, Italy, Hungary and France, the populists in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia use similar tactics yet have a number of characteristics unique to the region in which they operate/exploit.

First of all, it is quite apparent that they use classic populist tactics. Creating a “us versus them” environment in the countries is one of the best and most reliable tactics all populists use. In doing so they create an atmosphere charged with fear that allows them to steer politics and society. Also worth keeping in mind is that populism links itself to an ideology depending on the socio-economic circumstances present in a country, in the Western Balkans that ideology is nationalism. In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it proved especially easy as social cleavages were already there and they simply decided to prolong and deepen them in some instances. Both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia had the experience of armed conflicts on their own territory. Those clashes could be characterized as ethnic clashes and now it is obvious that the reconciliation efforts after the conflicts were not sufficient to heal the war wounds. The rhetoric used by these politicians provided further proof of this and it would seem that there is no political will intended to change this. In addition to this Dodik, and to some extent Vučić, is known to harshly criticize the presence of foreign powers in the country. Yet when one looks at whom he criticizes it is foreign powers who disagree with his methods. In addition, it is quite apparent that these countries are still suffering from post-communist nationalism which has allowed these politicians to manipulate the population.

Secondly, all of these parties have charismatic leaders. All of the above-mentioned politicians, Dodik, Izetbegović and Vučić, are charismatic. Here it is also important to note that different types of charisma exist. There are some differences noticeable when observing the different leaders, Vučić and Izetbegović are more moderate in their public speeches and statements while Dodik is blunter and has been known to make outright threats. In this sense, it is safe to say that Dodik is closer to the image of Balkan strongmen, unlike his colleagues. In a sense we are able to label these leaders according to their style, we can classify them as either “mad dogs” or “wise men”. Having this in mind Dodik with his incendiary rhetoric is most definitely a mad dog type of a leader, while Izetbegović with his more measured statements belongs to the “wise men” category.

Third, the use of media is important for these politicians. Dodik and Vučić have acquired control of state media who abstain from criticizing their rule and they use it as a propaganda tool. Vučić also uses privately held media to gain valuable facetime with the public which he

uses to create his persona of a great leader who works tirelessly to save Serbia. When it comes to Izetbegović there is no direct link between him and any media that can be found as of yet, although it was apparent that there are some news sites and other media that abstain from negatively presenting him. The media that does criticize him are mostly media operated by Serbs or Croats, with the exception of FACE TV which is owned and operated by Senad Hadžifejzović¹⁶.

Fourth, the much-needed reconciliation does not occur mainly because of the understanding of the people by the politicians mentioned above. They truly reject a civil society where ethnicity is not as important. Rather they understand the people as *Ethnos* and not *Demos* and history can attest that that is a very dangerous view to have in a multi-ethnic society. This proved especially dangerous in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was praised for its multiethnicity a century ago, who's the capital city of Sarajevo was even dubbed the Jerusalem of Europe. Today however three ethnic groups still live there along with several minorities yet are increasingly segregated. A similar thing can be seen in Serbia, or Kosovo to be more precise, where politicians are opting for areas that will be reserved for their ethnic group. Such practices are counterproductive and can serve only as fertile ground for populists.

Fifth, it is quite apparent that Balkan populist parties adopted the standard populist ideology prevalent in Europe. As mentioned in the theory section of this paper I do not consider populism to be a fully-fledged ideology, rather it is a thin-centered ideology. I started this as we can see populism present in South America as well although there it attaches itself to leftist politics. In Europe, it attaches itself to nationalism. And in the Balkans, it is the same story as the most successful populists and political parties are also openly nationalist and harbor only feelings for their ethnic group.

The relations between the two countries and the European Union are of major importance, or rather their accession path. The integration process is always a major topic and often used when the leaders decide to take a break on nationalist rhetoric. Then the goal of acquiring membership status within the European Union becomes the go-to theme, in Bosnia and

¹⁶ Senad Hadžifejzović is a prominent Bosniak journalist who opened his own TV station (FACE TV) in 2012.

Herzegovina it is used for populist leaders to shift blame from one to the other and/or mention that progress was made and that it is their merit. The progress is often minor as can be seen by the reports coming from the European Union. In Serbia progress was made, as they already opened and closed some chapters. Still, president Vučić presents their achievements as solely his accomplishments and that of his party. In reality, the groundwork and reforms were made by politicians who came before him as well, not to mention that the main issue of Kosovo (which is a special condition for Serbia) has not been resolved and is far from it. Another important peculiarity is that Dodik is known to give anti-EU statements, furthermore, he boasts about them and seems to be proud of his lack of acceptance within the international community present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand acceptance, good cooperation and constant negotiations with the EU and other international actors both within and outside of Serbia is important for Vučić, as he portrays himself as a great leader. Great leaders do great things and meet important and powerful international actors, which is exactly what Vučić does to maintain his image as a great leader.

Now we come to look at the particularities of the Balkan parties. The most stunning and one of the most important particularities of the Balkan populists is the tendency to perform historical revisionism. This stems from the necessity to control history and present movements that either died out or were killed of almost a century ago as unjustly removed. This is why we see the need to revise World War II and the events that took place from that time period to the 1990ties. Historical revisionism helps populists present themselves and their people as just, pure and victims of historical processes that were out of their control. They create myths that substitute historical facts and influence the present. This is perhaps the most dangerous practice of Balkan populists who may be dealing unfathomable damage and literally opening a „Pandora's box“ of resentment. Yet that revisionism also addresses recent history, as war crimes and other events are often disputed and presented in different ways among the populists. Generally, all are very reluctant to admit the wrongdoings of their ethnic group or their own roles in the conflicts that transpired in the 1990s, even though not all carry the same weight of history.

What is also peculiar about the populists present in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Serbia is the fact that it is to some extent rooted in the constitutional and administrative arrangements

of the country. Both constitutions, to varying degrees, offer populists excuses and justifications for their behavior. In addition, it also offers them with a legal framework, of even better an arena, to not resolve but emphasize their differences.

Self-victimisation seems to be a go-to tactic of local populist politicians when faced with subjects who question their rule. They also attempt to discredit movements and individuals who criticize their work or talk about them in a way that they do not appreciate. They discredit them by stating that they are not „authentically ethnic“ or „patriotic enough“. These tactics work well against all individuals who attempt to criticize them regardless of their ethnic background.

And the final particularity of local populist leaders is that a significant portion of their appeal comes from their relationships with other international strongmen. Izetbegović and his close relations with Erdogan and Dodik and Vučić and their relationship to Putin. Both Putin and Erdogan enjoy a lot of support from people living in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their good relationships serve as another „proof“ of their status as great leaders considering that they can, allegedly, secure support from these powerful countries which have some historical ties to the region.

I mentioned that Europe might suffer a similar fate, feuding ethnicities and politicians who are so skilled in manipulating the masses that they almost put them in a trans like a state. The price for that is the current state of affairs in the countries mentioned, yet this future of the Balkan states was known to some even years before the onset of war and the reality which came after it. Ante Marković the last Prime Minister of Yugoslavia warned the then rising nationalists that their policies would amount to poverty and war, not to mention general dissatisfaction and little to no progress. In December of 1989, he uttered the now prophetic words „*We will pay for these misconceptions with poverty, poisoning of the spirit and the position of the distant periphery of Europe*“. And it truly seems that those words, as unfortunate as it may be, came to fruition as despite the best efforts of civil society, academia and the international community the two countries mentioned are far from lasting peace and even further from prosperity. It

seems that populism in the Balkans has found a decent partner in nationalism which has been prevalent in the region since the 1990s.

After reviewing these two cases it is apparent that both states are under the influence of populist politicians. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are able to win elections mainly due to incendiary rhetoric which keeps cleavages open. It almost resembles a dance, in which each harsh or controversial comment is met with another one, taking care that they do not go too far while at the same time keeping the tensions high enough so to keep reconciliation almost impossible. Bosnia and Herzegovina's populism feeds mainly on internal strife and unresolved issues that date back to the 90ties war, also the constitutional arrangement makes it easier to create a crisis. In Serbia we have a similar situation, populism thrives thanks to the Kosovo issue. The truth on Kosovo's importance has been over exaggerated and a myth has been created around it which allows Vučić to exploit the issue and use it for his benefit. The constitution also allows him some legitimacy regarding the issue. Overambitious promises and actual non-action seem to be a characteristic of domestic populists as both populists in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia seem too fond of. This is evident through the lack of progress in the accession path of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the country's economic state. Similarly, Serbia has been locked into a battle of whits with the EU and Kosovo which yielded no results over the past decade not to mention its economy, although slightly better, still is far from admirable. It can be said even that cleavages are guaranteed by the constitutions of these two states securing populists with a never-ending supply of strife.

If the cases of these two states have taught us anything it is that populism in the Western Balkan states of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia also heavily depends on historical revisionism and actual non-action. In all actuality, they create a feeling of perpetual crisis by shifting the attention of the public from one issue to another. These events are most often political issues, yet when a subject has run its course and has no more to give they soon switch to another issue that is not fully political yet is touched upon by politics. Historical revisionism and naming of public institutions are one of them, like the controversial names of student housing complexes or public schools. This actual non-action can best be viewed through the "failure" of political elites in the two states to advance significantly in the field of EU integration or creating functioning market economies and avoiding deep structural reforms of the economy despite

being supposed devotion to resolving the issues that are holding the two countries back in this regard. The greatest difference between the two states is that in Bosnia and Herzegovina we seem to have multiple populist actors that exist thanks to a symbiosis of sorts. They prolong their rule by creating a perpetual crisis. If one was to fall it could trigger a domino effect that would bring the others down as well. They exist thanks to each other as if they were in a sort of informal partnership.

In the end, what all of this means for the states of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia is that they are under a firm grip of populist politicians. Unlike elsewhere in Europe, with the exception of perhaps Hungary, these two states and their societies are under the strong influence of populist politicians with no clear indication of it ending soon. Although dissatisfaction with politicians generally is high in both countries action against them is not prevalent. This is especially true in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to an extent in Serbia where there are protests and open critique of the ruling elite. These politicians obviously have their own interests at heart and use any means necessary in order to achieve victory at the next elections. The aftermath of their rule is apparent, little to no progress, a divided society, limited reform efforts, as well as EU integration efforts in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and economic ambiguity.

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