

THE BOUNDARIES, INTERNAL ORDER AND IDENTITIES OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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INTRODUCTION

The two entities which make up the state in reality enjoy more power than its central government

The aim of this article is to discuss several politico-geographical aspects of present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bosnia-Herzegovina, which appeared on the world map only relatively recently, represents a unique case among European states. Its current internal order is based on an international treaty which is usually known as the *Dayton Peace Agreement* or *Dayton Accords*. According to the provisions of the Dayton Accords the country comprises two entities divided by a newly created internal division line – the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (hereinafter IEBL). Bosnia-Herzegovina's internal order and the internal boundary are worth consideration alongside the country's international boundary primarily because of the fact that the two entities which make up the state in reality enjoy more power than its central government.

Particular attention is devoted to the linkages between Bosnia-Herzegovina's politico-geographical reality and Islam. Bosnia-Herzegovina is not, strictly speaking, an Islamic state, i.e. a state legally, culturally, historically and politically dominated by Islam. Nevertheless, it is a state where Islam is not only an important part of the landscape, but also a formative element of its identity. It is precisely this Islamic element which makes Bosnia-Herzegovina so different from other south-Slavonic states. Islam is also a key element in the collective identity of the most numerous ethnic group of an ethnically complex population and the group which presently forms a majority of the total population.

It is worth noting from the outset that the author is aware that his perspective is somewhat one-sided. Viewing Bosnia-Herzegovina from Zagreb is by no means the same as doing so from London, Paris or Washington. This 'near-abroad-perspective' on Bosnia-Herzegovina is arguably less than ideal and may be misleading, in particular because of the fact that historical and ethnical relations between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina remain unsettled in many ways. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this perspective is helpful and avoids some of the over-simplifications which have tended to accompany analyses from outside the region and in particular in the Western media.

INTERNAL ORDER

Bosnia-Herzegovina is in fact under some sort of international protectorate

As previously noted, the internal order of Bosnia-Herzegovina has been defined by the Dayton Agreement which was brokered under international sponsorship in late 1995. The agreement provided foreign actors – NATO-led troops, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) and other bodies – with broad authority over civilian, military and political activities. As a result of the significant role of international bodies and actors as well as the country's internal fragility, it has been widely observed that Bosnia-Herzegovina is in fact under some sort of international protectorate. Without this protection, the argument goes, the country would be likely to split into two, if not three, parts.

The Dayton Peace Agreement was not an example of "*a long prepared well-premeditated treaty*" (Skrabalo, 1999). Instead, it was a pragmatic solution imposed 'from above', aimed primarily at stopping the war and initiating a peace process. Indeed, according to the main American mediator, Richard Holbrooke, at Dayton: "*We're inventing peace as we go*" (Holbrooke, 1998).



Bosnia-Herzegovina was established as a country consisting of two entities the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska or Serbian republic

According to the provisions of the Dayton Accords Bosnia-Herzegovina was established as a country consisting of two entities – the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and *Republika Srpska* or Serbian republic. Power is divided between the central government and these two entities. The responsibilities of the central government include foreign policy, foreign trade, customs, immigration, monetary policy, and communications. Each of the two entities has authority over taxation, health, defence, internal affairs, justice, energy and industry, education, spatial planning, natural resources and environment. In practise, however, during the five years since the Dayton Agreement was signed, the two entities have exercised more power than the central government which they have frequently boycotted and which has remained weak and lacking authority. The Serbian entity in particular often pretends that no central government exists.

During the five years since the Dayton Agreement was signed, the two entities have exercised more power than the central government

According to Bosnia-Herzegovina's constitution, which was also part of the Dayton package, the two entities are to form some sort of federated state. Although the term 'federation' is not used in the constitution to describe the relationship between the two entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it seems that Dayton very much follows the federal model.

Within the federal state, power is divided between federal units and central bodies, but there is no doubt about the country's integrity and its membership of the international community as a unitary state. The central government is expected to represent the entities in fields where the two have common interests, most often defence, foreign affairs and communications. On the other hand the federal entities are allowed to retain their own identities and to have their own laws and policies in certain fields.

As Glassner (1993) has observed, the federal state model is known as the “*most geographically expressive of all political systems.*” The federal model introduced in Bosnia-Herzegovina through the Dayton Agreement fits the description perfectly. However, the Dayton Agreement does not define Bosnia-Herzegovina as a federal state and, moreover, one of the supposed federal units – the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina – has included the word “*federation*” as part of its official name. Indeed, contrary to logical expectations the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina does not consist of two or more units. Rather than being a federation of territories, it was meant as a federation of two constitutional peoples: Muslims (or Bosniaks) and Croats. This explains why this entity is sometimes termed the Muslim-Croat federation.

The international mediators encouraged the Serbs to take the view that Republika Srpska is more than a federal unit

By not defining Bosnia-Herzegovina as a federal state and failing to stress clearly the federal nature of the relationship between the entities, the international mediators who prepared the agreement effectively encouraged the Serbs to take the view that Republika Srpska is more than a federal unit. Such a perception is also encouraged by the fact that the term “*federation*” has been incorporated into the title of the other entity making up the country.

The attitude which still prevails among the Serbian population in Bosnia-Herzegovina is illustrated by several statements taken from the proceedings of a conference held in 1998 entitled *Republika Srpska within Dayton boundaries* which was published by the Geographical Society of Republika Srpska (Group of authors, 1998). The very title of the conference and proceedings is indicative. It suggests that there has always been a territorial unit called Republika Srpska, new boundaries for which were established in 1995. This perception is further developed by the editor-in-chief in his introduction: “*after it suffered military aggression in 1995...Republika Srpska lost a significant part of its territories.*” The “*aggression*” mentioned was, according to the editor-in-chief, conducted by “*Muslims, HVO units (units of Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina), regular Croatian army, foreign mercenaries and NATO forces.*” These few extracts serve to illustrate the still prevailing perception of the internal order of Bosnia-Herzegovina among the Serbian community.

The facts are completely at odds with this interpretation of the political position of Republika Srpska. There has never been a Serbian unit within Bosnia-Herzegovina. Moreover, Bosnia-Herzegovina has never been internally ordered as a composite state. While it is true that the country’s official name is a combination of two geographical notions – Bosnia and Herzegovina – these areas have nothing in common with the Dayton division into two entities and their Dayton boundaries. Republika Srpska did not come into existence until the 1990s, as a direct result of the separatist policy of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a policy based on ethnic cleansing and, in fact, part of an overall Serbian expansionistic strategy directed by Belgrade. It is a nonsense to speak about “*Republika Srpska within Dayton boundaries*” in this context knowing that Republika Srpska was only created by the Dayton Agreement and internationally recognised subsequent to the agreement.

BOUNDARIES

The present-day international borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina are inherited from the Ottoman period

The present-day international borders of Bosnia-Herzegovina are inherited from the Ottoman period. When Bosnia-Herzegovina was established in 1945 as one of republics of the Yugoslav federation, these historical boundaries served as a basis for its delimitation.

The border with Croatia followed the line of the old boundaries between the Ottoman and Austrian Empires, and between Venetian-controlled Dalmatia and the Ottoman Empire that were completed during the 18th and 19th centuries and existed up to the end of the World War I. The border with Serbia and Montenegro followed the line established mainly in the 19th century between Ottoman Bosnia on one side and the independent principality of Serbia and independent Montenegro on the other

side. That boundary was completed following the 1912-13 Balkan wars when Serbia and Montenegro expanded into the Sanjak of Novi Pazar and divided it between themselves. The historical boundary is not, however, preserved in its southernmost sector. Ottoman Herzegovina had a narrow exit to the sea there, known as Sutorina. Although this corridor was analogous to the one at Klek-Neum, which still exists and provides Bosnia-Herzegovina's only access to the sea, in 1945 Sutorina was assigned to Montenegro.

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The most interesting boundary feature of the post-Dayton landscape in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the boundary line between the two entities established by the *Dayton Peace Agreement*. Officially, the line is called the *Inter-Entity Boundary Line* (IEBL). The main purpose of IEBL, according to the *Dayton Agreement*, was to separate the territories of the two entities in line with the agreed 51:49 percent territorial compromise.

The Constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which formed an integral part of the Dayton agreement package, clearly emphasised the territorial integrity of the country, and the role of its international boundaries as the legal limits of the state. The IEBL, therefore, is an internal border but one whose importance and functions exceed those of an ordinary administrative division line. Skrabalo (1999) has rightly compared the IEBL to the partition line on Cyprus or the 'Green Line' of separation between Jewish and Arab settlements in Israel/Palestine.

Despite the fact that the legal framework guarantees the unitary nature and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and theoretically limits the importance of the IEBL, five years after *Dayton Agreement* was concluded, the inter-entity line had by no means ceased to exist. Its importance remains very strong and it is functionally a very active line of division. The degree to which the IEBL currently functions, and will continue to function as a dividing line in the future, depends on the degree of jurisdiction which is practised by the entities. As long as the central state remains weak and most state functions are carried out by the entities, the IEBL will retain its importance and will function as a line of division, not to say partition.

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At present the IEBL represents the frontline dividing two armies and this provides perhaps the best illustration of its role as a dividing line. The line's role in 'human partition' is also significant. Although the Dayton agreement guarantees freedom of movement and the two-way return for all refugees, very little has been done to ensure that these commitments have been fulfilled. It is well known that the war created 'ethnically cleansed' areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For the majority of refugees wishing to cross the IEBL on the way to their former homes, the line remains a major obstacle which they cannot cross. For them the IEBL resembles a wall far more than a mere administrative line.

The IEBL is also, legally and militarily, a well established and protected line. It is mentioned many times in the *Dayton Agreement*, which provides legal protection, while on the ground itself it is monitored and, if necessary, militarily guaranteed by the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina which acts under the umbrella of NATO. It is very rarely the case that an internal boundary has such significant legal and military protection.

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As previously stated, the IEBL is a new line with no reference to the historical or geographical internal divisions of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The IEBL does not correspond to divisions from the Ottoman period, including the main division into two units: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nor does it correspond to divisions from either the Austro-Hungarian or Yugoslav periods nor to a geographical division of the country into regions relating to the main towns (Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Banja Luka). Moreover, the IEBL is not even a variant of any of the many division lines

proposed by the conflicting Bosnian communities or international mediators to the conflict in the 1991-95 period. Instead, the IEBL was defined during the negotiations at Dayton. This is not surprising because the whole Dayton package was virtually coined overnight, without serious preparations. The IEBL was a pragmatic solution, very much dependent on the situation on the ground which developed following the combined Croat-Muslim offensives of autumn 1995. Only relatively few adjustments were made when transferring the existing frontlines into a newly invented division line between the two entities. While it is true that after initial definition, the line was the subject to further adjustments and a precise delimitation was undertaken by a special mixed commission, in its essentials it remained very close to the late 1995 frontlines.

IDENTITIES

Bosnia-Herzegovina consists of three communities with distinct identities and self-perceptions

To discuss a degree of identification with Bosnia-Herzegovina among its citizens and the notion of a Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity it is necessary to recognise from the outset that the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina consists of three communities with distinct identities and self-perceptions. For the purposes of this article the focus will rest on the Bosnian Muslim community while the Croats and Serbs will be mentioned only briefly.

The Bosnian Muslims are the most interesting subject for discussion because they are the most numerous community or nation in the country and very often the only one to identify fully with Bosnia-Herzegovina. Additionally, they clearly have an affiliation to Islam which makes them distinctive. Moreover, they have traditionally been denied recognition by their immediate neighbours – the Serbs and Croats. Even among themselves the Bosnian Muslims have been equivocal about their own identity. This equivocality stems from the complex history of the area including manipulations from beyond Bosnia's borders.

The Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks are one of the south-Slavonic nations. They inhabit the central part of the area which was once Yugoslavia, most notably the former Yugoslav republic and now independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In terms of ethnic structure, Bosnia-Herzegovina was a unique case among the Yugoslav republics. All the other republics were seen as the home of one of the constitutive peoples. Although none of the republics could be described as ethnically 'pure', all the others had one obvious majority and titular community. Only Bosnia-Herzegovina was the exception. According to the constitution, Muslims, Croats and Serbs were so-called constitutive nations of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The republic's national identity was, therefore, tripartite.

The medieval Bosnian kingdom was characterised by a multi-religious structure. As a borderland sandwiched between Frankish states and the Byzantine Empire it was the area of confrontation between Orthodox and Catholic Christianity. Between the two competing branches of Christianity, there was also a third affiliation – the autonomous schismatic Bosnian Church. Its followers called themselves simply *krstjani* or Christians. Therefore, on the eve of the Ottoman conquest, Bosnia was populated by a Slavonic population of three religious affiliations: Catholics, Orthodox and Bosnian Christians.

The Ottomans introduced Islam to Bosnia and the new faith was widely accepted by the local population. There are no historical records concerning the collective conversion of Bosnian Christians to Islam, but it is certain that they were the most numerous among those who accepted the 'new' religion. Conversion was probably often an individual decision and act but as a new and dynamic religion which also promised social promotion, Islam became the dominant religion in Bosnia by the end of the 16th century. With the acceptance of Islam as a religion, elements of Islamic culture were also sincerely adopted in Bosnia. Islamic cultural influences merged with autochthonous Bosnian elements, such as the vernacular Slavonic

language, to create a specific Bosnian culture and identity, different to any other part of the Ottoman Empire, and different from any other south Slavonic land. While language, Slavonic ethnic roots and a relatively strong sense of some sort of regional (Bosnian) self-identity made the population of Bosnia different from other parts of the Ottoman Empire, the Bosniaks were at the same time different from their south-Slavonic brethren, most notably the Croats and Serbs, primarily due to their Islamic religion.

The situation changed significantly when Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina and when political, religious and cultural ties with Istanbul were suddenly broken. In the new political environment the Bosnian Muslim community had to struggle for the affirmation of its religious and cultural rights. The terms 'Bosnian' and 'Bosniaks', used during the Ottoman period for the Bosnian Muslims, were gradually replaced with the general term 'Muslim'. While this change continued spontaneously, direct intervention on the part of the Austro-Hungarian authorities in the language sphere was not successful. An attempt to promote the term 'Bosniak' with a multi-religious meaning, introduced primarily with the aim of eliminating the growing influence of Croatian and Serbian national ideas in the region, failed to deliver long-lasting results. The idea of a multi-religious, all-Bosnian 'Bosniakhood' is usually associated with efforts of Benjamin Kallay, the Hungarian politician who governed Bosnia-Herzegovina in the period 1882-1903.

The failure of a multi-religious Bosniak identity to take root resulted in the development of three different communities and identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, closely related to religious affiliation. The Catholic community adopted the Croatian national identity, the Orthodox community perceived itself to be a part of the Serbian nation, while the Muslim community developed as the 'third' Bosnian identity, and adopted their religious affiliation as the basis for their national identification.

In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the Muslim community was looked upon with disfavour by the Belgrade authorities and no national recognition was offered to it. The second, communist, Yugoslav government was also unsure how to treat its Muslim communities but finally decided to offer them full recognition. Changing census definitions clearly illustrate how the Bosnian Muslim identity has been seen by the Yugoslav state over time. In the 1948 census some were declared as Croats and some as Serbs, but most were placed within the "*nationality not declared – Muslims*" category. In the 1953 census most Muslims inclined towards the "*nationality not declared – Yugoslavs*" category, while in the 1961 census it was the "*ethnic group – Muslims*" category. From the 1971 census onwards, the category "*Muslims*" was introduced as one of the six nations recognised by Yugoslav laws.

The decision to give the Bosnian Muslims full national recognition in communist Yugoslavia, seemed to be widely accepted within the 'new' nation itself. It also resulted in a strong affiliation and identification of Muslims with Yugoslavia. The Bosnian Muslims understood Yugoslavia as a politicogeographical framework providing them with acceptable conditions. That feeling was emphasised further by the fact that the Islamic religious organisation *Islamska Zajednica* was Yugoslav, not Bosnian, in scope. The attitude of *Islamska Zajednica* to the national question in Yugoslavia was very similar to the attitude of the communist regime: it promoted brotherhood and unity among Yugoslavia's nations and nationalities (Sorabji, 1996) and was organised to embrace all Muslims in Yugoslavia. These included not only the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina but also their fellow Muslims in the historical province of Sanjak divided between Serbia and Montenegro, and Albanians from Kosovo as well as other Muslims of different ethnic origin from Macedonia.

However, this situation changed when national parties were formed among the Serbs and Croats and the war approached Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Party of Democratic Action, unlike the Serbian and Croatian main parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina, chose not to include a national attribute in its name. But, it nevertheless acted as the main political representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslims. When the Yugoslav federation fell apart and Bosnia-Herzegovina became one of the successor states to gain independence, the political preference of Bosnian Muslims changed radically. From being a pro-Yugoslav community they were transformed into the main defenders of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The attitude of the Bosnian Serbs proved to be openly anti-Bosnian and this did not change significantly following the Dayton agreement. The Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina were equally clear in their national orientation. Although somewhat less inclined towards separatism than the Serbs (Klemenčić, 1994: 26-27), their identification with Bosnia-Herzegovina was ambiguous. Both the Serbs and Croats showed little respect and understanding towards the religious affiliation of the Bosnian Muslim. Moreover, their representatives often marked Islam as 'anti-European' and sought to portray the Muslims as fundamentalists with values and attitudes alien to European nations.

In the geographical context the most interesting sign of changing attitudes was the change of national name...The term 'Muslim' was replaced with that of 'Bosniak'

The growing antagonism among the three nations resulted in a general radicalisation of the Bosnian Muslims, with religious radicalisation as an inevitable, although not the main, element of this process (Sorabji, 1996: 61). For example, a limited number of mujahedins fought alongside the Muslim-dominated Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but this did not mean that all Bosnian Muslims had been transformed into mujahedins as Serbian and sometimes Croatian propaganda sources liked to claim.

In the geographical context the most interesting sign of changing attitudes was the change of national name. The term 'Muslim' was replaced with that of 'Bosniak'. An identification based on religious affiliation was replaced with an identification associated with a geographical notion. The term 'Bosniaks' replaced the previously used term 'Muslims' in all documents and in everyday speech.

The change of the national name represented a significant gesture. It clearly showed that the Bosnian Muslims distanced themselves from a religiously-dominated concept of identity. One may argue that this was a tactical gesture. The Bosnian Muslims had already avoided the inclusion of a national term in the name of their main party. Party officials, alongside their contacts in the Islamic world, made clear attempts to distance themselves from nationalist and fundamentalist associations and gain support from Western governments on the basis of a secular state and non-nationalistic concept. It is a fact that given a choice between a more Muslim-oriented or a more secular civil society concept, the Bosnian Muslims opted for the latter. There are also indications that the new concept of Bosniakhood is an even more ambitious approach and encompasses more than simply the representation of the Muslim community.

In the eyes of the Croats and Serbs the change in terminology represented only a nominal change: those who initially called themselves Muslims, now deciding to call themselves Bosniaks. However, the Bosniak community inclined towards a more complex transformation. While they do not deny that former Muslims have changed their national name, it is argued that this is only a part of the change. There are indications that in the longer term they anticipate that the term 'Bosniak' will come to embrace all those identified with Bosnia-Herzegovina, regardless of their religious affiliation. That broad conception of Bosniakhood is something which will develop in future and will take time. In general, it does not seem dissimilar to the abortive programme promoted by Austro-Hungarian authorities in the last century.

However, the present context is not the same: in the Austro-Hungarian period Bosnia-Herzegovina was only a marginal province of a large empire, whereas now it is an independent state. That simple politicogeographical difference may, in the end, prove to be decisive. The significant advance of the country's status may create more favourable conditions for the construction of the new identity.

CONCLUSIONS

The internal border is, in many respects, a 'hard' border, sometimes 'harder' than parts of the country's international borders

The internal order of Bosnia-Herzegovina, based on the *Dayton Agreement*, is chaotic. The accords were successful in halting four years of war – hardly an insignificant achievement – but there is a fear that the agreement, legitimising a division of the country and accepting the results of ethnic cleansing, might yet prove to be a failure in the long term. The agreement itself is ambiguous: it allows the parties to interpret its terms in the light of their own interests. While the Bosniaks emphasise those parts of the agreement favouring Bosnia-Herzegovina's integrity, the Serbs are primarily concerned with the preservation of their entity, Republika Srpska.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's international borders are protected but the newly created internal division line is the biggest threat to the country's integrity. The internal border is, in many respects, perceived as a 'hard' border, sometimes 'harder' than parts of the country's international borders. The Serbs in particular are keen to preserve the IEBL and to transform it into an international border in the future.

No common Bosnian-Herzegovinan identity exists, there are individual identities: Bosniak, Serb and Croat...two of which are by no means wholly loyal to Bosnia-Herzegovina, they perceive themselves as being part of neighbouring nations

At the present time no common Bosnian-Herzegovinan identity exists. Instead, there are individual Bosnian-Herzegovinan identities based on the three ethnic communities: Bosniak, Serb and Croat. Two of these are by no means wholly loyal to Bosnia-Herzegovina, they perceive themselves as being part of neighbouring nations. The Bosniaks are presently the only community directly identified with Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Bosniak identity is wholly accepted by Muslim community. However, there is a tendency to extend this identity to include all citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina, regardless of their religious background. At present it seems that the Bosniak identity is too far removed from the other two identities for any hope of integration in the near future. However, identities are not fixed forever, they are constructed in relation to other identities and they may change over time. In the light of this, it is possible that in the future a *supranational* Bosniakhood may develop and suppress national identities and ideologies. As a subvariant of that scenario a multiconfessional multi religious Bosnian nation may yet be seen.

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On the other hand if a broad concept of Bosniakhood does not become established, as was the case in the last century, then an increase or strengthening of individual national identities at the cost of an integrated multi-religious society will be the outcome. Bosniakhood will survive as the exclusive identity reserved for the Muslim community. Since Islam is a formative element of the Bosniak national identity it is very likely that in the future Bosnia-Herzegovina, dominated numerically by the Bosniaks, will be equally a country heavily influenced culturally by Islam. The other two communities will become further alienated and the integrity of the country will be subject to question even more so than at present.

It can be concluded that the solution to these problems, such as those relating to Bosnia-Herzegovina's internal order and internal boundary, is very much dependent on the future development of identity(ies) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. As long as this process is in a state of flux international protection will be needed to safeguard the integrity of the state.

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Ron Adler

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