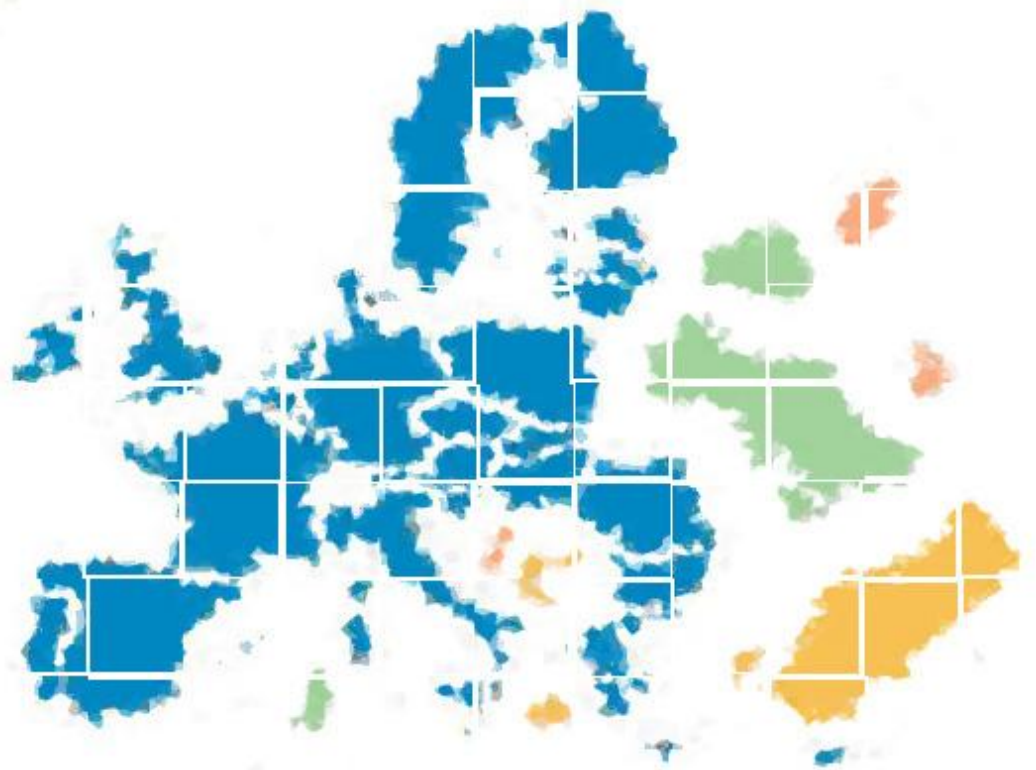


# EU Frontiers

Student Paper Series

Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the  
European Union: Time to Prioritize

**Đana Džafić**



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## Executive Summary

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In this paper I will analyze the factors behind the absence of progress in the process of European Union (EU) integrations of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). As shown in the last three general reports made by the European Commission for the countries of the Western Balkans, BiH is ranked last in the region. Such a negative result is mostly due to the missing implementation of the Sejdić-Finci verdict made before the European Court for Human Rights, but also to a continuous incompetence of the ruling political elites to provide answers for the demands of its people, demands that take into account elementary social and equality rights and standards. The paper analyses current partocratic structures embodied in the Bosnian political system which imply that the lack of political will-power of its main figures to negotiate compromise and secure stability and prosperity for all citizens of BiH is anti-politics per se with just one goal, which is to maintain position in governmental offices through a corrupt and obsolete oligarchic mechanism that thrives on blunt discrimination. Is EU's mellow attitude helping in reproducing political crisis? Will BiH perhaps be left to rely solely on alternative ways of community organizing as shown in the recent months through the plenums? In order to succeed, BiH society must prioritize. The paper concludes with a call for creation of a new definition of politics based on participatory democracy and a strong need for firm engagement in the process.

Keywords: political crisis, European Union, integration, Bosnia and Herzegovina, plenum, participatory democracy.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the European Union: Time to Prioritize

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### Introduction

Among those who follow the ambivalent processes in the Bosnia and Herzegovina's political scene, few would not agree that the country as a whole made progress all the way up to 2006. However, the post-2006 era has been marked as a low point for Bosnian-Herzegovinian society that hit bottom along with the crash of the so-called "April package" in that same year. The mentioned set of reforms which never came to life promised a much more efficient political system which in return would result in a less incompetent administration. From this point forward, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has been enduring a perpetual political crisis: unable to pull away from what was set out as a result of the circumstances surrounding the Dayton peace agreement, yet unwilling to make determined steps towards the realization of an extensive transition widely referred to as "the process of European integrations".

As shown in the last three general reports made by the European Commission for the countries of the Western Balkans, BiH is ranked last in the region.<sup>1</sup> Such a negative result is mostly due to the missing implementation of the Sejdić-Finci verdict<sup>2</sup> made before the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) in 2009, but also to a continuous incompetence of the ruling political elites to provide answers for the demands of its people, demands that take into account elementary social and equality standards. In the mentioned report, the European Commission stated that the political leaders in BiH do not share a common vision concerning the future of the country, nor the ways how it should function on a practical level.

After clearing the tables and acknowledging that the rest of the countries in the region have made firm progress on their way to becoming part of the European Union (EU), it has become apparent (even to European officials) that BiH lacks interest for a productive internal dialog among political leaders. Recent experiences show that key players are unwilling to come to a mutual agreement about the course of the country's future. All present obstacles lead to the conclusion that without political determination it is not possible for any kind of European perspective to materialize itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The EC's report on BiH for the year 2013 is available at :

[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2013/package/ba\\_rapport\\_2013.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2013/package/ba_rapport_2013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Information on the Sejdic-Finci case available at the official website of the European Court for Human Rights ([http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-96491#{"itemid":\["001-96491"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-96491#{))

## Who's to blame?

Ever since 1995 when the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, there have been different understandings about the political system in BiH. The country is regarded as one with a highly complex state apparatus that consists of two entities, one district and ten cantons who all have their separate governments. It is of importance to note that not only is the administration of the BiH government one of the biggest in Europe, but is also one of the most expensive.<sup>3</sup> As for its current position concerning European integrations, BiH is formally a potential candidate for EU membership. The Stabilization and Association Agreement between BiH and the EU was ratified in 2011, but has not yet entered into force. In reality, very little has been done to show serious intentions of moving onward with the process. When referring to the country's European perspective, such behavior implies certain doubts as to the true intentions of the political elites of BiH.

Examinations of the results coming from the bilateral meetings between the two sides indicate that even less has been done on a practical level. Going back to one of the main questions from the EU's Roadmap for BiH<sup>4</sup>, the commitment to implement the Sejdic-Finci judgment by 30th November 2012 was not respected. Despite intensive facilitation efforts by the EU, BiH's political leaders have not been able to reach agreement on how to address this case regarding discrimination against citizens on the grounds of ethnicity. Furthermore, the requirement to establish an effective EU coordination mechanism has not been met. With regard to implementation of the Sejdic-Finci verdict, some positive engagement was registered during the European Commission's mid-term review in February of 2013, but political leaders did not keep up the momentum and no tangible results were achieved.<sup>5</sup> The Commission therefore cancelled the High Level Dialogue meeting planned for April 2013 in the city of Mostar and set up such a meeting on October 1<sup>st</sup> in Brussels, with a broader agenda. At this gathering, the leaders of the seven main political parties signed a declaration on key principles for the solution of the Sejdic-Finci issue, committing themselves to reach agreement by the 10<sup>th</sup> of October. But these meetings led to a dead-end. The deadline was not met and the process came to a full stop since political leaders were not able to come to a reasonable agreement.

Regarding its slow pace in the transition towards the EU, there are presumably two groups of factors that contribute to the inability of the BiH society to achieve direct and unquestionable progress, on the external as well as the internal plan. One is the already mentioned difficulty concerning the complex and ineffective political system which arises directly from the

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<sup>3</sup> BiH spends more than 50% of its GDP on administration. More information available at:

<http://www.dw.de/bih-dr%C5%BEava-sa-najskupljom-administracijom/a-5583525>

<sup>4</sup> Joint Conclusions from the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Road Map for BiH's EU membership application available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-12-503\\_en.htm?locale=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-503_en.htm?locale=en)

<sup>5</sup> European Commission's Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013 Progress report, page 4.

Dayton Peace Agreement. Not only does it disable proper decision-making and valuable democratic processes – it has proved itself extremely prone to corruption, discrimination and inequality. It favors decision blocking, institutional absurdity and political irresponsibility. Even though the EU provides guidance to the country's authorities on reform priorities, these efforts are often left without response or appropriate follow-up from the counter side. It has been stated various times amongst the EU officials that the overall pace of reforms has weakened.<sup>6</sup> This illustrates the urgent need for an effective coordination mechanism on EU matters.

Direct warnings are also coming from the country's civil sector. Analysis prove that in the last ten years, besides signing The Stabilization and Association Agreement, BiH has made perhaps only one more significant achievement, which is the visa regime liberalization in 2011.<sup>7</sup> Finally, let me make one more remark in regard to the "BIH-EU relationship" question. Since so little has been done, it seems reasonable to investigate into the level of a possibly unfit and inadequate role of the EU in the process. If we take into account the efforts of the EU that were put into the so-called "structural dialog" with the leaders on one hand, and the overall poor results of the Bosnian political elites accumulating over the years on the other, the conclusion points to the fact that the outcome is very unsatisfying, to say the least. Although certain measures coming from within the Union could uncompromisingly be put into use, decisive reaction towards the political irresponsibility in BiH is missing. Perhaps a different question could be raised: is Europe's mellow attitude actually helping in reproducing political crisis?

The other group of factors that perhaps play an even more important role in explaining the incapability of overcoming the difficulties of such an establishment are the partocratic structures embodied in the Bosnian political system. Generally understood, political parties as such are the main bearers of representative democracy. They are founded on the principle of elected officials representing a certain number of individuals who have their common basic interests. In a certain Aristotelian sense, their aim is to project these interests on a higher scale of matters, in accordance with party programs and platforms.

Still, recent experiences coming from post-socialist, transitional countries (as in the case of BiH) imply that very often the dominant form of government in such societies is the rule of authoritarian, mostly mono-nationalist political parties.<sup>8</sup> They impose a social structure in which democratic laws and institutions are formally present, however - they become nothing more than a legal frame for the practice of power of partocratic policies. These are subtle formations that pervert and transform the true meaning of democracy. Such

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 5.

<sup>7</sup> Sasha Gavric, *Shadow report on the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina's European Union accession process*, (Centre for Political Studies, Sarajevo, 2013), page 8.

<sup>8</sup> Esad Zgodić, *Multiverzum vlasti* (Sarajevo: Bemust, 2009), page 383.



a structure is in its own core anti-democratic, or to be even more precise - it is a display of false democracy. The main protagonists of such establishments, notably in the case of BiH, are societies' leading political parties.

Governments with these sorts of characteristics are usually *de facto* run not by statesmen and elected officials who should be holding public responsibility for their actions. Instead, all authority lies in the hands of few powerful party leaders and their closest allies. Their goal is not only to define and govern that what is to be understood (from their own particular point of view) as common good within a community, but also to claim ultimate ownership covering all social functions and activities around their own exclusive interests and, most importantly, their own party structures. Such a system reinforces mechanisms which contradict the model of an open-minded and critically engaged society. It is uniformed and rigid, favoring personal gain rather than public interest. Member of European Parliament, Doris Pack, recently stated that leaders in BiH do not have a high interest for the EU because if they did, they would have to give up on a whole lot of benefits which were gained through corruption. As Pack stated, they are missing political will to move forward since this would mean putting the future of the country before their own private interests.<sup>9</sup>

Will for constructing an open and fully democratic approach in BiH has not been shown only through insufficient political work in the official institutions, but also within internal party elections and public initiatives. Heads of few of the most important political parties in the country have stated various times that electoral mandates should go to the parties and not the candidates.<sup>10</sup> Proposals for closed electoral lists, initiatives for rise of election threshold, suspicious changes to party statutes and selections in order to maintain leading party positions – all of this clearly points to a critically narrow circle of powerful people trying to hold on to their political seats. Also, a variety of efforts and hidden activities coming from dislocated places of political power are continually reproducing negative effects. They prove to have just one goal which is to maintain positions in governmental offices through a corrupt and obsolete oligarchic mechanism that thrives on blunt discrimination. And this is exactly what the current arrangements within the political framework of BiH allow them to do. Negative effects have been noted by different international organizations that operate within BiH. For example, the results of the Global Corruption Barometer (GBC)<sup>11</sup> for the year 2013 presented by Transparency International show that the level of corruption in BiH since 2012 has increased and that the citizens of BiH do not have trust in the institutions nor in the rule of law.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For more information check the following link: <http://www.bhrt.ba/vijesti/eu/doris-pack-celnici-u-bih-brane-svoje-interese-ne-buducnost-zemlje/>

<sup>10</sup> Milorad Dodik, who currently holds seat as President of Republika Srpska, stated that parties need to force implementation of closed lists in the electoral law because of fragmentation in the governmental bodies which obstructs the decision-making process. See more at: <http://www.otvoreno.ba/vijesti/bih/37648-dodikov-prijedlog-mozes-glasovati-samo-za-stranku-a-ne-za-kandidata>

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://www.wingia.com/web/files/news/61/file/61.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> More information available at official web-site of Transparency International Office in BiH:

## February events

Simply put, there are severe implications which point to the fact that the lack of political will-power to negotiate compromise and secure stability and prosperity for all citizens of BiH is anti-politics *per se*. Since it does not reflect the demands of the people in improving their social status, it contradicts its own supposed core values and promotes developments which subvert the political system based on representative government.

However, consequences of such practices are showing. The BiH society is undeniably going through unpredictable times of change. Just in the past twelve months, we witnessed direct violent and non-violent street action against such installments on several occasions. High levels of dissatisfaction and outrage of the masses finally surfaced creating space for a different political practice. After last June's peaceable "baby revolution"<sup>13</sup> came a wave of turbulent and violent protests in February of 2014 that began in Tuzla and spread to almost twenty other towns and cities across BiH. Unemployed youth, war veterans and disgruntled workers, among others, set fire to government buildings in Sarajevo, Zenica, Tuzla and Mostar – four out of five of the largest cities in the country. Thousands of people hit the streets demanding resignations from the officials and declaring their anger over factory closings and unpaid salaries for which they blamed poorly executed state privatizations. Analyzing the discourse and the language used by the protesters, two points were made very clear: a) these were protests of social unrest and b) they were anti-governmental. The protests gained heavy media coverage and a broad public acceptance. A poll conducted at the time showed that 88% of the people in the whole of BiH supported the protests.<sup>14</sup>

While the flickering events brought on by the protests certainly were no surprise having in mind the hardships of unprivileged and oppressed social groups within the ethnically divided society, what happened next seems to have come quite unexpectedly. The sudden emergence of the plenums as forms of direct political action in different parts of the country took everybody by surprise. The first plenum appeared in Tuzla<sup>15</sup>, the center and starting point of the protests, where the protesters were most articulated and most organized from the very beginning. After that, plenums started to appear in other cities as well, taking Tuzla as their example. Plenums were established as a way to employ principals of direct democracy. It promoted decisive, on-the-spot political engagement opening itself for all of those who wanted to

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<http://ti-bih.org/6389/gradani-bih-bez-povjerenja-u-institucije/>

<sup>13</sup> „Bebolucija“ in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. Refers to the protests that started on June 3rd in 2013 in front of Parliament building of BiH in Sarajevo when citizens demanded for a new law to be passed so newborns could get national identity numbers needed to acquire passports and other documents.

<sup>14</sup> The poll was carried out by a marketing and consultant agency Valicon. More information available at: <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/vecina-gradjana-podrzava-proteste-a-nasilje-predstavlja-preveliku-cijenu-promjena/140212119>

<sup>15</sup> The very first plenum took place on February 8th and came out with six basic demands that would create a base for further development. More at: <http://plenumtk.org/Proglasi>



take full-on participation and join in on forming commonly shared demands. It paralleled the protests forming a general assembly that went by the rule of "one man, one vote". Participants were hoping that plenums would pave way to constructive and relevant changes in social policy. At the same time, representatives of plenums in different cities were meeting each other to talk about whether changes could be made possible on the state level. This chain of events triggered solidarity among the people, especially among workers who as a result have come together in forming an independent trade-union called *Solidarnost*.<sup>16</sup> But there is still a long way to go if crucial change is to be made.

The mixed after-math of these events is yet to be examined. Besides creating an opportunity for the citizens to express discontent and the fact that the plenums compiled long lists of demands of which most were not met, these events have proven that some things certainly can be done. Four cantonal governments have stepped down. Nevertheless, it seems that the political elites would rather wait for the upcoming elections planned for October of this year. Since February 7<sup>th</sup>, the ruling political parties have kept themselves quiet about the uprisings, for the most part. This has been interpreted as a way of ignoring the events which in retrospective prove to be the most threatening for the government since the nineties, but also as a way in which they avoid to take responsibility for the results of their own doing. The single way in which the elites have been referring to the February events is through continuous mentions of "the violence and levels of destruction" connected to the protests<sup>17</sup>, using police and judiciary institutions to scare, accuse and on several occasions even arrest some who, in different ways, came out in public giving statements as ones taking part in activities of the plenums.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, few believe that necessary change could take place in the after-math of the elections. One of the main reasons is the obvious lack of a well-organized opposition to the current political leadership.

As for the protesters or the "plenumasi" (this term is widely used to name those who actively took part in the events), what seems to be missing is clear political vision and skilled leadership. Regardless, the forming of plenums has been openly praised in the region as well as internationally. As Tim Judah suggested in his article for *The Economist*, these general assemblies represent realistic hope that something might really change.<sup>19</sup> The plenums

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<sup>16</sup> In early May 2014, a total of twenty two lunched companies from the region of Tuzla formed *Solidarnost* (Solidarity), an independent trade-union whose members are coming together in their struggle for workers' rights.. More information available at:

[http://www.funkhauseuropa.de/sendungen/radioforum/region/bih\\_sindikati100.html](http://www.funkhauseuropa.de/sendungen/radioforum/region/bih_sindikati100.html)

<sup>17</sup> Seven people were arrested on the charge of committing terrorist attacks on the Presidency building of BiH. Two were detained and are currently on trial. <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/prijava-za-terorizam-protiv-sedam-osoba-povezanih-sa-paljenjem-predsjednistva-bih/140308056>

<sup>18</sup> More information about the arrests available in Bosnian at: <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/mostar-uhapsen-predsjednik-unije-nezavisnih-sindikata-fbih/140208007>

<sup>19</sup> Full article available at official website of *The Economist*:

<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21596572-latest-troubles-bosnia-may-wake-up-countrys-inept-leaders-fire>

have certainly disrupted and shaken the elites from their seats. And most importantly, having in mind the country's history of war, they proved to be multi-ethnic moving beyond all nationalist divisions. This represents a huge step towards formulating crucial steps for creating a more compact and inclusive society that would cut ties with the wrong doings of the past.

Those pushing for the realization of such an idea are optimistic. Recent events indicate that there is a possibility for the workers in Tuzla to engage in further political initiatives, such as appointing a few of their own members to take stand in this October's General elections. Also, it is notable that the workers in Tuzla together with some of the members from the academic circles as well as civil activist coming from the NGO field are pushing for the formation of a wider social movement which would also include workers from other factories who still are not part of *Solidarnost*. They are also counting on the army of unemployed which Tuzla canton is especially struggling with. So far, their success has been limited. But this is quite understandable – in a society deeply scared and divided by wrongful political action, there is mistrust towards any type of political engagement since, in the eye of most, it is seen as self-serving and opportunistic. Furthermore, they face severe financial, organizational and other types of restrictions which additionally harden their struggles.

With autumn approaching and a heavy political campaign already active in the media, it is very important to keep the relevant questions such as social injustice, corruption and unemployment rates in public focus. Nevertheless, it is yet to be determined whether the people of BiH will, once again, fall for the served tales of nationalist division. In regard to the European perspectives of the country, the General elections of 2014 are to be one of the most interesting and one of the most important.

### **The long road**

For the moment, the future of BiH seems to be quite blurry. The unexpected occurrence of past events proves that it is impossible to predict what happens next. Split between the mellow attitude of European officials and the recklessness of domestic political elites, will BiH perhaps be left to rely on alternative ways of community organizing as shown in the recent months through the plenums?

Current trends imply that the political scene of BiH does not really offer much to its voters. This is why their choices are quite limited. Very often citizens are prepared to assert that political parties and their campaigns do not differ from one another and that their ways of functioning in the system are pretty much the same. So, actually, this is where the political legitimacy of the plenums comes about. As I previously stated, citizens of various backgrounds are coming together to show that new forms of collective decision-making are possible. There is a creation of open political space

where everyone can have a say in deciding about what is to be done next. And most importantly, this space or its legitimacy is not being asked for. It is being taken away from those who abuse it.

However, recent events have proved that it is impossible for the plenums to become permanent bodies of political decision-making. At most, they can be used as a corrector for negative policies and social trends that contradict the needs of the people, or for balancing out interests of the masses. But it has become obvious that there is a desperate need to take a step further in political organizing. Unfortunately, this is where the problem with skilled leadership comes in. Many people in BiH were enthusiastic about the plenums and were taking part in them on a daily basis. Hopes were raised that efforts made by the plenums to try to coordinate the already existing ones was a great start. But after some time, most of them were reluctant to carry on since they lacked a clear idea as to where the whole movement was leading to and how it was going to change crucial matters on a higher scale within the system.

So far, the plenums have been filling in some of the blanks. They have certainly shown anti-nationalist and anti-capitalist sentiment, but without distinct vision drawn from demands of social justice and equality coming from a strongly politicized structure leading the movement, all concrete action is in danger to add up to an empty nut-shell. At the same time, it is quite understandable that drastic change can hardly be done overnight and that it will in any case be quite complicated to shift the centers of power down to its base. Right now, it is completely unrealistic to expect any kind of fast development of a stable political infrastructure. But sure enough, it is more than possible for a deepening of the democratic process to evolve through a progressive struggle for a just society. It is important to note that major change cannot happen in a short span of time and that realization of true transformations is always troublesome, especially when combined with the ever so delicate attempts of creating a prospective future within such a torn-up society. If it wants to succeed, BiH society must prioritize. Does this necessarily mean that the future of BiH includes strong ties to the EU, membership included? The support of citizens for the integration of BiH into the EU has been extremely high for a number of years, spanning from 75% to 90%.<sup>20</sup> But today, the EU faces major social problems and is probably going through some of its hardest times. A struggling economy and waves of extreme nationalist parties rising to power are creating a huge impact on how Europe is being perceived from the outside. In addition, great social and economic processes that come about through the process of integration can find a serious opponent in extreme nationalism as well as the neoliberal agenda.

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<sup>20</sup> Tija Memisevic, „Problems of integration of Western Balkans – comparison to the transformation with Central and Eastern Europe“ in *Towards the EU* (Banja Luka: ProEduca, 2009), page 9.

Nevertheless, those who are found outside of its borders aren't oblivious to these problems. In fact, the people of BiH are far from blind about the reality of the EU. They are aware of its troubles and paradoxes, but their conclusion is pragmatic and quite a simple one: their own situation is much worse. So indeed, Europe may have problems, but as a well-known European intellectual recently stated, they are still a rich man's problems.

### **Limits and opportunities**

If we are to question the role of politics over the last two decades as an instrument of the people to implement their significant interests, then we must also take into consideration the question of a certain fatigue of the common person in BiH with that very phenomenon. Actually, the ways in which latent and exploiting patterns of polluted politics have enthroned themselves over crucial aspects of everyday life in BiH is almost fascinating. Nonetheless, as I previously tried to point out, certain alternatives mentioned here that have certainly taken its toll on day-to-day lives of many are neither pleasing nor appealing. In order to fully realize itself, Bosnian-Herzegovinian society must engage to set up its main priorities.

Preference should be given to a newly arising issue of the necessity to re-politicize society while creating new norms and changing values of the political. This concerns not only the present/future political elites, but also the masses. As recent events suggest, they carry new levels of activity and political building from the bottom-up which are formed in the process. Using the right set of principles and an emancipative approach, politicized masses could be key element for a progressive transformation. Only by changing the set structures will the Bosnian-Herzegovinian society as a whole be able to establish advanced forms of political subjects that can pave the way for radical change.

Furthermore, in order to accomplish this endeavor, what is needed is a synergetic creation of a new definition of politics based on participatory democracy while advocating a strong need for a firm and widespread engagement in the system. In other words, the people of BiH must strive to create opportunities for all members of its population to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seek to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities which should be community-oriented and liberated from restrictive types of discrimination including ethnic, religious and social background.

Politics must respond to the process of transformation and investigate into the models that prove to be specifically effective. Whether transformation and political gestation processes correspond with each other is possibly one of the most important questions of the present. What I would like to point out is that, here, the word 'politics' is not used in its limited conventional sense of plain election cycles or even the existing built-in political structures. It

actually suggests that there needs to be a comprehensive understanding of politics in a much more fundamental sense - as a way of engaging into matters of crucial importance for one's life in general. True politics imply willingness to openly meet and speak with one another in a commonly shared space. The ultimate goal of political action is a constructive encounter where different groups are able to come up with a common vision on what they actually want to make out of the society they live in, as well as the quality of life that they lead. It is a call for a multiverse and multilayered dialogue that has high demands and emphasizes structural change, constant revision and adjustment.

On the other hand, how society and politics handle the limitation of power on both sides of the transformation process and what possibilities it creates for further democratization is another important question. Much of the prior focuses in BiH have been set on unquestionably important topics like reconciliation and dealing with the past. But recent tendencies strongly suggest that we may need to put more focus on how we connect our transitional and peacebuilding agendas with social movements grounded in concrete demands for the realization of basic social and economic rights.

BiH is a country that substantially differs from the rest of the countries that the EU deals with. What the EU should do is redefine its strategy towards the country. This means that a different approach must be considered and different strategies will probably have to be developed. There are presumably three actual steps in solving a problem, and defining the problem is just one of them. The other two are knowing where the solutions lie, and creating a climate that will bring them to life. It is of great importance for BiH to be able to speak in a strong and single voice. If the membership application of BiH is to be considered by the EU, then a tangible effort must be seen in dealing with these issues.

For now, desired change could be ignited in a few decisive and pragmatic steps. In order for BiH to become stable, functional and self-sufficient, BiH political leaders must carry out a constitutional reform on all levels of government with respect to the rulings of the ECHR. This would help abolish ethnic discrimination built in by Annex IV of the Dayton Peace Agreement while providing equal civil and political rights for all. Also, such a coherent reform could ensure a simpler decision making process within all governmental levels of BiH, which in turn should create institutions that are more functional and effective.

Priority should also be given to identifying and prosecuting cases of corruption and organized crime (especially in areas such as privatization and criminal networks gathered around public institutions) which would require strong engagement from the judicial institutions and law enforcement agencies on all levels in BiH. This too could help in taking away power from the political parties and their partocratic structures while making room for internal party reforms that demand more transparent and democratic approaches in handling inner and outer affairs.

Above all, issues such as poverty and high rates of unemployment are of huge concern to the BiH society. Statistical data given by Eurostat<sup>21</sup> show that BiH is currently the poorest country in Europe.<sup>22</sup> This is why all responsible institutions and policy groups must strive to develop concrete policies and strategies for the implementation of social and economic reforms in order to ensure fulfillment of basic work and social rights and decent life standards in accordance to those in the EU. The government could also prepare and create special programs within the public service that would meet specific needs of different social groups existing within BiH.

Also, it is of great importance to prevent all forms of political interference in the media and to help them maintain independence in their work. Events from the past year have shown that providing truthful and relevant information is crucial for building firm critical public opinion.

Lastly, the role of civil society needs to be adequately strengthened. It should gain more support through different ways of assistance provided by the EU and other international actors in BiH in order to ensure that its presence in the country is perceived and noted as legitimate by all actors in the BiH political arena.

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<sup>21</sup> Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union situated in Luxembourg. Its task is to provide the European Union with statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions.

<sup>22</sup> Statistics and additional information available at official Eurostat website:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/GDP\\_per\\_capita\\_consumption\\_per\\_capita\\_and\\_price\\_level\\_indices](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/GDP_per_capita_consumption_per_capita_and_price_level_indices)



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