

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Study Group Regional Stability in South East Europe (RSSEE SG)

# “Democratic Transition and Multi-Ethnicity – Opportunities and Challenges for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its Southeast European Neighbours”

43<sup>rd</sup> RSSEE SG Workshop  
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PfP Consortium of Defense  
Academies and Security  
Studies Institutes



### Executive Summary of Recommendations

- **WB-6/EU:** Ensuring the secular character of the WB states.
- **EU/U.S.:** Supporting the Youth Initiatives for Human Rights (YIHR) project on shared narratives in the WB.
- **EU/NATO/PIC/U.S.:** Ensuring further international military presence in BiH and substantial support for the Office of the High Representative (OHR).
- **EU:** Exerting pressure concerning the long overdue implementation of court rulings to end ethnic discrimination in BiH (Sejdić-Finci case etc.).
- **Kosovar government:** Establishing real societal dialogue with the Kosovo-Serb community.
- **NATO:** Enabling Kosovo's membership in the PfP program.
- **EU/U.S.:** Establishing a multi-ethnic university in central Kosovo.
- **Serbian government/EU:** Terminating Belgrade's discriminatory policy towards Albanians from Southern Serbia (Preševo Valley).
- **Bulgarian and North Macedonian governments/EU:** Refraining from new hurdles in North Macedonia's EU negotiations if constitutional changes are made in favour of the Bulgarian minority.

### Situation Analysis

Dealing with ethnic and religious diversity is an important yardstick for democratic and security consolidation in South East Europe and especially in the Western Balkan (WB) region with its population of about 17 million. Despite its historical burdens, the WB has the potential to become a positive role model for multi-ethnic coexistence. However, this would require shared positive narratives instead of the currently dominant political exploitation of nationalisms.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)**, the abuse of ethno-politics by sometimes kleptocratic decision-makers is most striking. The results of the national elections on 2 October 2022 will not fundamentally change this. A reconciliation of ethnic (collective) and civic (individual) rights would certainly be possible in BiH. However, this would require more vigorous action against separatist policies (BiH entity Republika Srpska) and kleptocratic interests of key political actors (overall state). The interference of Croatia and Serbia in BiH's internal politics has recently done more harm than good to BiH's consolidation.

BiH continues to need an international corrective in the person of the High Representative and the presence of international peacekeepers (EU or NATO) with an executive mandate. Only when a culture of political compromise is established in BiH will it be possible to take more far-reaching steps toward EU integration and cooperation with NATO.

The living situation of the 5–8% non-Albanian communities in **Kosovo** (Serbs and other nationalities) is negatively affected by the tensions between Belgrade and Prishtina/Priština. Despite increased mediation efforts by the EU and the U.S. government, the normalisation dialogue shows little progress. The Kosovar government has only partially implemented its legal obligations to the ethnic Serb community. Prishtina/Priština lacks a trustworthy policy toward the Kosovo Serbs, not only in North Kosovo, but also toward the Serbs south of the Ibar river. Violent incidents have recently increased in the multi-ethnic areas there.



In the **south of Serbia**, in turn, Albanians from the Preševo Valley have been exposed to various forms of depopulation known as “passivisation”. The residential addresses of ethnic Albanians who work abroad are removed from the Civil Registry. Therefore, the persons concerned lose their status as Serbian citizens, which includes numerous rights, including health insurance, pensions, the possibility of employment and the like. Furthermore, the citizenship status is also required for the renewal of ID cards or passports, which puts these persons at risk of becoming stateless people. According to Serbian human rights organizations, this discriminatory measure is applied exclusively to Albanians.

In North Macedonia and Albania, NATO accession contributes to domestic stability and thus has a positive impact on interethnic relations, which is particularly evident in the example of the multi-ethnic armed forces of North Macedonia. Montenegro’s NATO accession probably saved it from even more brazen hybrid attacks by Russia. However, all three states continue to face interethnic challenges.

**North Macedonia** must adhere to the implementation of the 2001 Ohrid Agreement in order to guarantee interethnic stability. In the medium term, the development of Macedonian and Albanian parallel societies is, however, to be avoided. In order not to lose course again regarding EU integration, Skopje must achieve the necessary parliamentary majority for the French compromise proposal. This should prevent **Bulgaria** from reasserting its policy of obstruction. The same applies to the consistent implementation of the Prespa Agreement by North Macedonia in relation to its neighbour **Greece**.

In **Montenegro**, there is no ethnic conflict between Montenegrins and Serbs, but identity issues are politically stoked by, inter alia, individual politicians from Belgrade and parts of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

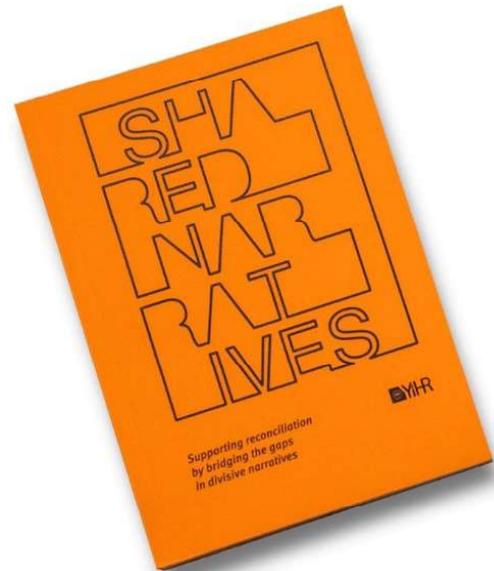
**Albania** has also not implemented all the provisions of its 2017 law on the protection of national minorities. There is a further need to conduct a new census that provides a realistic picture of the multi-ethnic structure of this state.

## Policy Recommendations

### With Reference to the EU Integration Process

- **WB states, EU and NATO:** Professional cooperation in the multi-ethnic armies of WB states should be highlighted as a positive narrative.
- **Donor communities, EU and U.S.:** When it comes to financial support for civil society and state initiatives, a more precise distinction should be made as to whether or not they produce positive results for multi-ethnic coexistence and democratic development.

- **Donor communities, EU and U.S.:** A civil society flagship project that should continue to be substantially funded and promoted is the project “Supporting Reconciliation by Bridging the Gaps in Divisive Narratives” of the Regional Network of Youth Initiatives for Human Rights (YIHR).



Source: Petar Novak/Youth Initiatives for Human Rights (YIHR)

- **WB states and EU:** All EU candidate and potential candidate countries should ensure the secular character of their state.
- **WB governments:** The states should guarantee the freedom of religion in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
- **Religious communities in the WB:** The official churches in the region should be encouraged to take more inclusive and reconciliatory roles in the respective societies.

### With Reference to Albania

- **Albanian government:** The 2017 law on the protection of national minorities should be fully implemented and a new census providing more accurate data on national communities should be conducted.

### With Reference to Bosnia and Herzegovina

- **EU:** To counterbalance the dominant negative narrative, BiH needs positive political momentum in the form of EU candidate status, as the EU has provided to Ukraine and Moldova.

- **Peace Implementation Council (PIC), EU and U.S.:** The politically and ethnically deeply divided society, and the dysfunctional state, in parts hijacked by corrupt and criminal politicians are proof that the institution of the High Representative is still required.



- **PIC:** The Western community must make it clear that it fully supports the High Representative's political and legal "Bonn-Powers", and that it will strengthen him in this regard whenever needed.
- **EU and NATO:** Against the backdrop of the antagonistic political climate in BiH and secessionist threats issued by Republika Srpska's political key actors, a rebooting of EUFOR-Althea seems to be inevitable to maintain peace and security.
- **High Representative:** The OHR should be encouraged to consult and negotiate with the independent and democratic civil society much more often.
- **EU and U.S.:** Brussels and Washington should start a new initiative to support BiH in finding a way out of the constitutional dilemma. This means that, above all, today's "ethnic" state needs to be developed into a European-type of "civic" state. The latter is a prerequisite for accession to the EU.
- **EU:** Extensive political and financial pressure should be exerted on the main legislative and executive institutions of BiH in order to ensure the long overdue implementation of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights and of the BiH Constitutional Court to overcome the ethnic division of BiH (the cases of Sejdić-Finci, Pudaric, etc.) as precondition for BiH's accession to the EU.
- **EU:** Separatist intentions and the undermining of the Dayton Peace Agreement are incompatible with EU financial pre-accession support.

- **BiH political actors, international presence in BiH, EU and U.S.:** Important political negotiations and decisions should be conducted in and taken by BiH institutions and not in shady informal fora.
- **Croatian and Serbian government, EU and U.S.:** Direct interference of Belgrade and Zagreb in BiH's internal political relations is not covered by the "Dayton Agreement" and therefore violates the sovereignty of the neighbouring country, hence it should be stopped.

#### **With Reference to Kosovo-Serbia**

- **Kosovar government:** A societal dialogue between the ethnic communities should be initiated with the aim of transforming the prevailing exclusive nationalism into an inclusive society.
- **Kosovar government:** An independent monitoring body consisting of domestic and international experts should be established to monitor the implementation of the governmental strategy regarding an improvement of the living conditions of non-Albanian communities.
- **EU:** Unvarnished Progress Reports (independent of the politically correct EU Country Report) are to indicate to the EU and other international actors the status of ethnic community rights in Kosovo.
- **EU and U.S.:** Support should be given to the establishment of a multi-ethnic university in the central part of Kosovo similar to the South East European University in North Macedonia. The aim is to strengthen connections among the young, to offer perspectives to decrease the brain-drain, and to improve prospects for economic development in Kosovo.
- **EU and U.S.:** This university should provide academic programs on Albanian-Serbian/Serbian-Albanian translation and interpretation, in order to meet the needs of translation services in Kosovo's public administration.
- **Kosovar government, EU and U.S.:** Uphold multi-ethnic businesses in multi-ethnic communities of Kosovo.
- **EULEX mission:** Tailor-made initiatives seem to be necessary in order to support rule of law in the insecure north of Kosovo and in the multi-ethnic municipalities.
- **Kosovar and Serbian governments:** In order to prevent negative interpretations of the dialogue process and to demonstrate the full readiness of both sides to normalise their relations, joint press conferences should be held after each round of dialogue.
- **EU:** Widely criticised for a lack of transparency within the dialogue process, the EU should consider the

proposal to partly relocate some rounds of the dialogue from Brussels to Belgrade and Prishtina/Priština.

- **EU:** The civil society's role is and should be an essential part of the dialogue process, as it guarantees dialogue within the community and therefore can be regarded as a credible interlocutor which could also be a part of the solution.
- **EU and US:** The approaches of the Kosovar government, Kosovo-Serb representatives (Srpska lista) and Serbian government have to be modified to the extent that they actually take into account the needs and interests of the Serbian community in Kosovo.
- **NATO:** Kosovo should be offered membership in NATO's "Partnership for Peace" to integrate this country into a cooperative security framework.



#### **With Reference to Southern Serbia (Preševo Valley)**

- **Serbian government and EU:** The discriminatory policy of "passivization" of the Albanians in the Preševo Valley practiced by the Serbian government must end. Ethnic Albanians must not lose their civil rights if they work in Western Europe or in Kosovo.

#### **With Reference to Montenegro**

- **Montenegrin government:** Legal regulations concerning the national symbols of ethnic communities should be imperative norms in order to avoid political tensions and ethnic confrontations.

#### **With Reference to North Macedonia (domestic and neighbourly relations)**

- **North Macedonian government:** Taking into account the important role of the Ohrid agreement for good inter-ethnic relations in North Macedonia, a linguistically segregated school system should be prevented from promoting ethnic segregation in the medium term.

- **Governments of North Macedonia and Greece:** The success of the "Prespa Agreement" depends on its immediate implementation by both North Macedonia and Greece, hence, both governments should enhance their commitment to and efforts at implementing this agreement and using the momentum to develop strong bilateral relations.
- **EU:** International mediators should encourage and ensure the implementation of the "Prespa Agreement", as this aims to provide a comprehensive framework for the resolution of existing and future disputes between Skopje and Athens and to be a positive role model for other regional disputes and conflicts.
- **Parliament of North Macedonia and Bulgarian government:** The political parties in North Macedonia are to agree on the proposed constitutional changes in line with the "French proposal". Furthermore, no new bilateral demands should be made by Sofia regarding North Macedonia's EU integration.

These policy recommendations reflect the findings of the 43<sup>rd</sup> RSSEE workshop on "Democratic Transition and Multi-Ethnicity – Opportunities and Challenges for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its Southeast European Neighbours", convened by the PfP Consortium Study Group "Regional Stability in South East Europe" in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 22–25 September 2022. They were prepared by Predrag Jureković (Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna) on the basis of the proposals submitted by the participants. Valuable support in proofreading and layouting came from Sara Milena Schachinger (Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna).