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## **BETWEEN THE PARADIGM OF NATIONAL STATE AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY: SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND NORTH MACEDONIA**

### **Abstract**

The subject of analysis in this research will be the national state and ethnic diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina (as federation) and North Macedonia (as unitary state), in the direction of identifying an appropriate model for social integration. Analyzing the similarities and differences between the two multicultural societies requires a close analysis of their unique characteristics. Evidently, particularistic categories are present or predominate in both models as factors, and the model of social integration frequently becomes unstable. The main objective of the analysis is to identify the categories that have significant impact on the models of social integration and disintegration in relation to ethnic diversity in both countries. In both states, the old model of federal multiculturalism and social cohesion in society failed to integrate communities and reconcile the categories of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. The analysis will take place through two levels of stratification of the problem (national, ethnic/religious), as well as through a comparison of the elements of the two models of social integration.

**Keywords:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, national state, ethnic diversity, social integration



## INTRODUCTION

Symbolic resources, such as political values, culture, history, and geography, provide the symbolic raw material social actors use to define national identities in public discourse. “In terms of building national identities, it is less important what resources political actors use than how they put those resources to practical use. “(Zimmer, 2003). In claiming a particular national identity, people are making a political claim. “National identity may seem natural and eternal, but its political character shows that it is neither of these things” (Gilbert, 2000). The nation is primarily a political category, as Choplin notes. It does not mean that nations do not have cultural, sociological, anthropological, or other dimensions. The study of nationalism as a political phenomenon highlights that cultural symbols are not necessarily political. However, they must be politicized to serve as the basis for self-government claims. “The ideology of nationalism connects culture and politics. It establishes the cultural characteristic as a basis for political action” (Lecourse, 2000)). However, only some national movements successfully built their nation-state, as has happened in recent history. In any case, the success of this political process opens space for the formation and strengthening of the national identity, which is usually associated with the majority national/ethnic group. The most important is the choice of symbolic resources that the political elites use to build their nation. In the introduction, we give the geopolitical justifications for, and methods used by the political elites in building nation-states in southeast Europe. The Western Balkans experienced the same situation. According to Misirkov (Misirkov, 1903), the small Balkan states attempted to imitate the big, recently built European nations and build their nation-state, but they were far poorer and less developed. Naturally, we would add through actual or imagined narratives, regional cultural definitions, religious and educational institutions, and of course, with the assistance of their armies and through the forcible annexation of parts of other territories and ethnic cleansing of parts of peoples who are not “coincided” with the ideas of the elite of their small territorial nations, in front of European nation-states which are more powerful and more prominent.

## THE NATION STATE AND IDENTITY

For several centuries in the Balkans, the Ottomans developed the Millet system (as synonym for ethnoses), which was based exclusively on recognized church and religion instead of ethnic affiliation, as is the case today. The process “from peasant to Serb/Bulgarian/Macedonian” continued until World War II’s end. The population’s religious beliefs and confessional sentiments generally played a significant role in the nation-building process, and the overlapping confessional, ethnic, and religious identities that are so well-known today—Serbs as Orthodox Christians, Croats and Slovenes as Catholics—were evident at this time. Long ago, the term “other” was defined by intellectual and governing structures using the category of religion. Therefore, Croats were referred to by some Serbian intellectuals as “Catholic Serbs,” although for some Croatian nationalists, Serbs only represented Croats of

the Orthodox faith. However, they all saw Muslims in Bosnia as “Serbs” or “Croats” who had converted to Islam while living under Ottoman dominion. (Tomic, 2014).

Historically speaking, already in the medieval period, a specific cultural and spiritual profile was created in Bosnia among the South Slavs because it was positioned between two blocs: the Western and the Eastern Roman Empire. Consequently, medieval Bosnia encouraged the development of several churches’ denominations confession on its territory: the Catholic Church in the North, West, and from the 14th century in Central Bosnia, as well as the Orthodox Church in the South and East, especially from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Complex cultural identities began to emerge within the context of Ottoman comprehensive confessionalism, including the Muslim-Bosnian identity, which was dominated by Turkish-Islamic culture; the Serbian-Orthodox identity, which was linked to the Byzantine religious tradition, the Catholic-Croatian identity, which was shaped by Western Christian traditions, and later the Sephardic-Jewish communities expelled from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century (Lovrenovic, 2001). The ethnically and religiously diverse population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was not always divided into three separate and solid categories of Muslims (Bosniaks), Serbs, and Croats. Instead, the generations after them defined their identities in light of their unique geographic, political, social, and cultural characteristics. The modern social structure of BiH is mostly a product of Ottoman rule, the influence of Austria-Hungary and Yugoslavia, and at certain times some communities had a more privileged status than others. (Zdeb, 2019)

Prior to the second half of the 20th century, Bosniak’s identity was primarily based on religious and cultural aspects; political awareness is an entirely new concept. The idea of a sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina appeared in the minds of the Young Turks; however, the Islamic Religious Community followed the caliphate order, trying to preserve the Islamic religion in these territories and ensure the interests and rights of Muslims. It was in 1939 when the Young Muslims started their activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They brought the idea of Pan-Islamism and tried to shape the Muslim/Bosniak identity into political categories. The recognition in the national/ethnic category under the socialist government gave the Muslim leaders an excellent opportunity to build the coherence of the Bosniaks. (Bojarczyk, 2014).

The Serbs and Croats saw the existence of the Islamic community in Bosnia as a remnant of the Ottoman era. This era is considered particularly traumatic for the narratives in the context of Serbian national myth. As such, the Muslim national identity was tested due to the conflicts that its survival would cause. Therefore, according to reports, at the end of the 1980s, interethnic conflicts increased until Bosnian government officials publicly acknowledged the tension between the constituent nationalities. Croatian and Serbian nationalists brought up the subject of Muslim ethnic identity once more in 1989, asserting that Muslim nationalism is merely a political construct with no basis in history (Tasopoulos, 2018). On the other hand, the building of the Bosnian national identity was a result of the politicization of the Muslim identity.

## RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

According to Gilbert (2000), some people, including Anthony Smith (Smith, 1991), contend that many countries are descended from earlier ethnic groups. "It appears that their claim of a national identity is mostly formed from those ethnic identities" (Gilbert, 2000). Smith (Smith, 1991a) looked into the roots of nations and national identity. He discovered that they could be found in ethnic identity as a pre-modern form of collective cultural identity, as noted by Gibert (2000). "Collective cultural identity" is defined as "a sense of continuity by consecutive generations of a specific cultural unit of the population" rather than "the uniformity of elements through generations" (Smith, 1991). Eriksen concludes by following Smith and stating that "acting accordingly and viewing oneself as culturally distinct from other groups, both individually and collectively, is important to the persistence of ethnic identification" (Eriksen, 2004). Some scholars argue that ethnicity identifiers do not automatically establish "identity because the key will depend on how the individual decides to identify with these features." (Zimmer, 2003)

Nevertheless, culture, like everything historical, presupposes constant transformation. According to Stuart Hall, identities are "far from being eternally fixed in some feature of the past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power." Here, we can continue elaborating on the meaning of ethnic diversity, especially after the most common definition of the origin of national identity – through the ethnic identities of certain groups and peoples in a particular area and their self-perception and self-identification different from others. The Balkans are also unique in terms of ethnic contrasts and similarities. According to Smith, the more similar certain ethnic groups are, the more fiercely these groups are denied, pointing out Macedonians and Bulgarians (Smith, 1991). Ethnic groups in BiH (for example, Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks) share a common language, customs, and culture.

Furthermore, the ethnic diversity between the three groups is insignificant because they are all descended from the same Slavic descends. The question is what distinguishes ethnicity. Sometimes, it is a person's name or a speech accent; however, these are not absolute ethnic indicators. Religion is a defining characteristic of the ethnic division between these groups. Terms like "Serbs" and "Croats" may have made it more challenging to reconcile religion and ethnicity, given that "Serbian" is synonymous with Orthodox Christianity and "Croatian" is synonymous with Catholicism. Despite the seeming immutability of these categories being mostly a modern phenomenon, many locals think the distinction is crucial and eternal. If someone is a Catholic, they are a Croat; if they are a Serb, they are not Catholic (Tomic, 2014)

The cultural aspects reveal strong ties among the three national groups. In addition to speaking the same language, which was known as Serbo-Croatian in the 20th century, Croats and Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina (as well as from Montenegro, Sandak, or the former Republika Srpska Krajina) also have a shared historical history. The diverse religions are the only thing separating them. The political polarization that has resulted from the cultural closeness of the peoples based on linguistic similarities can be seen in the experiences of Macedonia and Bulgaria. The policy of "language engineering" in the case

of the Bosnian and Croatian languages was understood as the ultimate goal of creating, first, independent standardized national languages within the officially common Serbo-Croatian language (during the former Yugoslav (con-federation) and, later, after the 1991 year, in the internationally recognized different languages, by deepening and using as many dialectal/regional differences as possible in the same spoken Serbian-Croatian language. Throughout the 20th century, Bosnia and Herzegovina's Muslim population evolved from a religious minority in interwar Yugoslavia to a country in socialist Yugoslavia and then to statehood in the post-communist era with the final codification and a globally recognized national language (Sotirovic, 2013). According to Bosniaks, it is the Bosnian language. Bosniaks could be distinguished from the other two nationalities by their Muslim religion, a cultural and ethnic attribute. However, as religion is the primary defining characteristic, this could lead to political issues and disagreements in a socialist-atheist state. Hence, despite the "boost" that Islam provided to the Yugoslav foreign policy of non-alignment, the Islamic religion enhanced its standing among Bosnians, but the socialist-communist elite did not acknowledge this (Tasopoulos, 2018).

Nationalism became a political strategy for the further separation of the republics. The republican media reinforced ethnic grievances as governmental coherence weakened, the economy suffered, and the social situation worsened. Instead of addressing economic flaws, the issue was discussed and broadened further regarding ethnohistorical flaws. Until 1989-1990, the state existed only in name. The prevalent rhetoric was of ethnicity, and the elites who gained political power in the constituent republics had no interest in Yugoslavia. The central government's monopoly of violence was eventually lost to the republics and militias even before the war began. However, ethnicity was never enough to answer questions about the *cause* of this war (Anderson, 2007).

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The main goal of this analysis is to influence the dominant categories in the model of social (national) integration in Bosnia, Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. The paper attempts to compare and contrast two nations, two multicultural societies, the difficulties they face in integrating into society, and their unique characteristics. To identify issues with social integration, we have divided the exploration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into two levels: sociopolitical and sociocultural. National identity serves as the primary determinant of identification at the sociopolitical level, while ethnic diversity serves as the primary source of division at the sociocultural level (religion, language).

At the socio-political level, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina builds its political modernity on several events that took place mainly in the Balkans during Ottoman rule. At the same time, the country completed its statehood in recent history associated with the creation of Yugoslavia. Perhaps the most influential moment was the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the federal state. At the socio-cultural level, ethnic and cultural differences and lines of division impact people's lives and relations between different ethnic groups. The main factor of divisions is primarily due to the different confessions and religious

differences, which are dominant in the relations between the three national groups in the past and especially today, with clear and separating lines between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. The Dayton Agreement currently regulates the relationships between the peoples of Bosnia in terms of national and ethnic matters. Although this deal brought peace, many experts believe it did not ultimately result in a stable political future for the nation.

According to the analysis of socio-political and socio-cultural factors, three key factors — the ongoing politicization of ethnicity, religious identification, and disintegration processes that threaten state stability — prevent social integration and spark social conflicts that have an impact on Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state and a society:

- The continuous politicization of ethnicity is among the most influential moments or factors for the stability of society. This process of politicization emerges from three points of view that manifest as ethnic identification. There are three similar but different relational nationalisms: the majority Bosniak, the minority Croat, and the sub-national Serbian. These three nationalisms are constantly in conflict both centrally and regionally and are exclusively used by the main political parties to serve the “national” cause. The political and ethnic elites hinder the greater social integration of the society, not allowing the reduction of the ethnic monopoly.
- The religious identity, as a product or legacy of the past, is still robust compared to the state identity, which is entirely fragmented. Today there are three strongly divided ethnic/religious blocs with different cultural characteristics. In order to overcome these divisions or to relativize their negative impact, political will is needed to work in the direction of building awareness for everyday living. Many activities are needed to bring Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs closer together, but with a focus on citizens as members of the “same” state. The biggest challenge for the development of modernization processes is the de-ethnicization of the political model, which can stimulate specific processes of democratization of the state. They are not being helped by regional developments at a higher level, particularly the recent wave of populism and nationalism that has swept through Central and Eastern Europe.
- The political processes of disintegration are manifested through political battles, but for three different ideas. The Bosniak political elite advocates for greater centralization of the state (with Bosniaks as the majority community), playing a major role against the current position of other entities. The Republika Srpska Serbs wish to live in their “own” section of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas the Serb political elites prefer a frozen Dayton. The Croats’ political elites favor a third entity or at least to maintain their influence in politics. “Bosnian” political elites have the power to influence and shape the state’s destiny. Recent attempts to reduce the influence of ethnic factors in the political model through the electoral process have been fiercely opposed by most ethnic/political parties. The state’s ideology and the prospects of its people are primarily insignificant or “captured” and under the control of ethnic-political solid elites.

As a historical paradox, the undisputed common Slavic origin of all three groups and the similarity of their languages in Bosnia does not make the situation any easier. On the

contrary, it is a country where at least two of the three constituent peoples living in it do not “feel” it as their “motherland.”

The domestic academic and professional community is familiar with the Macedonian model of social integration (Atanasov, 2017). Although in the current research, we do not dwell in detail on the Macedonian model of social integration, its elements are clear and elaborated. The Macedonian case can also be seen on socio-political and socio-cultural levels. At the socio-political level, the main misunderstanding factor is the current national situation. At the socio-cultural level, the main factor of conflict is the ethnic divisions between citizens/communities:

- As for the socio-political level, the state of North Macedonia was created based on several key events that took place at the end of the 19th (1893-1903) and the beginning of the 20th century (1912-1918), but also that this country builds its statehood through the events of contemporary political history related to the creation of Yugoslavia. Perhaps the most significant moment in the independence of the state, as well as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the separation of Yugoslavia and the federal state, which failed to build an integrated political model that would be resistant to the processes of the third wave of nationalism in the world.
- At the sociocultural level, there are ethnic differences and divisions in society, which significantly impact life and relations between people and communities. The main dividing factor is religion and language, and as a result, there is a deepening of ethnic/religious/linguistic differences that harm relations between communities.
- Another significant issue is identity and national identification. The Ohrid Framework Agreement and the related constitutional amendments set the parameters for the current relationships between the communities in North Macedonia. In the long run, this deal opened chances for prosperity for society, or at the very least, a more stable future for the country after it joined NATO in 2020. This accord delivered instant peace. Due to past identity issues with Greece and current “historical” issues with Bulgaria, two EU members, Macedonia is a candidate country for membership starting this year (2022) with significant conditions. The Ohrid Agreement continues to impact today, especially in maintaining awareness of the ethnic rights of minorities. Often identity of politics and ethnicity are more important than democratic principles.

Analyzing the Macedonian model considering the socio-political and socio-cultural factors, we can state that the Macedonian political reality also gravitates around the ethnic categories. We constantly politicize ethnicity, but after the Ohrid Agreement, we can talk more about softened ethnic/linguistic differences. As a result, the disintegration processes are today less visible and prominent.

As in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in North Macedonia, the politicization of ethnicity is among the most influential factors for (dis)integration of society. This politicization constantly arises from two points of view and manifests itself as Macedonian ethnic/civic nationalism and Albanian ethnic nationalism. At the state level and within their own “ethnic” bloc, these two nationalisms are constantly at odds with one another on the political front, nationally and locally. The majority of political life is dominated by political (ethnic) elites,



which continuously “invest” in ethnic “business.” Politics ultimately comes down to who and what benefits communities when in power in terms of resources.

With the changes and the Ohrid agreement, the “ethnic” identity persists but does not destroy the social matrix because the power-sharing agreements allow Albanians non-territorial central political power and some other smaller communities to receive a share of the “resources” through the state budget. “The biggest challenge for developing the possibilities for integration are the processes of Europeanization and EU membership. However, very few politicians publicly support the de-ethnicization of the political model, which would stimulate greater democratization of the state. We must point out that the “softening” of ethnic divisions and tensions generally helps achieve greater social integration and reduce ethnic issues.

Disintegration-related issues are less prevalent today and are only brought up during elections when the argument is dominated by “patriotic” comments about “ours” and “theirs.” Since the Macedonian society did not experience a significant ethnic conflict and largely expected the socioeconomic status and standard of the residents to be raised, the society and the citizens took advantage of the opportunity for greater integration. There is just one vision: a unitary Republic with political power divided under the Ohrid process. Additionally, no significant political forces are aiming for disintegration. Several political parties put much effort into upholding their privileges and individual interests while “defending” their ethnic rights. They maintain power through well-developed political patronage and clientelism, as well as strategically placed media propaganda.

Despite having different cultural backgrounds, faiths, and languages, Macedonian and Albanian political representatives discuss and dispute social issues publicly, particularly among elites. The political elites are satisfied, but most of the population is dissatisfied with how things are going in society right now. However, there are also broader regional challenges; the Macedonians are closer to Serbia and the Serbs and the Albanians to Kosovo and the Kosovars. This is the main line of political division and regionalization that has its impact. However, North Macedonia is a country in which de facto two “ethnic” elites, in bi-ethnic manner, decide on the future of the state. North Macedonia it seems that it could be a “functional” for everyone.

## CONCLUSION

The paper is comparative analysis between two countries that are similar in some aspects regarding issues related to the social integration, but are in different position regarding the political present and future. We can share the following points. First, both are states recognized by the United Nations. Macedonia is also a member of NATO and has started the initial integration process into the EU. Second, Bosnia is a political model with two state entities, mostly dysfunctional and expensive to manage. The country became an EU candidate country in December 2005. Macedonia is a unitary state, deeply ethnically divided and with two different religions (Christianity and Islam), but functional. Third, in Bosnia, there are three competing nationalisms, and in Macedonia, only two, more or less softened

thanks to external factors. Fourth, in Macedonia, there is cross-ethnic communication, and people would prefer more democracy than nationalism or conflict. In Bosnia, there are minimal efforts at communication (especially between Bosniaks and Serbs), and the political model maintains the ethnic privileges of the respective political-ethnic elites.

As a final conclusion, we can argue that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is an open political conflict between the three constitutional nations, as well as action against changes to the current dysfunctional ethnic model of the state (at least by one of the constituent's nations). Comparatively, there are persistent ethnic entanglements in Macedonia today, but there are no signs of escalation into another conflict. This may be the outcome of contented political elites or as a result of foreign forces' support. Unlike the Macedonian case, several political figures in Bosnia and Herzegovina advocate for a "final" settlement between the national groupings.

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