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**A Question of Resilience:
Challenges for Bottom-Up Democratisation in
Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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Abstract

Two decades after emerging from war and after many years of delay, Bosnia and Herzegovina at last submitted an EU membership application in 2016. There is little doubt, however, that candidate status and accession are still a long way off. Reform process is slow, and the country's state of democracy is undermined by a variety of factors. To evaluate perspectives for the future, this paper investigates what challenges the process of bottom-up democratisation is facing in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the analysis, the current political and socio-economic conditions are compared to key findings from the literature on democratisation theories. By complementing these insights with the data gathered in several interviews conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina, previous assumptions are confirmed and illustrated by numerous examples. The research results reveal that the country's conditions are unfavourable towards democratisation, with deficiencies being particularly strong in the areas of political culture, functioning of the government, and political participation. However, they also illustrate how interlinked many of the country's problems are, and that the most pressing ones can be attributed to the absence of a strong civil society. This paper highlights the importance of a vigorous civil society for a thriving democracy, pointing to a possible remedy for the flaws in the Bosnian system.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— **Margaret Mead**

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Abbreviations

BiH	Bosna i Hercegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
DF	Demokratska fronta (Democratic Front)
EU	European Union
FBiH	Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation)
HDZ BiH	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine (Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RS	Republika Srpska (Serb Republic)
SDA	Stranka demokratske akcije (Party of Democratic Action)
SDP	Socijaldemokratska partija (Social Democratic Party)
SDS	Srpska demokratska stranka (Serb Democratic Party)
UN	United Nations

Introduction

Standing in the heart of Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), one is surrounded by the traces of former empires, ideologies, and of world religions, by signs of war and of peace, of tradition and modernity. A meeting point of cultures, as the city is often called, it has since long been a place where all of Europe's diversity converged, and sometimes clashed. Despite a widespread tendency to perceive the Balkans¹ as peripheral to Europe, they have in fact played a very central role throughout European history. More than once, local struggles produced events of regional, continental, and even global significance. Marking for a long time the fault line between Islam and Christianity, between East and West, between the Ottoman Empire and European powers, the Balkans have served as a symbolic crossroad, and as the gate to Europe. Not everything that happens there necessarily has an impact on the rest of Europe, though everything has the potential to do so. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 in Sarajevo was the trigger for the First World War. A good hundred years later, in 2015, at the height of the migrant influx into Europe, the Balkans quite literally still served as a gate to Europe. BiH in particular, as the most ethnically diverse of the Balkan countries, is a place where history and identity are contested concepts which are being disputed and moulded every day. No study of Europe is conclusive without a study of the Balkans.

The European Union (EU) too has recognised the importance of attending to the region and in early 2018 published the new Western Balkans Strategy, outlining the path towards EU membership for the six countries. There is little doubt, however, that BiH in its current state still has a very long way to go until it can live up to EU requirements. Caught in a deadlock between the different ruling parties which are unwilling to make concessions, and plagued by widespread corruption and high unemployment, the country's performance is far below

¹ The Balkans are a contested concept. While there are numerous definitions comprising different geographic scopes, for reasons of simplicity, I will employ the definition given by Jasmin Mujanović. He understands the Balkans to include BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey. Occasionally, I will also refer to the Western Balkans, a term coined primarily by EU institutions to encompass the potential member countries located in Southeast Europe. It includes six countries: Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; the countries (in the case of Kosovo: province) of the former Yugoslavia, minus Croatia and Slovenia, as they have already acceded to the EU, and plus Albania. I will refer to the Western Balkans only when explicit reference to their non-EU member status is required. Otherwise I will be using the definition of Balkans as outlined above, as a space of shared social and historical characteristics which ultimately have their roots in the legacy of the Ottoman Empire's presence in the region. See: Jasmin Mujanović, *Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2018).

European standards.² If we imagine BiH as a complex system of gear wheels, we see it is not moving, except for some smaller wheels that turn quite independently; otherwise, it is stuck. This metaphor describes quite accurately the image many observers draw of the country: a broken, failed system. This paper will provide answers to whether this is an accurate depiction of BiH's state of democracy, and which of these gear wheels are particularly affected. Its main objective, however, is to investigate the challenges for bottom-up democratisation in BiH. Just like the country's past has played a significant role in European history, so will its future. A healthy and resistant democracy is not only a Bosnian, but a European interest.

Hypothesis and research question

By focusing on bottom-up processes, this paper concentrates on people and social processes, rather than the legal context or institutions. As such, the thesis builds on the premise of the book "*Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans*" by political scientist Jasmin Mujanović, published in 2018. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the current socio-political situation in the Western Balkan countries and how authoritarian elites in the region have been securing their power and wealth for centuries with the same, continuous strategies based on dispossession, violence, suppression of citizen participation, and recently, through toying with the international community.³ As the most up-to-date and comprehensive work exploring the democratic shortcomings in Balkan countries, I will frequently revert to it throughout this paper. As the original source of inspiration for my topic, it is an important guide for which areas need exploration in relation to democratisation. Mainly, though, it is a very capable analysis of the relevance of civil society in developing a sustainable democracy.

The strongest point that Mujanović makes is that in favour of citizen participation. He asserts that no genuine democratic system can sustain without deliberation and participation, and, whenever necessary, protest. Notwithstanding the growing regional influence of increasingly authoritarian regimes like Russia or Turkey, Mujanović is cautiously positive that a genuine democratic transformation in the region is possible, as "the way out of the

² Vuk Velebit, "What Is the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina's European Integration?," *European Western Balkans* (2018), <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/01/26/state-bosnia-herzegovinas-european-integrations>.

³ Mujanović.

morass of the former Yugoslavia's persistent, elite-engineered elastic authoritarianism has never been complex. It has simply required the emergence and articulation of a genuine civil society in the region".⁴ His belief in the potential of grassroots movements to initiate this democratisation process is inspired by examples from throughout world history, of civic movements that transformed the social and political order of their country. Convinced that "this desperation will transform into fury", Mujanović predicts for the former Yugoslav countries a rise of the *demos*, and he accords it the potential to transform countries into genuine democratic states.⁵ This is the premise on which this thesis is built, and I will critically evaluate its feasibility in the context of BiH. The research question, thus, is:

- What are challenges for bottom-up democratisation in BiH?

This question can be further broken down into three sub-questions, that will be answered by reviewing theory, analysing developments in BiH, and conducting empirical research:

- What does democratisation entail in general?
- What expressions of bottom-up democratisation can we see in BiH?
- What are the dominant factors that have an impact on democratisation in BiH?

This text will focus on BiH because, as Mujanović says himself, the country's development has often been indicative for the region as a whole, and "so long as BiH remains the rotten core of the former Yugoslavia, genuine democratization in the Balkans will remain out of reach".⁶ Due to its complex socio-political nature, BiH (together with Kosovo) can indeed be considered the region's laggard in terms of democratisation, illustrated also by the fact that those two are the only remaining Western Balkan countries without official EU candidate status. From analysing the situation in BiH, valuable conclusions for further work can be drawn for the future of the entire region, and positive changes in BiH may even have a conducive effect on its neighbours.

Structure

The remainder of this paper is divided into five chapters. First, the theoretical chapter will investigate different theoretical concepts related to the concept of democratisation, and

⁴ Ibid. 165

⁵ Ibid. 174

⁶ Ibid. 145

conceptualise bottom-up democratisation. The second chapter will provide the context necessary to understand the research findings, by shining a light on BiH's political conditions, history of protest movements and the state of civil society. After this, I will explain my research methods and limitations in the methodology chapter, before diving into the empirical results. In the results chapter, I will present the findings from my primary research. In the conclusion, I will give the final response to the main research question by providing a summary of which factors I have found to constitute challenges to bottom-up democratisation in BiH.

Theoretical framework

This chapter will begin by conceptualising a key term used in this paper: bottom-up democratisation. It will then go on to present an overview of the theoretical background of democratisation as a political and social process.

What is bottom-up democratisation?

What, exactly, does this paper refer to when speaking about bottom-up democratisation? We will begin by looking at the concept of democratisation.

There is no one accepted definition of democracy, and even less agreement on how democracy should be measured. The fact that democracy consists not only of tangible expressions such as democratic institutions and processes, but also of intangible concepts such as political culture, makes it an ambiguous concept that requires operationalisation wherever it is used. This thesis does not aspire to measure democracy in BiH, but it refers to democratisation as a desired development and thus we require clarity on what it entails. Whitehead describes democratisation as an open-ended process advancing “towards a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics”.⁷ If democratisation is the introduction and strengthening of democratic principles, what exactly are those principles? For the sake of this paper, the desirable democratic principles will be based on the five categories used in the Democracy Index, a yearly analysis of the global state of democracy published by The Economist’s Intelligence Unit:

1. electoral process and pluralism
2. civil liberties
3. functioning of government
4. political culture
5. political participation⁸

While there are many essential components of democracy, none of them are sufficient in themselves, but it is the presence and sound interaction of all of them that provide for a

⁷ Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization. Theory and Experience*, Oxford Scholarship Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 27

⁸ "Democracy Index 2017: Free Speech under Attack," (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018).

genuine democratic system. Democratisation, in this paper, should be regarded as the pursuit of high performance levels in the five above-mentioned areas. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly discuss each of them.

Elections are, undoubtedly, a key element of democracy, but are today held in almost every country in the world, including isolated dictatorships like North Korea and war-torn Syria. Instead of being absolute indicators of democracy, they are often marked by an absence of true competition and free choice and instead serve to legitimise the existing regime. Elections must be free of any coercion towards voters, free of restrictions on who may run as candidate, and free of irregularities during the voting process. The state should support voters' security, equal campaigning opportunities and universal suffrage. Pluralism refers to a variety of opinions and different groups being able to exist in the political sphere, and power being a bargaining process between them. Citizens need to be able to elect those who represent their individual interests, and to punish those who do not represent their interests when elected to do so, by electing somebody else.

The second category, civil liberties, refers to basic human rights like freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of assembly, as enshrined also by international agreements such as the UN Charter or the European Convention of Human Rights. Citizens are free to protest, to voice their opinions, to criticise their government, to form organisations and trade unions. The state ensures the protection of personal freedoms, personal safety, property rights and of the functionality of private businesses. It does not fabricate crisis situations used as an excuse to infringe on civil liberties. The judiciary operates independently without outside interference and everybody is equal before the law. As the system is based on the rule of the majority, mechanisms to protect minority rights need to be in place to truly ensure equal rights. The media need to be able to operate freely, without interference from the state, and should represent the pluralism of society and encourage free, public debate.

A functioning government can perform the tasks bestowed upon it and implement and enforce the decisions taken by elected officials, in all of the country's territory, by means of a capable civil service. All actors accept the legitimacy and rules of governing institutions, and they operate without threats of violence, boycotts, or undue interference from other areas of state governance, foreign forces, or powerful groups from economic or religious spheres. Ideally, there is high governmental transparency, no corruption, and a high level of confidence in the government and in political parties.

However, democracy is not only defined by its institutions and rules, but also by whether those are respected. Political culture is a rather intangible concept, referring to political practices and the beliefs people hold about the system. In an ideal, democratic political culture, citizens feel both compelled and able to participate in the democratic processes and accept the lawful outcomes of those processes even if they do not reflect their personal opinions. This reflects consensus on the legitimacy of institutions and recognition of democratically elected officials, and, ultimately, contributes to the sustainable functioning of a system.

Political participation can take a number of different forms, including participating in elections, engaging in political or civic organisations, protesting, or running for a political position. It is an essential component without which democratic processes are left unchecked and easy to exploit. While citizens are free to choose not to participate, engaged and capable citizens are what keeps a democracy healthy and prevents state capture by few groups of people. Ideally, participation is encouraged by the state, citizens show interest in politics and are willing to participate in protests, there is a high level of membership in political parties and organisations of political nature.

Having discussed democratisation, we will now turn to the prefix “bottom-up” that I have decided to include in my subject. Bottom-up means from the lowest level upwards, so bottom-up processes start at the lowest level and progress upwards. In the context of democratisation, I understand bottom-up to mean originating from the people, i.e. from the very base level of society, rising up through social spheres, penetrating governance levels and progressing all the way upwards to the highest levels of governance. In a democracy, which literally means rule of the people, this is the most logical approach to transition processes, because citizens are at the basis of every democratic process, and without their active consent and engagement, no truly democratic system can be established or make to work.

Theories of democratisation

When we think about transitions from an authoritarian regime to democracy, we often think of uprisings and protest movements, which indeed frequently play a significant role in those transitions. From the overthrow of communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the years after

1989 to the Arab Spring series of revolutions that began in 2010, there are plenty of examples illustrating the power of citizen movements in bringing about regime change. However, they also illustrate that democratisation is neither always the guaranteed outcome, as shown by countries like Libya or Egypt, nor does it protect against the threat of democratic backsliding, as can be observed in Poland or Hungary. Such movements can contribute to democratisation only under certain conditions.

In the vast body of academic literature on democracy and democratisation, there is little consensus as to what determines when, how and why a country might experience a democratic transition. In a smaller scale, the same holds true for social movements and mobilisations. Both phenomena are incredibly complex concepts that are influenced by a sheer endless multiple of factors, from outside and from within. These factors have an impact on the first phase, in which the initial development, such as a protest, is triggered. However, further influences are added once developments are set into motion, not just from external factors but also from within. The protests take on dynamics on their own, influenced by the choices and behaviour of the protestors themselves. Therefore, democratisation and mobilisation are very similar in the way that their development is extremely difficult to predict. Democratisation may be influenced by a myriad of factors within a country, ranging from more general questions of institutional setup, political history and state of civil society, to demographics and media landscape, down to very individual questions of values held or family situation, to name but a few. Even though it is virtually impossible to determine all aspects that led to the right circumstances to in turn lead to certain events, researchers have attempted to single out certain factors that appear to work in favour of democratisation.

As Valerie Bunce, American professor in comparative politics, points out, few regions in the world have developed in such different ways despite sharing similar departure points as post-communist Europe. This makes this region an interesting subject of democratisation studies. Bunce identifies five main factors that have a beneficial effect on democratic development, which are:

1. existence of a vigorous civil society
2. a sharp political break with the authoritarian past followed by competitive elections
3. settling of contested state borders
4. a unitary or geographically federal state, but no ethno-federation

5. political institutions empowering parliaments and protecting minority rights⁹

We shall take a closer look at each of these factors. First, a strong civil society is generally regarded as “an antidote to illiberal nationalism”,¹⁰ as strong ties amongst the population forces political elites to be more responsive to citizens’ needs, in turn making for more competitive elections and stronger citizen participation. Nationalism, on the contrary, leads to elites competing for political and economic power in an attempt to distract from their lack of reform process. With a robust civil society, pressure on elites increases and makes it harder to engage in such games. Second, a clear break with the previous, authoritarian system should be achieved through the electoral victory of liberal opposition forces. This way of giving legitimacy to elections is important because it reassures citizens that the risks they took during the process of regime change (e.g. by protesting) have paid off, installing trust in democratic elections and political participation. The clear break with the old system and leaders is necessary to create the political capital needed to take on truly transformative political and economic reforms. Unless state borders are settled, countries will struggle to build consensus on citizenship, political rights and new institutions. Heated nationalist debates will dominate the political sphere and strain relations with neighbouring countries, as the development of a highly militarised and aggressive state becomes more likely.¹¹

Next, concerning the political design, a unitary state or federation is most responsive to democratisation. In the case of federate states, Bunce argues that geographical division is preferable over ethnic division, as ethno-federal structures discourage interaction, weaken social cohesion and harden identities. Instead, the focus on separate identities encourages secessionism, and has minorities strive for stronger representation based on collective rather than individual rights. Political contestation takes place on the basis of ethnic belonging rather than socio-economic status, which is dangerous as “while socio-economic differences are amenable to bargaining, logrolling, compromise, and policy closure, identity issues are not. They tend to increase conflict while lowering the potential for resolution”.¹² Cultural diversity is much better handled by strong respect for individual rights, a political system that encourages political competition, collaboration in common objectives, local governance and minority protection, and a strong parliament. Political competition and regular electoral

⁹ Valerie Bunce, "The Tasks of Democratic Transition and Transferability," *Orbis* 52, no. 1 (2008). 25

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 31

¹¹ *Ibid.* 30-33

¹² *Ibid.* 34

turnovers are a guarantee for democracy, as it “keeps losers hopeful, rather than subversive, and encourages defection from authoritarian coalitions”, both increasing democratic behaviour and depriving authoritarian forces of their support, and hence lowering corruption.¹³

Besides these supportive factors, Bunce points out that there are many others that need to be taken into consideration. Generally speaking, the post-communist experience can put a large strain on a country if democratic transition is stalled and slow, as economies suffer from uncertainty and possibly internal conflicts, reform process is stunted, political opposition becomes fragmented, people – especially the young and educated – emigrate, and corruption grows; a description that reads like one of today’s BiH. The post-communist experience becomes a burden in itself, and increasingly fosters unfavourable conditions for democratisation the longer this process is stalled.¹⁴

Political scientist Leonardo Morlino singles out another two factors with a strong impact on democratisation: political traditions and experience with violent conflict. A political legacy of democracy or at least of certain democratic principles such as pluralism, civil liberties or political participation will have a supportive effect on democratisation processes. Depending on the duration and intensity of this legacy, the effect can vary in strength, but the historic memory of former democratic experiences can be beneficial. The experience of violence, or even a civil war, often has a moderating effect on the new, democratic elites. The devastating sacrifice the conflict demanded has become part of the collective memory, and results in a collective effort to avoid repetition of a similar scenario.¹⁵

One aspect that seems to enjoy consensus among scholars is the important role that a strong civil society plays for a functioning democracy. However, this point requires differentiation. Civil society actors should be organic to the country to be truly credible. Democratisation cannot work if it does not have robust, domestic support, and is backed up by domestic politics. As Bunce puts it, “[i]nternational assistance ... cannot substitute for local capacity and commitment”.¹⁶ Mujanović also asserts that, while international actors have an important role to play in encouraging civil society initiatives – a role that the local elites in

¹³ Ibid. 35

¹⁴ Ibid. 28-29

¹⁵ Leonardo Morlino, *Changes for Democracy: Actors, Structures, Processes*, Oxford Studies in Democratization (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). 92-93

¹⁶ Bunce. 40

the Balkans are unwilling to take on – it must be a process from within, and even more importantly a process from below. He underlines that democracy only begins to function when citizens begin using their tools and channels to discipline their leaders into representing citizen interests, instead of the process being established top-down.¹⁷

What lies at the base of a strong civil society, though? The question of what keeps societies together and makes people cooperate with one another has for centuries been examined by scholars from a variety of disciplines. The concept of social cohesion is used to describe the quality of relationships within a collective, or simply put, the “we-feeling”. A society with high social cohesion is “characterized by resilient social relations, a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community, and a pronounced focus on the common good”.¹⁸ These aspects are expressed through people’s attitudes and behaviour, for example regarding solidarity, identification with their country, trust in social and political institutions, trust in fellow members of society, and civic participation.¹⁹

A similar concept that could be very revealing when applied to BiH is that of social capital. Social capital, the degree to which people are connected in networks that are marked by reciprocity and trust, is an important foundation for, and an indicator of, a functioning democracy. Where people trust each other, they are more likely to cooperate and join forces in the political or social sphere to work on collective problems. Conversely, the interest of citizens in issues of public concern and their willingness to become engaged with them by organising in groups is an indicator of social capital. Civil society can thus be considered the arena in which interpersonal trust in a society plays out.²⁰

Professor of sociology and political science, Dankwart A. Rustow, in his exploration of democratisation processes, stresses the impact of consensus on national identity as the one single prerequisite that needs to be given. Resolving the question of what the nation and citizenry is and who is a part of it is an essential prerequisite for successful transition to democratisation. This excludes such aspirations as secession or mergers with other

¹⁷ Mujanović. 164

¹⁸ Georgi Dragolov et al., "Theoretical Framework of the Social Cohesion Radar," in *Social Cohesion in the Western World: What Holds Societies Together: Insights from the Social Cohesion Radar*, ed. Georgi Dragolov, et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016). 6

¹⁹ Ibid. 7

²⁰ Antonija Petričušić, "Democracy without Citizens: Inadequate Consolidation in Two Decades of the Western Balkans Democracy," *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes & Mentalities* 2, no. 4 (2013). 39

territories.²¹ In this point, he is in agreement with Bunce, who listed the settling of state borders as one of her five requirements for democratisation. Both Rustow and Bunce believe that consensus on who is a citizen, and a citizen of what, are essential prerequisites for a stable democracy. In challenging Rustow's theory, however, some scholars have since pointed out that there have indeed been states that succeeded in advancing their democratic development even though their territorial integrity remains contested, such as Taiwan, South Korea or Spain. The underlying assumption in Rustow's theory, that democratisation cannot take place if national identity has not been solved beyond doubt, can hence be rejected, as it does not grant trust in democratic systems to manage identity issues constructively, for example through means of partial autonomy to certain regions or simple suspension of the identity question.²²

Still, the concept of identity and citizenship is an important factor in state-building. In countries where citizens share a feeling of collective identity, they realise they are bound together in their interests and fate, and cooperate. Conversely, weak national identity or competing identities can have a divisive effect, which results in low social capital and in turn low support for shared state institutions. As Seth Kaplan, professor and consultant on conflict prevention, predicts, "[t]his toxic combination - the absence of social cohesion and the lack of a set of shared, productive institutions - prevents states from fashioning a robust nationwide governing system, yielding instead a host of chronic problems, ranging from state illegitimacy to high transaction costs, to corruption".²³ Low state legitimacy in turn reinforces exclusive identities, as people fall back on traditional loyalties for protection they cannot expect from the state. This point brings us back to the concept of trust: in a democratic system, mutual trust is at the basis of political, economic or social activities and processes, which are based on the understanding that everybody will adhere to the rules and reciprocate. A fragmented society, however, will, for a lack of collective vision, pursue short-term opportunities rather than strive for more long-term objectives that would require a stable environment, carry more risk and require ongoing cooperation. This kind of behaviour stunts a country's development, and has political institutions be exploited for group interests,

²¹ Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics*, no. 3 (1970). 350-351

²² Baogang He, "The National Identity Problem and Democratization: Rustow's Theory of Sequence," *Government and Opposition* 36, no. 1 (2014). 118-119

²³ Seth Kaplan, "Identity in Fragile States: Social Cohesion and State Building," *Development* 52, no. 4 (2009). 466-468

expressed through corruption, biased judiciary, strong patronage networks, and nonadherence to laws.²⁴

This is precisely the reason why protesting and generally civic engagement of any sort have such an important role to play in society. In establishing contacts that go beyond a person's direct social circle, interpersonal trust can be improved, and social capital increased. This also has implications for civic activism, as creating or joining a protest movement requires risk-taking, something which can be mitigated by strong trust in fellow citizens.²⁵ We are thus looking at a cycle, where social capital makes citizen engagement more likely, and citizen engagement further increases social capital.

Political participation is today understood as much more than participating in elections, it encompasses every activity in some way meant to influence political decisions, such as protesting, campaigning, fundraising, signing petitions or even becoming a member of a civil society organisation working on specific issues. One of the most widespread explanations for citizen participation is the civic voluntarism model. It provides three factors explaining people's behaviour: socio-economic resources, psychological engagement, and social networks. Differently put, the reason why people are not participating is "because they can't; because they don't want to; and because nobody asked".²⁶ According to this model, people must be interested in order to participate, but also able to do so. In certain situations, this may even be sufficient ground for people to become active. When complemented by membership in a mobilising network that encourages participation, though, becoming active is a highly likely outcome. As one can easily imagine, there needs to be a motivation to become politically active, but the model also stresses the importance that feeling able to influence political decisions has. In terms of resources, people require not just time and possibly money, but also the level of education and cognitive capacities for understanding political processes and the implications of civic engagement. And finally, when people are members of a social group in which participation is encouraged, whether political or more community-focused, they are more likely to become active.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid. 468-469

²⁵ Petričušić. 40-41

²⁶ Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995). 269

²⁷ Ibid. 269-271

Generally, two requirements for a vibrant civil society space are the support for such a development from the state side, and a functioning economy that provides people with decent living conditions.²⁸ Post-communist societies, however, typically have very low levels of membership and engagement in civil society organisations. Marc Morje Howard, an American professor of government and law, identifies three reasons for this: the mistrust towards voluntary organisations stemming from people's experience with communism, the persistence of private networks that were relied upon in communist times and still replace the role of voluntary organisations, and the general disappointment with the new economic and political system that followed communism. Civil society used to be controlled by the state in as much as there were organisations for almost every social group, like youth, workers, or women, but membership in those organisations was forced, leading most people to steer clear of organisational membership today. This degree of alienation with democratic processes and lack of civic skills is a clear weakness for the development of strong democratic systems.²⁹

Looking at political transitions, Howard identifies three factors required for a lasting societal change: the presence of strong and legitimate institutions, which should be based on existing traditions and cultural peculiarities of the country, and which are given sufficient time, meaning decades, to establish themselves. Second, he sees a certain authoritative character of the new institutions as necessary for people to be forced to adapt their behaviour to the new reality instead of clinging to old patterns, which is more likely if the institutions are built upon existing tendencies and make use of what people are familiar with. This will make it more likely to be accepted as legitimate, and for people to relate to them. In the end, however, time is the crucial third factor because every adjustment needs time to pass before it no longer feels as novel, and new behavioural patterns have solidified.³⁰

²⁸ Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 160

²⁹ *Ibid.* 148-155

³⁰ *Ibid.* 20

Contextualisation

The aim of this chapter is to provide the information necessary to understand the larger context of democratisation in BiH. I will present an overview of the current political landscape and the situation of civil society, as well as an insight into recent expressions of citizen participation in BiH. Some themes that emerge as significant in this chapter will be further explored in the empirical chapter.

The state

Officially, BiH is a parliamentary democracy with an extensive power-sharing system based on consociationalism. The constitution is based on the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, commonly known as Dayton Agreement, the peace accord that ended the war lasting from 1992 to 1995, but also introduced a complex political system based on ethnic quotas guaranteeing representation of the three constituent people: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Due to serious flaws in its democratic system, BiH is ranked as a hybrid regime in the Democracy Index, with a score of 4.78 out of 10 points.³¹

The state which was established by the Dayton Agreement is divided into two entities, the Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), each with significant autonomy, as well as the self-governing Brčko District. The RS is centralised, while FBiH is further subdivided into ten cantons. Together with the municipalities, this creates four possible government levels: state, entity, cantonal (in FBiH), and municipal. The country relies on a complicated system of ethnic quotas, which requires proportional representation of the three constituent groups at every level. The State Presidency, for instance, has three members, with the chairmanship rotating every eight months. The multiple of many positions and institutions (e.g. one per ethnic group or per administrative level) leads to an overblown administrative system which includes fourteen prime ministers and over 180 ministers in a country of less than four million people. Each of the two entities has its own constitution, government, judicial system, police force, as well as tax, education, and legal system. In addition, each canton in FBiH also has its own constitution, government and legislative body. The strong decentralisation of the country means that state institutions

³¹ "Democracy Index 2017: Free Speech under Attack."

are weak and cover only few policy areas like trade and foreign affairs, while responsibilities for e.g. education, health or police lies with the entities (in the case of FBiH even with the cantons) to name but few details of the Bosnian legal system.³² The maintenance of this bloated public sector takes up 60 per cent of the annual state budget.³³

The economy is weak and foreign investment is hampered by the absence of a single market. Unemployment is high at over 27 per cent, with youth unemployment particularly drastic at almost 60 per cent. Corruption, especially in the political establishment, is pervasive but rarely persecuted, and if so only with weak penalties.³⁴ The independence of the judiciary is compromised as it is frequently put under political pressure. Politicians from RS have repeatedly chosen to ignore court decisions coming from the state level.³⁵ This practice has increasingly spilled over to FBiH, where the disregard of a Constitutional Court ruling on certain provisions of the election law could impede government formation following the general elections in October 2018. In Mostar, the implications of such a situation can be observed: Another unimplemented court decision on election law has left the city without local elections since 2008.³⁶

Given the catastrophic socio-economic situation and lack of respect for the rule of law, one could be surprised to find that for decades, voters have faithfully voted for the same ethno-nationalist parties that have not only led them into the war of the 1990s but have also since watched young citizens leave *en masse* whilst their country stagnates both economically and politically. With few exceptions, all parties in BiH identify with one of the three constituent people and justify their existence not with a specific policy agenda, but with the need to protect their group's collective rights against the others.³⁷ This pattern usually follows the line of Bosniak representatives advocating a stronger central state, Serb representatives advocating more independence for RS, and Croat representatives, as the smallest group, evoking suppression of Croat interests and, increasingly, advocating a separate Croat

³² Chiara Milan, "Reshaping Citizenship through Collective Action: Performative and Prefigurative Practices in the 2013–2014 Cycle of Contention in Bosnia & Herzegovina," *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 9 (2017). 1350

³³ "The Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Bosnia and Herzegovina," (Strasbourg: Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2018).

³⁴ Dino Jahić, "Nations in Transit 2017: Bosnia and Herzegovina," (Freedom House, 2017). 3

³⁵ *Ibid.* 12

³⁶ "53rd Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the UN," (Sarajevo: Office of the High Representative, 2018).

³⁷ Asim Mujkić and John Hulsey, "Explaining the Success of Nationalist Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Politicka misao* 47, no. 2 (2010). 144

entity.³⁸ The major ethno-nationalist parties enjoying strong electorate support include the three that were founded before the war, during the collapse of Yugoslavia: the SDA (Party of Democratic Action, Bosniak,), the HDZ BiH (Croatian Democratic Union of BiH), and the SDS (Serb Democratic Party).

A Freedom House report from 2017 analysing reform efforts comes to an alarming conclusion:

Given the weak economy, high indebtedness, and problems in every sector of the state, from education and health care to security, Bosnian politicians continued to deflect attention from their poor performance [...]. In order to retain their positions and benefits, they constantly provoke interethnic tensions and then present themselves as saviors of the state's various nations. However, each episode requires more tension and more danger than the previous one to make citizens turn to their leaders for protection. This creates an unbearable atmosphere, filled with nationalism and constant political disputes that block every important process and opportunity for improvement.³⁹

So far, local politicians have managed rather well to hold on to and consolidate their political power. Contrarily to Morlino's theory, the experience of violent conflict did not have a moderating effect on Bosnian political leaders, quite the opposite. Instrumentalising ethno-political strife to divert from other issues is a frequently used strategy on which I will elaborate further in the following chapters.

As a result of this political strategy, reform process in the country is painstakingly slow. Legislative output at state level, but also at entity level, is generally small. Legislative bodies often rely on unstable coalitions, become blocked by stalemates, or are boycotted by certain members, as the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina⁴⁰, Valentin Inzko, recently reported.⁴¹ Political will to find solutions for disagreement and negotiate compromises is generally low. The most ferociously held political debates in BiH almost exclusively concern questions of constitutional arrangements, political responsibilities, and territorial integrity,

³⁸ "Bosnia's Future," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2014). 5

³⁹ Jahić. 2

⁴⁰ The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina is a position created in the Dayton Agreement, charged with oversight of the civilian implementation of the agreement.

⁴¹ "52nd Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the UN," (Sarajevo: Office of the High Representative, 2017).

while seemingly harmless policy topics are often exploited for exactly these aspects. Left to suffer from the political bickering are the citizens, as illustrated for instance by the reform on the citizen identification number: following the Constitutional Court's ruling which found the existing law to be unconstitutional, the debate over adapting it turned into a more general debate regarding the decentralisation of the state. The Constitutional Court's given reform deadline passed with nothing more than political bickering having been achieved, leaving new-born babies without a personal identification number and, as a result, without the opportunity to receive a passport to seek life-saving medical treatment abroad.⁴²

At this point, it is important to note that the citizens of BiH share this evaluation of their own political elites. A survey conducted by the Sarajevo-based research centre Analitika reveals that over 77 per cent of the Bosnian population do not trust political parties.⁴³ The question imposes why such large dissatisfaction is not countered by action, and why such lack of reform progress is not reflected in election results.

The leadership

Looking into historical developments is always beneficial for understanding present-day tendencies, and this might hold even more true in the context of BiH, and the Balkan countries more generally. The crisis of democracy the country and the region find themselves in today is not the making of recent history, but the result of deep-rooted socio-economic patterns and leadership styles going back to the nineteenth century.

Mujanović finds distinctive similarities in how local elites in the Balkans have navigated the regime changes throughout time, from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian rule, to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and finally, the post-war states. He refers to this ability of clinging to political power as elastic authoritarianism, which he defines as “the process of persistent ideological mutation contrasted with static political and economic patterns, through which local elites have deliberately stunted social transformation processes in the Balkans since the nineteenth century”.⁴⁴ It is to the early nineteenth century that he tracks the origins of these local elites,

⁴² Chiara Milan, "Civil Society in Bosnia Herzegovina. From the Late '80s to Nowadays: A Historical Perspective," *Tiempo devorado: revista de historia actual* 4, no. 2 (2017). 286

⁴³ "Survey Results: The Trend of Citizens' Distrust in Political Parties and Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina Continues," (Sarajevo: Analitika - Center for Social Research, 2015).

⁴⁴ Mujanović. 2

when the Ottoman Empire began to lose its grip on the Balkan regions and, in response, handed over governance to powerful local figures which would be able to exercise better control over the area. It was those who could repress revolts most effectively that were needed, so the first generation of political local elites came overwhelmingly from the criminal milieu.⁴⁵ To consolidate their power, they learned to shift allegiances where necessary, and to preserve the patrimonial and clientelistic practices that successfully manoeuvred them through the upheavals of regime collapse. Nationalism was discovered as an effective substance on which to base social cohesion, because it divided the population not along their socio-economic status, but along their ethnicity and religion.⁴⁶ The threat emanating from the “other” ably obscured any socio-economic grievances. This pattern continues until today, as the 2017 Freedom House report reiterated in the contextualisation chapter.⁴⁷ Only recently this is beginning to be dismantled by the social movements I will discuss further below.

It is this system created by elastic authoritarianism which Mujanović identifies as the main reason that decades of Western efforts to support democratisation in BiH have been met with so little progress. He argues that as long as international actors rely on the willingness of the elites to resign from the kind of clientelistic behaviour that has served so many generations, they are simply feeding the system already in place. There is no incentive for those already in power to implement reforms, since to do so “for the sake of normative ideas of democratic legitimacy would be an unheard-act of political self-sabotage”.⁴⁸ After all, they have much to lose in power and money in exchange for an uncertain future. It is very likely that a more democratic system, by increasing accountability and transparency, would impede the patrimonial structures that give them access to financing and control over people. Employment in the state institutions, for example, is today “virtually impossible to secure without party affiliation”, sociologist Larisa Kurtović reports.⁴⁹ Furthermore, as examples of democratisation from other countries have illustrated, there is a real danger for politicians of coming under criminal investigation, as happened for instance to Croatia’s former prime minister Ivo Sanader, jailed on corruption charges.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ibid. 24

⁴⁶ Ibid. 21

⁴⁷ Jahić. 2

⁴⁸ Mujanović. 86

⁴⁹ Larisa Kurtović, “‘Who Sows Hunger, Reaps Rage’: On Protest, Indignation and Redistributive Justice in Post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea* 15, no. 4 (2015). 645

⁵⁰ Mujanović. 99

To maintain their power, the political establishment is using the regular fabrication of a political crisis as an effective mean to keep “both local populations and the international community in perpetual fear of renewed conflict, while simultaneously presenting their respective regimes as essential for peace”.⁵¹ Faced with such constant threat, maintaining peace and stability in the Western Balkans appears to have become a more important Western policy goal than pushing for reforms supporting a democratisation. Kurt Bassuener, a former advisor to BiH’s High Representative, comes to the same conclusion, and says that the focus on mere containment of the situation has also been damaging the credibility of Western actors with domestic partners and the general public in BiH.⁵² Local leaders are effectively able to keep the international community and their own population in a limbo. It is this line of argumentation that I am following with the focus of my thesis: change as a necessity to be led from the grassroots level, as a bottom-up rather than top-down process.

The civil society

Present-day civil society in BiH remains poorly developed. An EU-funded research project found that a “general assessment of the civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina corresponds to a general assessment of the BiH state and society – fragmented, institutionally very weak, financially unsustainable and greatly dependent on political and financial support of the international community”.⁵³ Heleen Touquet, a social science researcher, reports that many civil society groups, such as associations for war veterans, are organised along ethnic lines, despite their obviously overlapping interests.⁵⁴ Moreover, institutions in civil society are, to a certain degree, facing the same lack of trust that political institutions are experiencing. Most organisations are small with few or no full-time employees and very locally focused in their activities. Cooperation between different civil society organisations is still at an early stage, and networks are only beginning to take shape. In general, neither the political system nor the private sector is attaching great value to establishing partnerships with the civil

⁵¹ Ibid. 48

⁵² Kurt W. Bassuener, "Submission to the House of Lords' International Relations Committee," (2017). 4

⁵³ Goran Žeravčić, "Mapping Study of Civil Society Organizations in BiH," (EPRD Office for Economic Policy and Regional Development Ltd., 2016). 6

⁵⁴ Heleen Touquet, "Non-Ethnic Mobilisation in Deeply Divided Societies, the Case of the Sarajevo Protests," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 3 (2015). 388

society sector, hence also a chronic lack of social investment from the state side, and the absence of any advisory function of civil society actors to political actors.⁵⁵

Following the end of the war in 1995, a very large number of NGOs were set up in BiH by Western aid agencies, which were mostly seen as part of the “UN economy”⁵⁶ as they were often guided by whatever theme funding was available for, rather than the actual needs of the local population, Chiara Milan, a researcher on social movements, stresses.⁵⁷ Like in other post-communist countries, democratisation promotion from outside initially led to an almost elitist structure of Western-funded organisations that had little to do with domestic groups. A legacy of not having much trust or attachment to NGOs still prevails, a process only very gradually rectifying itself, as most NGOs still rely on international funds for survival and are hence seen as not objective.⁵⁸ Without a functioning civil society, a state is lacking a controlling mechanism to ensure accountability. This position can only to some degree be filled by international actors in the country, who can offer incentives and exert pressure trying to steer local leaders into a certain direction but are still only an artificial replacement of what should be a domestically owned effort.

Another explanation for the weakness of civil society is the low level of social capital, typical of a post-communist country. Interpersonal trust is low, hence trust in civic organisations is also low, further aggravated by the historical, communist tendencies of low trust towards voluntary organisations. Instead, people rely on personal networks in their immediate social surroundings. The more ethnic division is institutionalised and contact between individuals of the groups is discouraged through geographical division and, for example, the segregated schools in FBiH, the less potential there is for social capital to be built, again reinforcing the weakness of civil society in general.⁵⁹

Following Rustow’s and Kaplan’s arguments on the relation between national identity, a cohesive society and state legitimacy, BiH is an illustrative example of a fragile state, where identity is used as a divisive factor and the lack of social cohesion translates into low support for institutions. A fractured society and a weak state are unstable conditions for any political,

⁵⁵ Žeravčić. 6-7

⁵⁶ Heleen Touquet and Peter Vermeersch, "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Thinking Beyond Institution-Building," *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 14, no. 2 (2008). 283

⁵⁷ Milan, "Civil Society in Bosnia Herzegovina. From the Late '80s to Nowadays: A Historical Perspective." 279

⁵⁸ Milan, "Reshaping Citizenship through Collective Action: Performative and Prefigurative Practices in the 2013–2014 Cycle of Contention in Bosnia & Hercegovina." 1353

⁵⁹ Petričušić. 45

economic or social development, because all of them require cooperation and a functioning bureaucracy. In the constant conflict situation which is politically played out between different groups in society, short-term gains are prioritised over long-term investments, and the state is ravaged by corruption and lawlessness.

Arguably, BiH does not do well in the first area that Howard identifies as an important factor for lasting societal change: institutions are neither strong nor do they enjoy legitimacy. Since they were set up by the Dayton Agreement, a framework aiming at stopping warring factions and never intended to last decades, they were not modelled to reflect any elements of traditional governance of the country. Many even perceive the Dayton Agreement as imposed by foreign powers, which is not contributing to its perceived legitimacy among citizens. Howard's remaining two factors, an authoritative character of the institutions and time for adjustment, seem almost irrelevant in this context. As long as institutions are ravaged by corruption, more authority cannot solve their legitimacy problem, and time by itself is equally unlikely to produce societal change.

The citizens

In both entities of BiH, protesting is considered the most effective way to address problems, with 35 per cent in FBiH, and 31 per cent in RS saying so. Elections are considered the second most effective, with 23 per cent and 22 per cent respectively, followed by the establishment of citizen associations working on certain issues with 15 and 18 per cent respectively. The establishment of citizen associations eventually running for election was considered the most effective method by merely 4 per cent in FBiH, and 9 per cent in RS. In comparison to neighbouring Balkan countries, BiH shows the lowest level of trust in elections, and in turn the highest reliance on protests as a mean to solve problems, indicating low trust in institutions.⁶⁰ Based on these figures, I will look in some detail at previous protests movements as expressions of political participation. While protest is by far not the only expression of participation – or of civil society, for that matter – it is an illustrative example of the topics that mobilise people, and how this mobilisation is perceived and countered by other forces in the country.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 45

Protests tend to be small and locally concentrated, nationwide protesting is hardly seen. People mobilise mainly around socio-economic issues, questions concerning quality of life such as unemployment, safety, education or pensions.⁶¹ In 2008, for instance, protests erupted in Sarajevo following the murder of a teenage boy in a tram. For several months, demonstrations were held demanding the resignation of political leaders. Protests turned violent as rocks and paint were thrown at government buildings and police forces, and protests were repressed in response.⁶²

By far the strongest expression of citizen agency seen in post-war BiH, however, were the protests in 2013 and 2014. I will therefore look at them in greater detail. The protests in 2013 erupted when policy makers were unable to reach an agreement on reforming the state law on citizen identification numbers, causing a political deadlock that left new-born babies without passports and hence also without the ability to receive medical treatment abroad. The protests, nicknamed *bebolucija*, brought together hundreds, later thousands of citizens that occupied the square in front of the National Parliament for twenty-five days in June 2013. The blockage was entirely non-violent, and among the protestors were many families with young children, pushing prams past riot police forces. The protests received a lot of support throughout the country and the entire region, especially when one of the babies unable to receive medical treatment died from an infection. Citizens set a deadline for a new law to be passed before July 2013. On 1 July, with no progress achieved (as parliamentarians had been boycotting the parliamentary sessions in the besieged building, quoting security concerns) protestors announced the symbolic dismissal of their policymakers.⁶³ It was, above all, the indifference of the politicians towards what their citizens wanted to say that denoted “a new moral low” for the protestors.⁶⁴

Only few months later, in February 2014, citizens took to the streets again. This time, the spark ignited in Tuzla, a former industrial hub, where the privatisation of former state enterprises, through intransparent deals excluding staff and trade unions, frequently resulted in the stripping of factories of their assets, laying off workers, and eventual shutdown.⁶⁵ When local workers assembled to express their grievances about the authorities’ inertia,

⁶¹ Ibid. 44

⁶² Touquet, "Non-ethnic Mobilisation in Deeply Divided Societies, the Case of the Sarajevo Protests." 401

⁶³ Milan, "Reshaping Citizenship through Collective Action: Performative and Prefigurative Practices in the 2013–2014 Cycle of Contention in Bosnia & Hercegovina." 1352

⁶⁴ Mujanović. 146

⁶⁵ Kurtović. 643

widespread unemployment and corruption, the forceful reaction of the police force triggered a similar response on the side of the protestors, and the rally turned violent. In the following days, solidarity protests spread to several other cities around the country, and so did the violence. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Mostar, Zenica and Bihać, local government buildings or party offices were set on fire.⁶⁶ After a couple of days, as the violence faded and gave way to more peaceful street protest, a new form of citizen participation was established, the so-called *plenums*. These *plenums* were public meetings open to all citizens to attend and to speak in, with the aim of formulating demands to the political institutions. More than twenty of these assemblies were established in many cities of, primarily, FBiH.⁶⁷

The *plenums* can be understood as a historical reference: in the former Yugoslavia, a system of workers' self-management was an important element of participation in formulating industrial policy. They were, of course, not entirely free in their decisions as everything was still very much controlled by the central regime. However, the workers' self-management must be understood as an important ideological component of the Yugoslav experience.⁶⁸ Even though it was rather aspirational, the citizens of Yugoslavia had experience in the practice of direct democracy, an asset lost during its disintegration into the current successor states. Mujanović deplores that by not integrating forms of citizen participation in the Dayton Agreement, the peace brokers lost "a rudimentary but nevertheless important apparatus of accountability that could have immeasurably aided genuine democratic reform efforts".⁶⁹ Howard would support this point, as he believes that democratic institutions should be modelled on traditions of the country to be more readily accepted and supported.⁷⁰ The point is also in line with Morlino's hypothesis that any democratic experience can have a conducive effect on democratisation. Today, twenty-six years since the beginning of the war, it is questionable how much of this experience from Yugoslavian times remains, and since a large share of the Bosnian population is even too young to have made those experiences themselves, I am assuming it to be negligible.

The *plenums* in 2014 worked on the principles of direct democracy, with every participant having a vote, and no permanent hierarchical structures. They were marked in particular by

⁶⁶ Milan, "Civil Society in Bosnia Herzegovina. From the Late '80s to Nowadays: A Historical Perspective." 288

⁶⁷ Milan, "Reshaping Citizenship through Collective Action: Performative and Prefigurative Practices in the 2013–2014 Cycle of Contention in Bosnia & Herzegovina." 1355

⁶⁸ Mujanović. 55

⁶⁹ Ibid. 90

⁷⁰ Howard. 20

the total absence of any ethnic references, let alone quotas. In fact, as Mujanović points out, what was striking about the *plenums* was the similarities in what was debated across BiH, regardless of whether it took place in a monoethnic or in an ethnically mixed area. Five major demands emerged: resignation of government officials and the installation of an expert government, fighting corruption and increasing transparency, cutting salaries and ending special privileges of politicians and managers, increasing social welfare, and revoking and reviewing privatisation deals.⁷¹ Demands left out highly politicised and complex topics like constitutional change, and instead focused on socio-economic issues and those with a direct impact on people's lives. Mujanović concludes that "given the opportunity to engage in meaningful, grassroots, participatory political discourse, the citizens demonstrated that the constantly invoked 'national question' that supposedly defined BiH and the Western Balkans as a social space melted away".⁷² Asim Mujkić, a Bosnian sociologist, comes to the same conclusion, stressing that the *plenums* demonstrated that the true division of BiH does not occur along ethnic lines, but between the political elites and regular citizens.⁷³

By May 2014 the *plenums* ceased to exist in their form of citizen assemblies, partly caving under the political pressure put on them, and partly because severe floods hit the country and caused a national emergency. Once more, citizens put their elected representatives to shame, as it was civil society that organised the major share of the immediate relief efforts, significantly coordinated by local *plenums*.⁷⁴ Organising support across entity lines, the protestors and activists "again challenged the taboo of inter-ethnic solidarity",⁷⁵ once more stressing the main insight of the *plenum* movement. In a similar effort, in early 2018, Croat and Bosniak war veterans also joined forces, protesting for better social benefits and a unified register for all veterans.⁷⁶

At this point, we need to turn our attention to the RS. The fact that the vast majority of all protests in post-war BiH has been taking place in FBiH should not be understood as an absence of public discontent in RS. Rather, it is an expression of the local authorities' systematic oppression of any mobilisation, finds Cera Murtagh, researcher on political

⁷¹ Damir Karamehmedovic, "Citizen Demands," (Powerpoint Presentation, 2014).

⁷² Mujanović. 151

⁷³ Asim Mujkić, "In Search of a Democratic Counter-Power in Bosnia–Herzegovina," *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea* 15, no. 4 (2015). 635

⁷⁴ Milan, "Civil Society in Bosnia Herzegovina. From the Late '80s to Nowadays: A Historical Perspective." 289

⁷⁵ Mujanović. 154

⁷⁶ Mladen Ladic, "Bosnian Veterans Take Protest to Mps in Sarajevo," *BalkanInsight* (2018), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/protesting-war-veterans-in-sarajevo-04-17-2018>.

mobilisation.⁷⁷ When solidarity protests spread from Tuzla across the country in 2014 and people started to mobilise in Banja Luka and other cities in RS, they were immediately met with reinforced police presence in public squares and a high number of arrests before any protest could really form.⁷⁸ In 2015, the government even amended the legislation on public spaces to include the internet, essentially allowing them to restrict the expression of civil society actors online.⁷⁹

In previous years, RS had seen some, but no large-scale protests. In 2010, a small grassroots group protested for social justice issues, on a non-nationalist basis. A group in Prijedor has been holding an annual march since 2012 for the civilian war victims of their city, protesting their leaders' refusal to erect a monument of all victims, regardless of their ethnicity.⁸⁰ In 2013, shortly after protests erupted in Sarajevo over the citizen identification numbers, people in Banja Luka began to demonstrate for better university education system and equipment.⁸¹ While the concrete theme of this protest differed from the ones in FBiH, the socio-economic grievances they addressed both have their roots in the dysfunctionality of local governing structures, and both expressed a dissatisfaction with the quality of life in the country. The fact that both protest movements took place in June also suggests that it might have been more than a coincidence, and that one action inspired another. In 2014, even though protests were immediately suppressed, in Banja Luka and Prijedor groups of citizens nevertheless managed to formulate a list of demands to their local governments, as the *plenums* in FBiH did.⁸² In both entities, a majority of the population endorsed the demonstrations, with 98 per cent in FBiH and 78 per cent in RS, with a significant share even being benevolent towards the violence used.⁸³ As recently as March 2018, new protests erupted in Banja Luka over the mysterious death of a young man, with locals gathering each day for more than a month, accusing the authorities of not doing their job. They deplored the

⁷⁷ Cera Murtagh, "Civic Mobilization in Divided Societies and the Perils of Political Engagement: Bosnia and Herzegovina's Protest and Plenum Movement," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 22, no. 2 (2016). 163

⁷⁸ Mujanović. 148

⁷⁹ Jahić. 9

⁸⁰ Milan, "Civil Society in Bosnia Herzegovina. From the Late '80s to Nowadays: A Historical Perspective." 284-285

⁸¹ Judith Illerhues, "Soziale Proteste in Bosnien Und Herzegowina: Ein Mögliches Signal Zum Aufbruch," 2013. 4

⁸² Karamehmedovic.

⁸³ Mujanović. 148-149

apparent inconsistencies in the police's official investigations, with some suspecting it to be a cover up to protect a family member of a political leader.⁸⁴

While in comparison, expressions of protests remain less developed in RS, the evidence indicates that this is not for a lack of dissatisfaction. Indeed, in a survey exploring the reasons for not participating in civic actions in Balkan countries, only 9 per cent of respondents in RS answered that there was no need, in comparison to 21 per cent in FBiH.⁸⁵

Evaluation

Looking at the protest movements of the recent years provides a first insight into how political participation is perceived, and what this might mean for democratisation efforts. Obstacles were laid in the path of the movements by politicians who relied on their usual rhetoric repertoire to discredit the protests: they portrayed them as attempts of the other ethnic groups to marginalise their own, and blamed foreign powers for having instigated the protests.⁸⁶ Previous protest movements had experienced similar accusations, so the demonstrators in 2014 had past lessons to rely on: Just like during the 2008 protests, they consciously decided against cooperating with political parties. Parties were banned from attending *plenums*, politicians could merely attend in their capacity as private citizens.⁸⁷ Moreover, the movement refused any ambition to become involved in the political sphere itself, for example by establishing a new political party. A few years earlier, in 2006, some people from different civil society groups indeed decided to form their own, non-ethnic party, named Naša Stranka (meaning "our party").⁸⁸ The refusal of political ambitions and support from existing parties was not uncontested, as isolating the movement also deprived it of certain resources and opportunities.⁸⁹ However, since anything considered "political" is often immediately considered tainted and manipulated in BiH, leaving out topics of highly

⁸⁴ Danijel Kovacevic, "Protests over Youth's Death Rattle Bosnian Serb Entity," *BalkanInsight* (2018), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/protests-over-youth-s-death-rattle-bosnian-serb-entity-04-27-2018>.

⁸⁵ Petričušić. 49

⁸⁶ Mujanović. 151

⁸⁷ Murtagh. 158

⁸⁸ Heleen Touquet, "Multi-Ethnic Parties in Bosnia- Herzegovina: Naša Stranka and the Paradoxes of Postethnic Politics," *Studies In Ethnicity & Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (2011). 457

⁸⁹ Murtagh. 158-159

politicised nature, such as the recurring question of constitutional reform, was an important mean to sustain interest and support for the protests.⁹⁰

As opposed to 2008, 2014 protests also excluded any cooperation with non-governmental organisations (NGO), something that turned out to be a pitfall in the past, as many Bosnian NGOs are dependent on foreign grants and were thus susceptible to accusations of foreign interference.⁹¹ Protestors also experienced attempts of intimidation by authorities, a tactic which is significantly facilitated by the country's disproportionately high public sector employment. Considering the high unemployment rate, often it is entire families relying on the income provided by one family member working in the public sector, making these a prone target for threats. Murtagh reports, for instance, how Croat protestors in the city of Mostar were actively discouraged from participating in local protests by members of the ruling Croat party HDZ BiH.⁹² The clientelistic networks give the political elite leverage to actively discourage participation in protests.

The two requirements which Howard identified for a vibrant civil society, a supportive state and good living conditions, can hence not be regarded as fulfilled. Living conditions are impaired by high unemployment, political instability and widespread corruption. The state, as I have illustrated above, is not supportive of active expressions of citizenry, both in FBiH and RS. Protests are discredited and suppressed, and nationalism and ethnically divisive rhetoric is promoted.

Despite some existing expressions of citizen agency, the Bosnian system provides unfavourable conditions for mobilisation. The ethnic division of the country, which is institutionally reinforced in all aspects of life from politics, education and media outlets, to utility providers and public holidays,⁹³ makes non-ethnic mobilisation a difficult feat. The country's legacy of conflict further aggravates the situation, as we cannot ignore the impact of recent conflict and trauma in society. Each of the protest waves described above contributed to making the next one possible, to normalise protests in a post-conflict society where "the fear that massive gatherings will turn violent continues to discourage the population from adopting protests and street actions as tools of contention", Milan

⁹⁰ Milan, "Reshaping Citizenship through Collective Action: Performative and Prefigurative Practices in the 2013–2014 Cycle of Contention in Bosnia & Hercegovina." 1354

⁹¹ Touquet, "Non-ethnic Mobilisation in Deeply Divided Societies, the Case of the Sarajevo Protests." 403

⁹² Murtagh. 160

⁹³ Milan, "Reshaping Citizenship through Collective Action: Performative and Prefigurative Practices in the 2013–2014 Cycle of Contention in Bosnia & Hercegovina." 1351

explains.⁹⁴ The last, truly large-scale protests were held on 6 April 1992 in Sarajevo, when fifty thousand people protested against the looming war and snipers shot six of them, officially marking the beginning of the war in Bosnia.⁹⁵ With every new protest wave, something new and unthinkable is tried and moved into the realm of the possible, empowering and strengthening civil society actors. People are slowly regaining courage, or maybe indignation is winning over trauma. The practice of protesting has been reclaimed, including occupying public spaces, violent protests, citizen assemblies, making political demands, enforcing resignations, and forming civic organisations and political parties – even if in very limited quantities. Mujkić called the events of 2013 and 2014 “‘the end of the beginning’ of the ideological hegemony of ethno-nationalism in BiH”,⁹⁶ as the ruling elites failed to retain citizens within the imposed ethno-nationalist boundaries, and previously unseen expressions of civil society emerged.

The question that remains though, is what happens with the momentum of protests. “Social movements can set the agenda, but change has to come from the political system (unless it is overthrown in a revolution)”, as pointed out by Austrian professor on Southeast European politics Florian Bieber, who considers this one of the two big obstacles to overcome. The other one is the task of uniting a divided population behind a common goal.⁹⁷ While there have been some attempts at the latter, and it indeed seems possible to rally more people across the entire country for protests addressing socio-economic aspects, the former has a less favourable track record. Political parties which have attempted to escape the current ethno-nationalist system have had little electoral success, if one chooses to consider only quantitative measures as indicators of success. Naša Stranka’s voter base is overwhelmingly concentrated in few urban areas in FBiH. One that fared a little better in terms of election turnout is Demokratska fronta (DF), founded in 2013 by a former member of the social-democratic SDP, the successor party to the Bosnian branch of the Yugoslav communist party. Both DF and SDP have been part of governing coalitions in FBiH, albeit each at a debatable level of political success. Still, the problem that all these declared non-ethnic parties share is the strong bias in their voter base towards people of Bosniak background, which makes them susceptible to accusations of being secretly ethnically motivated, and

⁹⁴ Ibid. 1349

⁹⁵ Milan, "Civil Society in Bosnia Herzegovina. From the Late '80s to Nowadays: A Historical Perspective." 278

⁹⁶ Mujkić. 635

⁹⁷ Florian Bieber, "Is Change Coming to Bosnia? Reflections on Protests and Their Prospects," *SEER: Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, no. 1 (2013). 38

their non-representation in one half of the country, RS.⁹⁸ Even assuming that the non-national parties would perform better than their ethno-nationalist counterparts and embrace political participation, including protests (a hypothesis that should not be taken for granted), they still face significant obstacles to being elected as democratic representatives on a state basis.

An overwhelming majority of the population is disillusioned with and uninterested in politics. When asked in 2011, 44 per cent of respondents in RS said they do not like any of the running parties and have no one to vote for, with 36 per cent in FBiH feeling the same way. In FBiH, 56 per cent believed that elections cannot change anything, with 37 per cent in RS agreeing. Combined, this indicates a level of apathy towards politics unmatched in the Western Balkan countries.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Murtagh. 152

⁹⁹ Petričušić. 49

Methodology

Data collection

This research project is positioned within the field of European Studies, which is by nature an interdisciplinary field of study. Therefore, this thesis makes use of concepts and sources from a variety of disciplines, including political science, history, and sociology. Different theories surrounding the subject of democratisation are combined with an in-depth exploration of the political, historical and socio-cultural reality of BiH. The research findings are based on three semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with local actors in BiH in April 2018. Their answers are complemented by the notes from four less formal, non-recorded conversations held in Sarajevo in April 2018, as well as the minutes from one presentation attended in Sarajevo during the same month. The findings and conclusions are supported by an in-depth review of literature on the research topic, as well as a number of analytical articles and reports on the development of BiH.

My interview and conversation partners are representatives from academia, civil society, political parties, and international organisations. My interviewees were Asim Mujkić, a sociologist and professor at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Sarajevo, Zoran Ivančić, founder and President of the NGO Fondacija CPI (Public Interest Advocacy Center), and Predrag Kojović, President of the party Naša Stranka. My conversational partners were Marius Müller-Hennig from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Brigitte Heuel-Rolf from the German development agency GIZ, as well as one diplomat and a representative of an international organisation active in BiH, who both wished to remain anonymous. The public presentation I attended was given by Christiane Hohmann, Ambassador of Germany to BiH.

Organisational procedures had to be adhered to, which means that in some cases recording an interview was not possible, and an unformal conversation setting was chosen instead. This obviously constitutes a weakness as the notes from these meetings were written by me following the meetings and therefore are a product of selective memory, and not an exact transcript. Additionally, representatives from international organisations may be subject to restrictions in the political commentary they can give in public when speaking not as a private individual but in their official function. All respondents were offered to remain

anonymous, and were given the opportunity to review and modify my finished notes as they saw necessary.

Interviews were between one hour and ninety minutes in length. In certain cases, I provided some sample questions in advance to allow the interviewee to prepare for the type of questions I would be asking. Apart from this, the interviews were merely semi-structured, allowing me to fall back on a prepared set of questions but mostly giving the interviewee space to highlight points he found important to address. The reason I chose to remain relatively passive was to gain an insight into the overall view and understanding of BiH my interviewees had. Culture is a pervasive concept, and the political culture in BiH is an especially interesting concept to observe. Had I made my interview subjects answer to a rigid catalogue of questions, I would have forced my own understanding of cultural reality on them, and I could have missed the more intangible, implied expressions of how they expect a country to work, or people to behave. It also allowed my interviewees to provide some information about their personal background which is crucial in interpreting their views on certain issues.

One might consider it a weakness that much of my recorded and non-recorded interview data comes from sources of German nationality. I do believe, however, that their nationality has no significant impact on the validity of their observations. I was surprised to discover the level of skill with which not only those working within a political field, but also the average Bosnian citizen was able to analyse the shortcomings in the country. In the countless conversations I engaged in during my stay in Sarajevo in April 2018, I encountered a high degree of congruence in what people were conveying, regardless of their background.

Another weakness, which no research project is free of, is the question of validity and representativeness of the collected research data. Due to time constraints and greater difficulties in arranging interviews than I anticipated, I was left with less primary data than I had expected. Again, I do not believe that this significantly compromised my conclusions, as I have experienced BiH to be a country in which there is considerable agreement on what the problems are and what is causing them. Opinions divert on how to tackle these issue; however, this paper is merely analysing conditions and not proposing solutions.

Data analysis, scope and limitations

For the analysis, the interviews were transcribed and coded using the programme MAXQDA. This allowed for the identification of repetitive themes and points which I summarised in the findings section. The main points made by my respondents were furthermore connected to the insights previously gained in the theoretical and the contextualisation chapter, looking for convergence, differences and inconsistencies. In the conclusion, I am revisiting the five aspects of democratisation I identified at the beginning of this thesis. By looking at the performance of each factor in the context of BiH, I can draw final conclusions on the challenges for bottom-up democratisation in the country.

This paper is not doing justice to the complexity of the issue at hand. Many of the different aspects I touch upon would, in themselves, deserve the attention of a full research project. Due to time constraints, the scope of this thesis had to be limited both in breadth and in depth. While I will attempt to provide as complete of a picture as possible, because I believe it is necessary to provide an overview of the complexity of the topic, I will not be able to go into great detail for each aspect. Moreover, many of the aspects I came across during the research period are far more comprehensive than the existence or absence of certain institutions, policies or networks. The trauma and psychological impact that the war in the 1990s has had on the local population, as well as on generations born after the conflict, is largely being ignored in this paper. Researching how far-reaching the consequences of this are today would require research skills and expertise from fields I do not possess. I can only draw generalised conclusions about the fact that trauma does exist, and that the war did have an impact on the relationships between people, and between citizens and institutions. In the conversations I led in BiH however, I frequently experienced how extensive consequences have been and how many aspects of life have, in some way or another, been affected by this legacy.

One weakness of my research is that it was conducted in Sarajevo, with the city being the context in which I interpreted my observations. Sarajevo, like most capital cities, cannot be understood as an accurate depiction of the country's overall reality. The great irony of this paper on bottom-up democratisation is that it does not go all the way to the bottom. Had I not been limited by time constraints, it would have been advisable to conduct more research on local level across the entire country, to understand local challenges away from the capital. I am arguing for the importance of people in democratisation processes, yet my

understanding of these people is biased towards those located in urban centres, facing a different socio-economic reality.

Empirical results

Coming back to Bunce's prerequisites for democratic development, the evidence from BiH is a resounding defeat. The country can neither boast a strong civil society, nor did it have a clear break with its past. The main ethno-nationalist parties that have held power during the last two decades are the same that were already in power prior to the war. The country's elections cannot be regarded as competitive in the truest sense of the word, for reasons I will elaborate on further below. While state borders might be largely settled for now - besides some ongoing negotiations over the borderland to Serbia - another issue in this regard is more pressing: the grounds on which Croatian and Serbian territorial claims during the last war were justified would still be applicable today, if need be. Contestation of borders and belonging also comes from within BiH, with a referendum on the independence of RS still looming. As I have previously mentioned, commitment to the state is low, so there cannot be much commitment to state borders either. Even if this point's relevance has been discredited by disproving Rustow's theory which deals with the same issue, it remains an important point: If people refuse to recognise BiH as their state, they will require another incentive than patriotism to personally invest into the development of BiH. Bunce's next point on ethno-federalism could have been tailored specifically for BiH, as the Bosnian system is struggling with every shortcoming she predicts: weak social cohesion, an ethnically fragmented society, secessionism, a minority striving for stronger institutional representation, and a focus on collective rather than individual rights. The Parliament has no power, because there are fourteen of them: one each at state and at both entity levels, in the Brčko District, and in the ten cantons of FBiH. The larger the geographical region they represent, the more they are paralysed by political bickering. In short, the basic conditions for democratic development seem highly unfavourable.

In the following paragraphs, I will analyse the findings from my empirical research, keeping in mind the information gathered in the contextualisation chapter. I will begin by looking at political leadership and power, followed by different aspects concerning society, social fabric, and civic engagement.

Political leaders and sources of power

One main challenge for democratisation lies with the current political leaders of BiH, their political style, corrupt schemes, and unwillingness to change the status quo. They have, through a combination of different strategies based on manipulation, dispossession and coercion, managed to stay in power despite their poor performance in the last decades. They are skilfully camouflaging the lack of progress through nationalist propaganda and the periodic creation of political conflict between the three ethnic groups. This way, they create an atmosphere in which BiH is always on the verge of an escalating crisis that requires tending, becoming “each other’s *raison d’être*”.¹⁰⁰ International partners, too, are in this way duped into working together with the political leaders to prevent the escalation of the crises that they themselves have created. When politicians do cooperate, it is mostly in pursuit of short-term and personal objectives, and not to represent citizens interests or because of genuine interest in democratic development. Mujkić describes it as an “alliance in not doing anything, blaming each other”,¹⁰¹ an arrangement in which every side can blame the other for negative outcomes and nobody needs to take responsibility. Moreover, as Kojović points out, as elected leaders they enjoy the recognition of the international community and are supported with various resources. Unjustly so as he believes, as it is “difficult to do better when European leaders come here and take photo ops with the people we should remove from power”,¹⁰² giving them a legitimacy and status Kojović does not think they rightly deserve. Ivančić deplores that political leaders have become very skilled at their game, having received training from international organisations that essentially allows them to mask their ambition behind more professional speech and tactics.¹⁰³ While on paper, all political parties make commitments to implement reforms, they usually lack an actual strategy of implementation and many promises are made largely for the benefit of the international community, who is pressing for them.¹⁰⁴

A popular excuse used to justify the political paralysis is the Dayton Agreement, with Dayton having become a catchphrase to explain everything negative, from the complicated political system to high unemployment. Indeed, as the agreement was never supposed to function as a constitution for a sustained amount of time, it was merely meant to end the war and guide

¹⁰⁰ Zoran Ivančić, interview by Anne-Kathrin Schmidt, 20 April 2018. Appendix A, Line 220

¹⁰¹ Asim Mujkić, interview by Anne-Kathrin Schmidt, 20 April, 2018. Appendix A, Line 297-298

¹⁰² Predrag Kojović, interview by Anne-Kathrin Schmidt, 25 April, 2018. Appendix A, Line 268-270

¹⁰³ Ivančić. Line 80-84

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous representative of an international organisation, Non-recorded conversation, 4 April 2018. Appendix B, 1

a transition period.¹⁰⁵ Recently, Bill Clinton, the US President under whose auspices the agreement was signed, even expressed regret about the outcomes that Dayton has had until today.¹⁰⁶ Yet, as Ambassador Hohmann said, Dayton is not a valid excuse, it is not prescribing corruption and disrespect of the rule of law.¹⁰⁷ The political culture is solely the making of the ethno-nationalist politicians. Political will, if it were present, could fix the shortcomings of the original constitution, but there have been very few and no successful attempts in the past twenty-three years of negotiating constitutional reforms.

Ivančić asserts that, essentially, there is a very small group of people who all political decision-making in the country can be attributed to: they dictate the official party line and compliance with the party leadership is the custom, rather than internal democratic processes.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, one can doubt whether BiH is ruled according to mechanisms of representative democracy, or rather by (an elected) authoritarian elite. Ensuring party interests appears to have priority over representing the interests of the people that voted for this party. BiH is also experiencing a rise in foreign influences from other countries besides its neighbouring states, particularly from Russia and Turkey.¹⁰⁹ Contrary to the EU, who is demanding reform efforts under the conditionality principle, Russia and Turkey have been content to invest in BiH and other Balkan countries in exchange for something less cumbersome: cultural and political influence, invoking historical and religious ties of their countries to certain ethnicities in the Balkans.¹¹⁰

Political processes are undermined by corruption. “If you manage to achieve some change that means that it's not very important, that it doesn't affect somebody's deals and interests”, Ivančić says, explaining why far-reaching, transformative reforms are not realised.¹¹¹ In this regard, the EU accession process might prove to be a game-changer, as compliance with EU standards will require an extensive transformation of the country.¹¹² However, just how this will be realised with little to no political will in most parties to implement reforms is difficult

¹⁰⁵ Kojović. Line 234-236

¹⁰⁶ "Bill Clinton Received a Lifetime Achievement Award in Bosnia and Herzegovina: I Feel Terrible for Dayton Agreement, but We Ended the War in Bosnia with It," *Telegraf* (2018), <http://www.telegraf.rs/english/2956502-bill-clinton-received-a-lifetime-achievement-award-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-i-feel-terrible-for-dayton-agreement-but-we-ended-the-war-in-bosnia-with-it>.

¹⁰⁷ Christiane Hohmann, Presentation, 24 April 2018. Appendix B, 6

¹⁰⁸ Ivančić. Line 51-58

¹⁰⁹ Kojović. Line 493

¹¹⁰ Sanimir Resic, *Jugoslaviens Undergång: Krigen, Freden, Framtiden. 1991-2017* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2018). 391-413

¹¹¹ Ivančić. Line 94-95

¹¹² Anonymous diplomat, Appendix B, 9

to imagine. Ivančić asserts that, despite the politicians' public commitment to EU accession, "it's not in their interest to enter [...] because these technical, financial standards that will come with EU will prevent them from a lot of revenue and generating activities that they have".¹¹³ Privatisation of state companies or setting up of public-private partnerships is one strategy taken by international actors in the attempt to deprive corrupt leaders of their sources, to counter processes of dispossession.¹¹⁴

The patronage networks of the political elites play a crucial role in securing their existence. As long as they continue to function, the politicians are unlikely to change their behaviour, undermining all otherwise directed efforts. One key factor that has kept the current political elites in BiH in power for the past two decades is the public sector employment structures. As I have mentioned before, a job in the public sector is difficult to secure without party affiliation or some other type of personal contact to a power holder. Conversely, this provides the people controlling access to such positions with significant coercive power over the employed, as they can force compliance or else dismiss them. As Kurtović points out, welfare recipients like pensioners or war veterans, too, are potentially exposed to state arbitrariness.¹¹⁵ However, a large share of those working in the public sector or in some other way dependent on a benign state realise that the keeping of the status quo is very much in their interest, and political changes would produce significant uncertainty at the very least. They often readily refrain from any action that would challenge the political structures that they owe their job or benefits to, such as protesting or supporting a political party that cannot offer them the same personal short-term gains. In a country like BiH, a job is a precious good, and the public sector pays well, often better than the private sector.¹¹⁶ This is an argument I encountered again and again throughout my research, as a key reason why there is not more outrage over the country's condition. Mujkić estimated that "[a]pproximately 50 per cent of the people of this country vote. And almost 50 per cent of these people actually are, in some way, connected to the elites".¹¹⁷ The premise, thus, is that those who vote in elections are those who own their employment to a certain party, or are promised employment or other benefits by one of the parties running. It is even likely that large-scale protests will not break out in BiH unless public salaries cannot be paid out anymore, and a

¹¹³ Ivančić. Line 119-121

¹¹⁴ Anonymous diplomat, Appendix B, 9

¹¹⁵ Kurtović. 645-646

¹¹⁶ Anonymous representative of an international organisation, Appendix B, 1

¹¹⁷ Mujkić. Line 405-407

majority would lose the kind of reliable comfort they enjoyed so far.¹¹⁸ As long as the public sector remains the biggest employment sector in the country, with few (well-paid) alternatives in the private sector, and as long as political elites retain patronage over public sector employment, they will continue to have significant power in forcing compliant behaviour from their citizens.

Citizen responses

The previous point is also connected to the problem of high emigration in BiH, especially of young, educated people in search of better opportunities elsewhere, both in terms of employment and general quality of life. When Mujkić says that 50 per cent of citizens have a reason to invest into the status quo, he is also saying that the other 50 per cent are the ones that could form the critical mass needed to demand changes. He warns, “[t]he less people we have, the less chances that we can organise and become a serious opposition or threat to our regimes”.¹¹⁹ Both Ivančić and Mujkić said that the country is literally racing against time. It is also not only the young or those unable to find a job who are leaving, but also older, employed people, seeking a better quality of life, “people who are just fed up with this stagnation and bad social services and nothing for kids”.¹²⁰ Many people are profoundly disappointed with the slow speed at which changes are taking place, and see little hope for improvement. A recent World Bank report calculated that it would take the Western Balkan countries up to sixty years to reach the average EU income levels, should growth continue at the rate seen in the past two decades.¹²¹ Emigration is also rooted in more complex considerations, though, extending beyond economic reasons: people have had enough of the primitivism that is holding their country captive, with nationalistic governance styles and the regime of corrupt patronage networks.¹²² However, as long as emigration rather than protest is the prevalent reaction to the dire socio-economic and political situation, this is working to the benefit of political elites, because fewer people will remain to challenge their practices. Mujkić notes “that’s my concern about the possibility of change. Literally we are

¹¹⁸ Anonymous representative of an international organisation, Appendix B, 1

¹¹⁹ Mujkić. Line 401-402

¹²⁰ Ivančić. Line 250-251

¹²¹ "Western Balkans Need Faster Growth to Catch up with European Union, Says World Bank," news release, 30 November, 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/11/30/western-balkans-need-faster-growth-to-catch-up-with-european-union-says-world-bank>.

¹²² Alida Vračić, "The Way Back: Brain Drain and Prosperity in the Western Balkans," (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). 8

crumbling down, melting away. Not only people in Bosnia but in the region. Which is good for the dominant structures, political structures...”.¹²³ The country’s potential for transformative action seems to shrink with every day it is not seeing any.

Already now, many of my respondents seemed doubtful about the prospect of new protests springing up. The explanations for this are manifold. My respondent from the GIZ pointed out how in post-war countries, people frequently retreat from society and focus very strongly on their immediate social circle of family and friends, concerned more with existential questions of survival and wellbeing rather than abstract notions of state-building or constitutional reform.¹²⁴ While this is a pattern that can certainly be detected in BiH, it does not necessarily foreclose political participation or protest in general. Rather it steers action to certain areas, those that have the most direct impact on people’s lives: questions of social justice, unemployment, poverty, safety, as well as questions of corruption and mismanagement. Ivančić too is doubtful about new protests, pointing to the poor socio-economic situation of people. This is an argument in line with the civic voluntarism model which looks at resources, willingness and networks. Participation is discouraged by non-material limits like the lack of civic education on politics,¹²⁵ and an incomplete understanding of democracy,¹²⁶ but also by the sheer fact that “people who are poor they struggle to survive and they don’t have time or energy to engage in movements or participating in dialogue”.¹²⁷ While many do not have the resources to become active, many also do not have the will to do so. The dislike of the political sphere in the general public is strong; it is regarded as toxic.¹²⁸ Trust in political institutions or political actors is low, and as Ivančić stated, “[t]here are very few people that want to change something that dare to go to this swamp”.¹²⁹ Whereas elsewhere, an interest in politics might be enough to become involved, the political culture in BiH is an additional obstacle to overcome, not only in terms of personal resilience but also because a person’s social environment may actively advise against becoming involved. In short, there are restrictions on the socio-economic resources, the psychological engagement and, as I have previously argued, also on the membership in social networks which would encourage citizen participation, such as civil society

¹²³ Mujkić. Line 430-432

¹²⁴ Brigitte Heuel-Rolf, Non-recorded conversation, 23 April 2018. Appendix B, 4

¹²⁵ Anonymous representative of an international organisation, Appendix B, 1

¹²⁶ Anonymous diplomat, Appendix B, 9

¹²⁷ Ivančić. Line 49-50

¹²⁸ Anonymous representative of an international organisation, Appendix B, 1

¹²⁹ Ivančić. Line 67

organisations. By themselves, the conditions in BiH are already disadvantageous towards civic engagement, a situation further aggravated by the efforts of political leaders to actively discourage such expressions.

For those who do engage, seeing that their efforts remain without consequences can be crushing. After all the enthusiasm that marked the periods in which citizens united across ethnicities and defied all expectations of the apathetic Bosnian society, the ensuing feeling of disappointment about efforts not leading to substantial results and the situation returning to as it was before weighted even heavier. This is a point that I frequently encountered throughout my research, and was emphasised by Mujkić and my respondent from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.¹³⁰ This despair could serve as a further discouragement to future engagement. In her Master thesis, Sarah Freeman-Woolpert confirmed the magnitude of precisely this demoralisation and even linked it to an increased likelihood of emigration, in search of a place more respectful of people's rights and their engagement.¹³¹ Political apathy already has a strong foothold in BiH.

At the same time, politics pervades every sphere of life, and political leaders constantly exert influence on citizens, a point that Mujkić picked up upon when he spoke about the 2014 protests: "For a second, at least, this dominant nationalistic mobilisational discourse stopped. They couldn't mobilise anybody with this. It was panic for the political elites".¹³² There are few instances in which political leaders lose this kind of control they have over steering the population's actions, or rather their non-actions. By keeping the society fragmented along ethnic lines, for example in public service provision, education, church, unions, and of course the geographic division in many places, a "them versus us" kind of mindset is perpetuated, and people receive constant reminders over where their allegiances should lie. This is supported by the degree of influence on information channels and education which political leaders have through their power in the cantons and entities. Another implication of the clientelistic networks is that favourable representation in public media and public education can be secured through installing a management sympathetic towards the ruling party. During the protests, for instance, the political elite was quick to discredit the events as being directed against their own ethnic group, turning it into a threat to group survival. They

¹³⁰ Mujkić. Line 44; and Marius Müller-Hennig, Non-recorded conversation, 6 April 2018. Appendix B, 2

¹³¹ Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, "(De)Construction of the Protester: The Role of Public Narratives in the Development of Contestatory Agency in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina" (Master thesis, University of Sarajevo, 2017).

¹³² Mujkić. Line 466-468

were supported by media coverage that was “either malicious or sensationalist or very ideologically instructed”,¹³³ focusing on the cases of vandalism, and circulating conspiracy theories and false information, such as “many busses of Tuzla students coming with arms [to Republika Srpska]”.¹³⁴ The protests were recognised as a threat to the status quo and treated as such. Civil society organisations exposing, for instance, government inefficiency, are also frequently targeted by media and the authorities, as Ivančić and his organisation have experienced.¹³⁵

Political control over the media has caused many journalists to subject themselves to self-censorship, as acknowledged by Ambassador Hohmann,¹³⁶ as to not endanger their sources of funding, avoid harassment and lawsuits, and protect their employment positions and personal safety.¹³⁷ Schools and universities are similarly influenced by governing party interests, as both Ivančić and Mujkić assert.¹³⁸ It is this line of reasoning Mujkić is following when he argues that “we cannot say that our elections are actually [a] true representation of people’s desires, needs”, because from a young age onwards, people are not free of scaremongering, ethno-nationalist rhetoric, coercion, and conspiracy theories perpetuated by the media, hence they are not free in their decisions.¹³⁹ This is also what I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, when discussing Bunce’s factors for democratic development. The official requirements for free elections are met, and fundamental freedoms are mostly respected: candidates campaign freely, citizens can vote without obstructions, and gender quotas are respected, as the OSCE reports. However, the same document also points to the mistrust towards institutions, to the inflammatory use of language in campaigns, and ethnic bias in media coverage. While there are no gross violations of democratic principles, BiH still does not live up to the ideals of democratic elections.¹⁴⁰

One point my respondents did not agree on concerns their views on future protests. While Mujkić believes that change needs to come from the street, from a social movement working

¹³³ Ibid. Line 111-112

¹³⁴ Ibid. Line 68

¹³⁵ Ivančić. Line 26

¹³⁶ Hohmann. Appendix B, 5

¹³⁷ "Media Sustainability Index 2017: The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia," (Washington, DC: IREX, 2017). 17-20

¹³⁸ Ivančić. Line 275-294; and Mujkić. Line 186-189

¹³⁹ Mujkić. Line 189-190

¹⁴⁰ "Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina Held in Competitive Environment, but Inter-Ethnic Divide and Mistrust Remain Key Factors, International Observers Say," news release, 13 October, 2014, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bih/125488>.

hand in hand with a separate grouping striving for political representation,¹⁴¹ both Ivančić and Kojović were critical of these kind of uprisings. Ivančić is wary of the destructive potential of protests but also of how easily they can be exploited in ethno-nationalist terms,¹⁴² and Kojović of protests being merely destructive, but not constructive in terms of offering solutions.¹⁴³ Indeed, the vandalism that accompanied the 2014 protests could have easily escalated further, as Mujkić claims, as enraged protestors debated setting fire to the neighbourhood in which many political leaders have their estates.¹⁴⁴ Ivančić admits that the burning of government buildings in 2014 did produce the wanted effect, but he is critical of the way mass protests might develop, saying “the psychology of a mob never brought anything good”,¹⁴⁵ and that the anger against the government is difficult to contain once it is allowed to surface.¹⁴⁶

Despite these shortcomings, there is agreement concerning the biggest merit of protests being their positive effect on social cohesion and shared vision among those participating: “I think that every wave of citizen protests helps people to recognise each other, [...] to come out as lunatics that want to change something here. As people who didn't give up. Or who thinks [*sic*] that human rights or people lives are priority [...] compared to quiet life of ordinary citizens”,¹⁴⁷ Ivančić explains, and Mujkić adds that “there was [an] important change in the mindset”.¹⁴⁸ Participating in protests, or in any other expression of active citizenship for that matter, strengthens social capital as it increases the perception of a collective identity. Protestors realised their shared interests and shared fate as citizens of BiH, showing solidarity and organising support across ethnic and entity lines. Even Kojović, who does not approve of the path the 2014 protests took, expressed that, in the beginning, “I was hoping that it could lead to, you know, to something...cathartic”,¹⁴⁹ with people recognising their similarities, and their potential to create an opposition to the mismanagement of the country.

¹⁴¹ Mujkić. Line 448-454

¹⁴² Ivančić. Line 215-218

¹⁴³ Kojović. Line 193-194

¹⁴⁴ Mujkić. Line 497-503

¹⁴⁵ Ivančić. Line 202-203

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Line 202-216

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Line 182-185

¹⁴⁸ Mujkić. Line 39

¹⁴⁹ Kojović. Line 181-182

The social fabric

The fact that BiH has serious deficiencies in the field of social capital and social cohesion, as well as in collective identity and a shared vision, is another major challenge to democratisation. All of these factors are both a requirement for developing a strong civil society, and also an expression of such. Without a strong civil society, democracy cannot function – something that all my respondents agreed upon. The lack of civic education is an obstacle in this, because with a lack of understanding comes a lack of interest in becoming involved in it,¹⁵⁰ especially in a country like BiH, where nationalist propaganda and corruption have discredited the political sphere. “[T]hroughout education children are empowered to be active citizens, and it's not happening here”, Ivančić deplors.¹⁵¹ The education system is exactly as politicised and ethnically divided as most other aspects of life in BiH, and an extension of the attempt to contain action so that current structures need not to change, Ivančić believes. He suspects that the fragmentation of education along ethnic lines is “not by chance, it's a part of master plan of dividing people permanently to prevent socialising between children, to teach them different things”.¹⁵² This strategy seems to work, so far, as “today, Mostar, Sarajevo and Banja Luka are further apart than they were in ‘93. Psychologically, emotionally”,¹⁵³ Kojović finds, referring to the main cities representing each of the ethnic groups, and stressing the psychological division that follows the geographical one. When there is no contact between groups, it is easier for scaremongering and divisive rhetoric to take hold.

Generally, there is also little awareness of the extensive rights that living in a democracy entails; both citizens and politicians, for example, often seem unaware of the roles either side should fulfil in a representative democracy.¹⁵⁴ Accountability, however, becomes secondary in light of the threat emanating from the ethnic “other”. Any weakening of the own position could be exploited by the other groups. There is no trust basis on which these reflexes could be mitigated, and politicians have given people little reason to believe that they would not capitalise on their opponent’s weakness. This low level of trust, into those steering the country but also into other parts of society, and narratives of imminence regularly vivified by politicians and media, have not contributed to the development of social

¹⁵⁰ Anonymous representative of an international organisation, Appendix B, 1

¹⁵¹ Ivančić. Line 284

¹⁵² Ibid. Line 315

¹⁵³ Kojović. Line 529-530

¹⁵⁴ Anonymous diplomat, Appendix B, 9

cohesion. Besides momentary expressions of solidarity such as during the *plenum* movement, there is almost no recognition of belonging to the same nation and struggling with the same issues that could then lead to a transcending effort of demanding better governing of the country. The absence of an organised citizenry is what enables political leaders to continue in that same manner. Aggravating the situation is that the legitimacy of the state and its institutions remains challenged, not just by ordinary citizens but all the way up the highest political levels. The most prominent example is the President of RS, Milorad Dodik, who regularly denies the sovereignty of BiH.¹⁵⁵ With such fundamental disagreement on the state on the political level, what trickles down to the citizens cannot be expected to have a harmonising and unifying effect.

One aspect that remains an obstacle to the development of a collective identity is the interpretation of history. Both my respondents from the GIZ and the German Embassy stressed this point, linking it also to the way German society faced its Fascist past.¹⁵⁶ In BiH, however, the dominant narratives still revolve around the own side's victimhood and the other side's fault, rather than admissions of wrongdoing and making amends. Convicted war criminals are still glorified within all three groups and on all political levels, just recently illustrated by respective comments from the Croat member of the State Presidency, Dragan Čović.¹⁵⁷ History continues to be a dividing factor in society, which makes rapprochement a difficult task. The ethnically divided schools are teaching different versions of history to their students, reinforcing cleavages.

The question of history cannot be dealt with exclusively nationally, however. It concerns Croatia and Serbia too, both because of their involvement in the conflict and because of the strong influence they still have on their respective *protégé* groups in BiH. Changes in BiH could not take a strong hold as long as the reverse were promoted by these two countries. The same holds true for the prevalence of ethno-nationalism, "unless we have [an] anti-nationalist platform or network on regional level, and I mean at least Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, I don't think the dominant nationalistic paradigm will ever disappear", Mujkić notes.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ "53rd Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the UN."

¹⁵⁶ Heuel-Rolf. Appendix B, 4; and Christiane Hohmann, 24 April 2018. Appendix B, 7

¹⁵⁷ "53rd Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the UN."

¹⁵⁸ Mujkić. Line 137-139

The opposition

With all these points made, I want to make clear that, like my respondents, there are many people in BiH who are very aware of the kind of games their politicians are playing. The problem is less the mindless following of what political leaders are preaching, but more the lack of a broad, determined opposition represented by a geographic and ethnic diversity. Due to reasons outlined above, still too few people are standing up to the problematic system in place.¹⁵⁹

A lot of hope is placed on the youth, on those born after the war, hoping they will lead the way to changes. While there are young people active in organisations, in student unions, and participating in protests,¹⁶⁰ emigration does not subside and the waves of disillusionment following each unsuccessful action is a test to people's resilience. The anonymous diplomat I spoke to sees two main challenges for the young: to become active in society and politics, and to break out of the patterns that have been drummed into them during their upbringing.¹⁶¹

Certainly, not all politicians are corrupt and lacking the will for political change. They are, however, up against a system in which, too frequently, "the entire surrounding, institutional design, political culture, regional context moulded them into [the] nationalist setup of thinking",¹⁶² and as long as there is no critical mass, individual people will not be able to accomplish large-scale changes in the system. Naša Stranka is one example of a political party refusing to play by the same rules as the ethno-nationalist parties, but they are struggling every day with the disadvantages position this puts them in, as they do not control media themselves and have no significant money-generating schemes. They rightly identify the country's political tone as a main problem, and hence see themselves as having "sort of an educational role here, also to other parties and to the voters in changing the kind of rhetoric and wording and all that kind of stuff".¹⁶³ As an outsider, it is often difficult to comprehend how Bosnian political leaders get away with their inflammatory language, which would be unimaginable in many other European countries. However, the impact of political culture on a society cannot be underestimated and BiH is not alone in this. The United States and United Kingdom also provide illustrative examples of how changes in the political tone impact people's behaviour and their tolerance for a certain kind of rhetoric.

¹⁵⁹ Hohmann. Appendix B, 7

¹⁶⁰ Anonymous representative of an international organisation, Appendix B, 1

¹⁶¹ Anonymous diplomat, Appendix B, 10

¹⁶² Mujkić. Line 221-222

¹⁶³ Kojović. Line 17-18

Having a counterforce that serves as a reminder that the status quo is, in fact, not enforced by nature is critical. As Kojović summarised, “I think every person has the same capacity for evil and good, and it all depends [on] which wolf are you feeding. And we are unfortunate to have [a] government for the last thirty years [...] that brings the worst out of us”.¹⁶⁴ Being exposed to the constant flow of nationalist rhetoric and the disastrous political performance, people will either endorse the argumentation of political leaders and seek all blame in some other group, or they yield to disgust and attempt to isolate themselves from the political sphere as much as possible to. Only few will consciously expose themselves to what they disagree with time and time again, and continue to openly express their objection.

The perceived toxicity of the political sphere also has implications for the work of civil society organisations. Since everything in BiH is interpreted in terms of political implications, civil society organisations are constrained by having to constantly assure their neutrality. “If you claim that you are neutral and you are not then you raise suspicion for all civil society”,¹⁶⁵ Ivančić says, stressing how it is made easier for authorities or media to discredit an organisation over suspected agency. This puts significant constrictions on the work of such organisations, which are by default frequently doing work of political nature, yet tend to distance themselves from any political actor.¹⁶⁶ They also struggle financially and in terms of sustainability, because grants are rarely guaranteed over a longer period of time, which makes the realisation of long-term projects challenging. Also, most funding opportunities come from foreign sources, which again provides an easy ground for allegations of hidden agendas. Moreover, donors may be overly focused on topics that are trending politically at that moment, or on wanting to experiment with a novel approach.¹⁶⁷ These kind of considerations come at the expense of much-needed, sustainable and credible civil society work.

The lack of trust in political institutions and leaders, and the challenging of their legitimacy also illustrates the importance of democratisation being a bottom-up exercise. This is not even just a local phenomenon: democracy is in crisis not only in the Balkans, but in several EU member states too, as well as in other parts of the world. Political elites are discredited,

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Line 97-99

¹⁶⁵ Ivančić. Line 45-46

¹⁶⁶ Müller-Hennig. Appendix B, 3

¹⁶⁷ Ivančić. Line 10-13

populism is on the rise, and anti-democratic tendencies grow.¹⁶⁸ In these situations, top-down approaches are not likely to restore trust or increase legitimacy. Popular discontent should be countered by empowering citizens to participate and exercise more control over their fate. Bottom-up processes are the only credible solution to a crisis of political legitimacy and trust, both in BiH and beyond.

¹⁶⁸ Jan Marinus Wiersma, "An Introduction: The State of Democracy in Europe: Alarming Developments in New and Old Member States," in *Problems of Representative Democracy in Europe: A Challenge for Progressives*, ed. Jan Marinus Wiersma, Ernst Stetter and Sebastian Schublach (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Van Genneep BV, 2014).

Conclusion

In summarising all previous points, this section aims to answer the research question: what are the challenges for bottom-up democratisation in BiH? Returning to the five aspects of democratisation identified at the beginning of this paper, we will look at each point individually.

Electoral process and pluralism: The state capture by few powerful people has a negative influence on the competitiveness of elections. The coercive means that governing parties possess to influence citizens in their voting decisions imply that elections are not entirely free. Furthermore, the complex system of ethnic quotas for specific positions puts significant restrictions on the concept of equal opportunity. Due to the way the Bosnian system works, citizens are not guided in their voting behaviour by who is best representing their interests as an individual. Instead, the focus is on collective interests, with the collective not being based on socio-economic or class concerns, but on ethnic origin.

Functioning of government: The governing structures of BiH are largely dysfunctional. Legislative output is low due to frequent boycotts and a general unwillingness to negotiate political compromises. The fabrication of interethnic conflicts is used as a smokescreen, obscuring the lack of political progress. Political short-term gains are prioritised over long-term development. Political leaders frequently challenge the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. Foreign countries have a growing influence on domestic politics and on certain shares of the population. With power being concentrated in the hands of very few political leaders, decision-making is moved away from the individuals elected as the representatives of citizen interests. Civil servants are not free of political influence. Corruption is all-encompassing, and trust in political institutions, political leaders and political parties is very low.

Civil liberties: The fact that citizens are granted rights only on the basis of their ethnic belonging and not on an individual basis is discriminatory. Certain rights are granted only in case of identification as one of the three constituent people, as for instance the right to be elected for a high political position in the state. While officially, the basic freedoms of speech, assembly and so forth are guaranteed, the government indirectly curtails these rights by complicating the process of obtaining such necessities as funding and permits. The media are not contributing to a free, critical debate in society. They are under political influence

and spread biased information, while journalists often face political pressure and revert to self-censorship.

Political culture: Political culture is in a poor state. The operating norms of the political sphere are the use of inflammatory language towards other individuals or ethnic groups, threats, accusations, and an unwillingness to compromise. The state representatives are openly portraying a low level of respect for democratic principles and the rule of law. Both among politicians and large shares of society, there is no consensus on the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. This environment is not conducive to encourage interest or engagement in politics among citizens. The frustration with the political culture and the constraints on civic rights is a key reason for high emigration, a factor further undermining the democratisation potential.

Political participation: Despite some existing initiatives working on encouraging participation, the political system is actively discouraging it. Civil society organisations are poorly supported in their work by the state, and there is no synergy between the two sides. Protests are facing smear campaigns in the media and by political leaders. The political culture results in a general unwillingness to engage in politics, which means protest movements often lack a credible political partner who can translate the momentum of protests into political action. People do not see any compelling reason to vote except to gain personal benefits from the governing administration. The lack of a strong civil society acting as a controlling force of politicians means that corrupt networks continue to rule, with all state power concentrated in the hands of a small group of people. Political participation is facing serious challenges, and it is uncertain whether in the future, the continued impasse and inertia will produce new protest, or lead to even stronger levels of political apathy.

This analysis has produced clear evidence that democratisation is facing a multitude of challenges in BiH, with the most pressing points concentrated in the field of functioning of government, political culture and political participation. As long as the same beneficiaries of the current system remain in political power, they will do what they can to preserve their privileges and the structures in which these are embedded. With their divisive rhetoric, they attempt to keep the society hostage in mutual mistrust. They can only be credibly countered by a civil society which realises its common identity and shared fate, that unites and demands its rights, and takes transformative actions across ethnic lines. The key to democratisation is indeed rooted in the bottom, and a strong civil society would be the necessary basis from

which all other problems can be addressed. In this point, I agree with Mujanović's hypothesis: the development of a strong civil society would have the power to cause profound changes in the entire country, and it would provide the cure to the democratic shortcomings. In the current situation, however, low social capital and social cohesion means people have no social trust basis on which to cooperate with others and are averse to risk-taking. Low trust in political institutions and a lack of interest in politics foster apathy, feelings of powerlessness and drive emigration from the country, while also depriving the political landscape of new, motivated actors.

Despite all odds that seem to work against BiH, the message of this paper is not one of pessimism. I have no intention of joining the chorus of the impossibility of change that is too pervasive in the Balkan countries. On the contrary, I hope to have illustrated that the problems BiH is facing are rooted in particular conditions, and that these conditions can be changed. To come back to the metaphor of the gear wheels: the system might be stuck, but that does not mean that every single wheel is broken. Instead, by just fixing some of them, movement might return and it may, in turn, set in motion a series of entirely unexpected developments. These conclusions should serve as an orientation for the priorities of international and domestic actors working in the country, specifically for the EU in the realisation of the Western Balkans Strategy.

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Appendix A: **Interviews**



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Appendix A: **Interviews**

Interview with Zoran Ivančić (ZI) conducted by Anne-Kathrin Schmidt (AS) CPI Fondacija, 20 April 2018, Sarajevo

1 AS: So maybe we can just start with you telling me what you think are the biggest challenges
2 for your work that you're doing here as an organisation.

3 ZI: So we are working already for eight or nine years...nine years. And our main challenge,
4 or problem, I prefer using the word problem than challenge, it's sustainability. We rarely
5 have more than one year in advance of secured financing for our activities, so... We really
6 struggle in fundraising, writing proposals, getting support...reporting on this administrative
7 work and fundraising. So, sustainability and I think it's not only for us, it's for most of NGOs.
8 And as in other countries it's not always that organisations that do most of work or best work
9 or most significant work that are getting support but those that are best equipped for
10 administration. So, if you know the lingo, if you follow what hot topic, you know, you can
11 get much more support than if you're concentrated on work and output, or outcomes. Another
12 problem is that disruptive is here in start-up companies and also NGO, that they very often
13 they want something new, something that nobody did before or at least nobody did before
14 in Bosnia. And since we are focused on strategic things like long-term public finance
15 situation, that's another reason why it's difficult to get support. It's not so sexy, you know,
16 hard labour is not so sexy in terms of donors.

17 AS: And that's an argument I have heard a lot. That a lot of people don't trust NGOs because
18 they say they are only after funding. They are not looking at what is needed but looking at
19 what they can get funding for.

20 ZI: Yeah, I think we have really good feeling of what needs to be done and we know how to
21 do that, how to exploit this with donors.

22 AS: Do you feel like, like, if you look at Bosnia and Herzegovina from the outside often
23 people say civil society is very weak, there is not a lot of opportunity to... to change
24 something, to educate people on certain topics because they also have state propaganda
25 coming from the other side...

26 ZI: Yeah it's difficult. We are often defamated. Is that a word? By media and by the
27 authorities, as the foreign agents. But the truth is that our government is foreign agent. They
28 are being financed by foreign credits, by foreign governments, much more than we are. But

29 also many members of so-called civil society are also not contributing to our credibility, our
30 reputation, because they align with political parties or authorities so, I don't know, like six
31 years ago or I'm not sure exactly which year but, it happened at one election that like forty
32 NGOs created a network before the elections that was like, to engage young voters or first-
33 time voters and they were not neutral, they were helping one particular party.

34 AS: Which one?

35 ZI: SDP, social democrat party. So that's a blow for civil society, you know. I mean, I'm
36 much more left than SDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but I'm trying to be neutral in my work
37 and not supporting them particularly.

38 AS: But of course in other countries this fact that somebody is politically related wouldn't
39 be such a big issue because of course you need some relation to politics because otherwise
40 you can't translate, you know you have mobilisation and you have protests maybe but if you
41 can't translate it into political action it doesn't go anywhere so of course you need certain
42 links.

43 ZI: Yeah but then you should do it openly. You know in Germany there are Stiftung and
44 each big party has their own Stiftung, that's obviously their own. And they have a group of
45 organisations that they are financing or training or educating or providing support so... It's
46 more transparent in that way. If you claim that you are neutral and you are not then you raise
47 suspicion for all civil society. It's easier for government to manipulate, because they have
48 proof: Aha, they told they are neutral and they were supporting this and this party. So... What
49 else is challenge? I don't know, problem is that society is inert and that people who are well-
50 off they don't care and people who are poor they struggle to survive and they don't have time
51 or energy to engage in movements or participating in dialogue or in public discussions so
52 that's a problem, not only in Bosnia but probably global problem. Another thing is that state
53 is captured by small group of people, so we worked in last few years a lot with parliaments
54 and members of parliaments told me that they have to do what executive part of state, so
55 what ministries and governments are telling them to vote for or against, which is not natural
56 I guess, and then executive people in ministries and governments they have to do what
57 political parties tell them, and then people in political parties, because there is no internal
58 democracy in those parties, they do what the owner of the party or the president tells them.
59 So actually, it all comes to seven people. So that's why this professor from history, Salmedin
60 Mesihović, he wrote an article, maybe five years ago, about tyranny. He explained how we

61 are ruled by tyrants. His topic of research is Roman Empire, so he is drawing the parallels
62 between empires and our current situation.

63 AS: So in the parties they don't have a lot of... maybe I didn't expect a lot of debate but they
64 don't have internal democracy?

65 ZI: It happens rarely that there is a position, I mean the counter-candidate for the main
66 person. So it's Izetbegović... yeah. No there is no genuine internal party democracy.

67 AS: And from these new parties, a lot of these new parties keep getting founded. I guess a
68 lot of them are founded for economic reasons, for opportunistic reasons, but you know, I
69 want to believe that there must be some people in this country that actually want to change
70 the system. Do you see any of them, that dare to go close to politics? Because a lot of people
71 try to stay away from it, because the system is so toxic.

72 ZI: [Thinks] There are very few people that want to change something that dare to go to this
73 swamp. It's different type of swamp than Washington... [thinks]. Yeah I mean there are
74 attempts, like Naša Stranka, but after that many years they still don't have a lot of reach out
75 of Sarajevo. So they are just small, local party and they are, maybe not all of them, but some
76 prominent members of Naša Stranka are also, you know, just opportunists as everybody else.
77 So they don't hate people, they don't judge people by ethnicity or nationality, which is good,
78 but everything else is pretty much the same. They fight for their particular interests so...

79 AS: Normal politics.

80 ZI: Normal politics. I think that also Stiftung contributed to that situation, I mean not all the
81 Stiftung but Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung for example. The train the conservative parties all
82 over the Balkans and this Christian pillar how they call it from Poland to Balkans, the thing
83 that replaced Iron Curtain, and they train them how to be better, more successful, how to
84 look polite, and out of those people ultra-right, very conservative, regressive movements
85 arised and they use social media really well because they got trained, they know how to
86 mobilise citizens, so they fight against female reproductive rights or whatever is good they
87 fight against it [laughs]. And they got training by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung so... There are
88 foreign agents and it's not us, it's somebody else. Yeah... We don't have Grüne which is
89 shame, we really need it because of all this natural resources that are endangered,
90 concessions... because we are waiting now the flood of concessions and public-private
91 partnerships, and it's really difficult to protect the nature and all this investment that are so

92 promoted like, number-one priority for country's foreign investment it's very often just neo-
93 colonialism that's done nice and politely without army and occupation. So, obstacles. We are
94 still at obstacles. [Thinks]. Yeah it's difficult to achieve the change in terms of policies, to
95 affect state policies or laws or introduction of new laws or amendments to existing laws. If
96 you manage to achieve some change that means that it's not very important, that it doesn't
97 affect somebody's deals and interests. It will change with stronger EU pressure for once we
98 start with harmonisation with *acquis* and everything, but in case of Croatia we can see that
99 it's not only positive effect of entering or achieving that level that EU would accept a country.
100 Because until that point when Croatia was accepted in European Union everything was going
101 smooth, civil society was blossoming, there was really good government office for civil
102 society, everything was participative, they divided thematic groups of NGOs dealing with
103 chapters and everything but once Croatia got full membership in EU things very quickly
104 deteriorated. They didn't have to pretend anymore political elites that they are civilised, so
105 ethnic hatred, civil rights, civil society, anything is going down. So there is that phenomenon
106 that scares us, you know. What will happen once we... Because European Union doesn't have
107 many tools to affect internal policy. They can name and shame, like, Junker can tell to Orban
108 that he is dictator but Orban doesn't care much about that. So there is this paradox effect of
109 EU accession.

110 AS: They can do into countries and, you know, finance projects and encourage certain
111 developments which I guess they're doing here, but maybe where it gets difficult is, I often
112 hear somewhat conflicting stories. A lot of people say it needs to be a Bosnian effort to
113 change something, it can't be imposed from the outside. And then at different situations I
114 here people say that because the Bosnian system was imposed from the outside, it's also the
115 outside that has to fix it.

116 ZI: That's exactly what I wanted to say. Because framework was enforced and then
117 unfunctional framework is our responsibility to drive the broken car. So OHR five years ago
118 stopped with any activities that are within their mandate and they are authorised to do that,
119 but because of this dogma that now is time for Bosnians to take their destiny in their hands,
120 any positive reforms stopped at that moment because it's not in interest of these seven people
121 and maybe there are a few dozen but seven key players, it's not in their interest to enter, to
122 bring Bosnia to EU, because these technical, financial standards that will come with EU will
123 prevent them from a lot of revenue and generating activities that they have. And I think in
124 this moment there are enough proofs to, if OHR is like it used to be ten years ago, there is

125 enough substance for many of political leaders to be arrested, which they deserve, but
126 nobody wants to do that, so... I don't know. There are huge, how to say, properties, villas,
127 and you can ask Dragan Čović, he has a huge complex of his villas in Mostar, it's so big that
128 they had to change the flow of the river so he can accommodate another... And you just ask
129 him to produce tax, you know, file, and if he cannot support it with tax file you can take it
130 from him or arrest him because, you know, it's illegally. And then it's the same person who,
131 during the war was using people from concentration camp for labour in the company that he
132 managed, and then he is the person who welcome the war criminals on the return from the
133 prison, so he's, I don't know, one of the worst person it would be technically and legally
134 really easy to put him in prison but nobody is interested in that. Because he is a willing
135 partner, he is willing partner of foreign organisations, of World Bank, IMF, European
136 Union... European Union is just bunch of interests of particular countries in Bosnia.
137 European priority of EU is free flow of capital. And then other things are just annexes. So...
138 AS: So the most important thing is stability.

139 ZI: Stability again for the free flow of capital. Not stability for like, extreme poverty or
140 something so I don't know, Italy has interest in energy from Bosnia. They want more energy
141 from what is considered sustainable energy because it's made in hydro power plants. Austria
142 has many interest in banking sector, so when there was a crisis here in banks there was
143 something called Vienna Club, the biggest banks and our central bank had an emergency
144 session in Vienna and from that year on Bosnia on all levels, so from municipalities to state
145 level they are taking more and more credits from commercial banks. And it's not well-
146 monitored, it's not well-published. Retail banking is not good money as it used to be, so now
147 banks are giving loans and credits to public sector, and you can follow this. So, I mean I
148 don't want to sound like this [thinks], how do you say, theory of... I don't think that there are
149 lizard people who are controlling...

150 AS: Conspiracy?

151 ZI: Conspiracy, yeah. But, there are groups, companies, individuals, who are working in
152 their interest and who are successful.

153 AS: And if the system doesn't stop them... Because probably a lot of people are working in
154 their interest, but they are constrained by a system.

155 ZI: Hundreds of construction projects, resorts, hotels, private homes from Middle East are
156 developed around Sarajevo, and because there is no strict regulation and there is no resilient
157 public administration who would make some rules or respect the wrong rules, urbanistic
158 rules, so our state is very soft in that way. With small amount of money you can easily
159 achieve, get some permits, and... Maybe this is a bit off our topic. What else? Then in Croatia
160 also after they accessed EU all other funds stopped, there is only EU and state. And also EU
161 reduced it drastically. So, it's another milestone that will make many civil society
162 organisations disappear.

163 AS: Because also all the countries limit their funding and the embassies can't... because here
164 I know the embassies are doing a lot from each country...

165 ZI: Yeah yeah yeah. Dutch, Norwegian... There is also problem to find good people, because
166 people who are educated, smart and speak languages they go abroad more and more. Busses
167 and airplanes are full, going to Austria, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand. Well, New Zealand
168 you cannot go by bus, okay [laughs]. But, yeah, and many people just...

169 AS: I would probably do the same if I were in their situation.

170 *[Omitted: exchange about the interviewees experience of visiting West Berlin in the 1980s]*

171 AS: Do you feel... because the 2013 and 2014 protests were kind of very big compared to
172 everything that happened before. Can you feel that anything in society has changed since
173 then? Anything really concrete or is it maybe just more of an abstract feeling maybe, that
174 people saw that something is possible and they keep it in mind for next time if there's a next
175 time?

176 ZI: [Thinks] What do you study, what's your actual...?

177 AS: It's European Studies, but it's a mixture of fields, it's under humanities. So it's supposed
178 to be a mixture of history, culture, with political science.

179 ZI: I ask because maybe you can look up Larisa Kurtović. Because she was researching that,
180 she is now in Ottawa, Canada. Okay, that crossed my mind because I know that she
181 published something on this. I mean it started in 2008, first big protests when, like, they were
182 also violent in a part happened in 2008 when this Denis Mrnjavać was killed in a tram, and
183 it was spontaneous rise of the citizens and then we met each other for the first time. So people
184 who are willing to participate in direct democracy in the street, in protests, met there. And

185 so 2013 and 2014, 2013 would not be possible without 2008. 2014 again, started in Tuzla
186 but it got support in Sarajevo, again by the same groups, not maybe dominantly but... So I
187 think that every wave of citizen protests helps people to recognise each other, to out, to come
188 out as lunatics that want to change something here. As people who didn't give up. Or who
189 thinks that human rights or people lives are priority in compared to quiet life of ordinary
190 citizens. So, I don't know, did it help a lot, were there any concrete results, I'm not aware of
191 that, there was some outcomes, outputs, impact. Maybe something short-term, some
192 governments resigned, some people were changed, but the main narratives, main things
193 remained the same. In 2013 at least some concrete problem was solved, so babies got their
194 ID numbers and passports. [Thinks] It was surprising for me at '13 that all these cities around
195 the country also in a way showed their solidarity, they went in the streets and squares and I
196 think mainly it's bigger impact there in these twenty cities where people started to take direct
197 action, to talk to each other and everything. Tuzla was one of those, and I think maybe in
198 Tuzla these nucleus got bigger with '13 so it helped '14 to be so powerful. But I'm not sure
199 that's the solution. So even if it happens, some type of popular rising or revolution I'm not
200 so sure it's good way to go for progress of the country.

201 AS: But which other way would there be?

202 ZI: Definitely more active citizens, citizens that care, citizens that participate, that vote,
203 foreign movements that make trade unions stronger, I don't know... Single mothers that unite
204 and fight for these benefits for single mothers or I don't know, patients who are neglected,
205 so all type of association of citizens, grouping them, so they can build genuine grassroots
206 pressure on government on all levels. [Thinks] But popular risings very easy go to
207 destructive and pointless stage. I don't think that these burning of these building here was
208 pointless, but you know, the psychology of a mob never brought anything good, you know.
209 After second day it was, yeah it was five years ago, after certain amount of, I mean after like
210 twenty hours of siege of parliament in 2013 they wanted to evacuate pregnant women,
211 diabetic patient and I don't know, few medical cases, there was 1700 people inside. And it
212 was really difficult to negotiate safe passage and people wanted to attack the ambulance. So,
213 I cannot see anything good in that and I cannot identify with the folk that is burning this shit,
214 you know, so...

215 AS: Not with a mob, but you know you have examples like East Germany, what brought the
216 change was peaceful demonstrations that grew bigger by the week, by the day. And you
217 could say that it was the mobilisation, the protesting that brought the change in the end.

218 ZI: I'm very glad that happened.

219 AS: But you're right of course, it can go both ways.

220 ZI: In Czech Republic and Slovakia also it was very civilised movement. But here first it's
221 difficult to manage and to contain the rage of the people who are there genuinely, because
222 they are angry against, they're mad at the government, and then you have this nationalist
223 movement that wants to appropriate things so very quickly Bosniak nationalists started to
224 use that, which gave good excuse to Serbian and Croatian politicians to say it's all staged by
225 Bosniaks. So Bosniak nationalism is on the rise, and it becomes same problem as with other
226 two nationalism, they are each other's raison d'être. So, too many stakeholders and I don't
227 see the force or platform or common denominator that can bring them all together. Class
228 struggle could be that, because there is really oppressed class in this country, but they are
229 not aware that they belong to the same class, they are aware that they belong to some religion
230 or ethnicity or local community but there is no class awareness in Bosnia. People don't know
231 that they are workers, there is no solidarity. We are ten, ten hungry women are protesting in
232 front of Federal government building for few weeks, like hunger strike and I don't know, and
233 then when this is over then twenty workers from another company that is being ripped off
234 by some tycoon are protesting, so trade unions, unions of workers are corrupt, run inefficient,
235 so I think that in Bosnia part of solution can be class struggle but, social democrats won't do
236 that because they are just like everybody else and they don't hate people by ethnicity as I
237 mentioned. Nobody is doing that. So even if you don't want, it's not matter of proletarian
238 revolution, but it's matter of the balance in society. If there is no sound opposition to workers'
239 exploitation, workers' exploitation will go on until it's unsustainable for society and
240 everything collapses, so... For sustainability of society you must have strong working class,
241 that's my opinion. Because it's profit, it's unchecked, if nobody can control if profit is a god,
242 if profit is dogma, then state has no incentive to put in place regulation, and I think that's one
243 of the main reasons why Britain, UK is leaving because... the power elites were against
244 regulation that was imposed by... So their companies couldn't employ children in India or
245 invest dirty, in coal and I don't know where... So they felt constraints, you know, and I read
246 somewhere that, to get back on what's priority for EU, or for everybody else, some person

247 from UK said that after this preliminary negotiation about EU members in Britain and British
248 citizens living in the EU; he said that Cheddar cheese will have bigger freedom of movement
249 than British people living in the EU. Because for the cheese it's negotiated, for humans they
250 can find their own solution. Yeah... I'm not very optimistic person. I am cheerful, I can
251 always find something funny in that but I'm not optimistic.

252 AS: Do you think that Bosnia could still change significantly? In the next ten, twenty years?

253 ZI: It can change for the better or worse significantly. There are no limits, you can always
254 go down, the weakness is that there are no limits for that. But can it improve, I don't know,
255 I mean we will be depopulated, so we will have really old population and young people will
256 leave, and it's not only people in need for job or financial security, it's people who are just
257 fed up with this stagnation and bad social services and nothing for kids, so very successful
258 people who live great in Bosnia they are also in fast pace. So, yeah, I cannot... And then we
259 are investing, all the money we have we give to finance infrastructure, big highway but it's
260 question who will, you know, use this highway.

261 AS: Yeah, I was on the highway between Doboje and Banja Luka this weekend.

262 ZI: Aha, pretty empty, don't you think? It's a dystopic experience. And it's huge and
263 expensive highway, they have, there is a village south of Sarajevo when you go by car on
264 this highway towards Mostar and it's a small village and there is a huge junction, you know,
265 so if you go with highway it's like you go to Frankfurt, you know, and just tiny village.
266 Because of lobby of road construction, they make a project biggest possible road, biggest
267 possible, you know... You know, Tauern tunnel in Austria, between Austria and Munich, so
268 they make, I don't know, in late sixties they made a single tunnel and then only like in late
269 eighties or early nineties they made a second, so it's two one-way tunnels. And it's the main
270 corridor between Western Europe and Asia and Southern Europe, it's like... millions of trucks
271 that are paying... that are paying, you know. And here, we build between two villages double
272 tunnel with lights and you know, like, space shuttle. It's beyond our economy to finance
273 something like that. And then Croatia built nice highway, I don't know if you've been in
274 Croatia, and with all the traffic they have on this corridor or tourism and everything, they
275 cannot pay back the credit so now they want to sell it to Goldman Sachs and then Goldman
276 Sachs will take profit and state has to guarantee the income so there is [intelligible] you
277 finance too much in highways you become slave, you know, and that's the only big thing

278 that's going on. So, can we go in, can we in ten or twenty years we will have maybe nice
279 roads and we will live somewhere else. Yeah. Hmm. Schade.

280 AS: Very schade. So, what is your... Because you said yes, we need more active citizens. Do
281 you have a strategy? An easy way, or is it just a lot of hard work?

282 ZI: No, I mean, it should be education. But education again is captured by church, I mean
283 religious institutions and political elites and we have segregation in schools, you know this
284 apartheid that we have Croats and Bosniaks. Education would be a natural tool to make, you
285 know because we have really poor education, especially on civil rights or citizens' rights or
286 democracy or public finances, so in Japan, because this is topic that we cover in public
287 finances, so we did some research, in Japan but also in other countries they have age-
288 appropriate education for, from kindergarten they start telling the children that this
289 kindergarten is financed by taxes, your parents are paying taxes, you know they start to
290 introduce this topic and then at the end of primary school when they are like fourteen, they
291 are quite serious about it. Children are modelling what happens if we cut this tax, what
292 happens if we... you know, so, throughout education children are empowered to be active
293 citizens, and it's not happening here, here we have religious education as mandatory from
294 kindergarten, so... Even if Mohammed the prophet said that children under age of seven are
295 too young and they should play and I don't know (laughs), you know, here they start like,
296 religious education at the age of three or four, you know. So it's against their [intelligible],
297 some really stupid people in control of education system here, but PISA, they're just
298 introducing PISA so God knows what results that will show, I'm afraid it will be quite poor.
299 [Thinks] Universities are also under control, there is no independence that universities, so,
300 we have shitty private universities that are expensive and not of very good quality and then
301 we have state-owned universities that are controlled by cantons, political powers, there are
302 a few independent, I mean, there are really good professors sometimes, on some... Who did
303 you visit in political science?

304 AS: Asim Mujkić.

305 ZI: Asim Mujkić he is really good guy. But he doesn't have much power or influence. He
306 doesn't have many followers of him on Instagram [laughter]. But he plays in a band, yeah.

307 AS: Yeah, I was thinking you know, if everybody at the university would be like him it
308 would be a different place probably.

309 ZI: Yeah, but no. [Thinks] So I think that education reform, that, I don't know, maybe
310 somebody will wake up, UNESCO, UNICEF, OHR, OSCE, American... they should make
311 some really big alliance and put some conditionality, like, if you don't reform education
312 system we will, I don't know, kill you, I don't know, or at least arrest, I don't know, I mean
313 some really... threats. You know, there was this Richard Holbrooke, Richard Holbrooke
314 negotiated Dayton Peace Agreement and he died like five years ago and after he died... So
315 we need new Holbrooke. Somebody who negotiate change in education system, that's
316 possible... solution.

317 AS: As long as the system is so strong and so stuck and rusty, changes are not gonna...
318 nothing's gonna... you need like a tipping point...

319 ZI: Yeah, yeah.

320 AS: ...you need something's that's big enough to...

321 ZI: Look, I mean it's not, I mean we don't have Ministry of Education and we don't have
322 Ministry of Culture on state level, and it's in various jurisdictions. So even between cantons
323 it's not, sometimes municipalities are financing bits of high schools, sometimes cantons and
324 then cities, so it's very fragmented and it's not by chance, it's a part of master plan of dividing
325 people permanently to prevent socialising between children, to teach them different things,
326 there are different versions, everybody has their own version of history. Not just recent
327 history but entire history, you know, their own specific interpretation of history and then art
328 and culture is soft power that can unify people, children, you know, that can disrupt this
329 identities that people think that they're have a special ideology, a special identity, actually
330 they don't. On many occasions I heard foreigners, and not just from Europe, from other
331 continents too, how do you manage to be nationalist in Bosnia or in Balkans. Because to
332 them we all look the same, we behave the same, we have similar names, we have to make
333 extra effort to be nationalist here. Like, this person from Malaysia told me, because in
334 Malaysia you know, there are Chinese, Hindus and Malaysians, it's very easy to hate
335 somebody [laughs], you know, and here we really put extra effort to be nationalists, to create
336 others... [sighs].

337 AS: I think that's all the questions I had.

Interview with Predrag Kojović (PK) conducted by Anne-Kathrin Schmidt (AS)

Naša Stranka, 25 April 2018, Sarajevo

1 AS: So, I sent you some questions yesterday. That's basically the direction I'm going in. I
2 saw this morning, I read an article about when you announced your candidate for the, for the
3 presidency. You know, I was reading what he said and of course he's saying... He's pointing
4 out all the right things. He was saying that the system needs to be changed for the better,
5 brain drain of young people needs to be prevented, honest people need to get into politics,
6 need to change the imagine of politics, people need to have their faith restored that they can
7 have a dignified life in country. So it was... Obviously it's all the, exactly it's the points that
8 need to be changed, but how, how do you think you can achieve that, how do you want to
9 make to want these things a reality?

10 PK: It's a kind of like, serious of like, great society speeches that candidate obviously has
11 given so far. They're very emotional, not very concrete, it's mostly like, he's talking almost
12 like on a board of philosophy, political philosophy and how the mentality of this country has
13 to change. And I think probably that's the best change for this country. Some sort of, like,
14 emotional change before the rational change in terms of who you're voting for comes
15 forward. And it's very hard, I mean, you know, first of all the way, the kind of party that we
16 are, we are social-liberal party and probably too radically liberal for country like Bosnia, and
17 we see also ourselves as a, being like a, that we have like sort of an educational role here,
18 also to other parties and to the voters in changing the kind of rhetoric and wording and all
19 that kind of stuff. If we had any money to run this campaign properly the way it's run, you
20 know, other parties who have a lot of money, but these are all the obstacles that we have to,
21 and we been overcoming them, like, you know, ever since Naša Stranka started, you know,
22 so... It's an impossible mission but we are in it, hundred percent. And we don't have much
23 else left, you know, than to believe, and we do believe in it's possible, and that people do
24 change. Because they changed, I mean, people were not like this before the war here, they
25 were different. And they changed for the worst, then maybe they can change for the better
26 now. And we'll see, but we'll really... I mean, we don't have money for TV ads and newspaper
27 ads and stuff like that, but we have a lot of energy and we have time and we have patience
28 and we gonna sit in a little van and travel around the country and visit every place where

29 there are five people who are ready to listen. And, you know, I mean as a kind of a backup
30 for your psychological position, like, you know, I'm thinking like, okay, the best we can do
31 in this business is offer people a choice. But also they have a responsibility. Which is, to go,
32 first to go out and vote, and then to make the decision based on what are their best interest.
33 And I don't think, I mean, I don't think that people generally deserve to have the government
34 that's worse than they are on average, but I don't think they should have a better one, you
35 know. So it should be just right, so... We I think are giving them for the first time an option,
36 a new person. A person that has a different view. And... But they have to be brave and smart
37 and make that choice. I mean, I'm, you know, a democrat, I do believe that there should be
38 like a day where regardless of who we are, rich or poor, smart or stupid or educated, non-
39 educated, there is a time, there is a day when all our votes will have the same value, and we
40 are the same in a way. And you know, we decide who is gonna run this country for the next
41 four years. We try to give people an offer and we are putting a lot of effort with whatever
42 we have to bring that person a message to them, as close as we can, I mean, you know, we
43 don't own media, we don't control media, we don't have money for TV ads, but we have
44 social networks and, you know, I'm generally thinking that the hope for this country is in a
45 generation that were born during the war or just after the war, and they didn't have a direct
46 kind of trauma, and don't suffer maybe from the war PTSD but maybe they suffer from post-
47 war PTSD. And... But at some point, you know have to grow up and you're going to that
48 voting booth and you make a decision that is gonna determine your life. And if you keep
49 making mistakes, then maybe you don't deserve to keep going, you know.

50 AS: But many of these young people you're talking about are leaving.

51 PK: That's one of the unfortunate things. I mean, you know, it would be much easier to do
52 what we are trying to do if we were still in the old times when we had one news bulletin at
53 seven-thirty, so everybody had the same source of information or same experience regardless
54 of what was your opinion about what was said there. But now we live in a world where you
55 have actually parallel realities, which are created by social networks and fake news and... I
56 mean, there are so many things that are against Bosnia, it's like almost like a perfect storm.
57 Like we are trying to reconstruct like a society after very, very difficult war and, that left a
58 lot of people wounded, and war's that's been unfinished, war that in some way rewarded
59 people who were aggressors. We also had an amazing thing that basically after the peace
60 was signed the same players who caused the war were left in power and the constitution was
61 made in way that basically ensures that they do stay in power. It would be like, removing

62 like Hitler, and then negotiating with Nazi party about what's Germans gonna do after the
63 Second World War, you know, I don't think that would be acceptable to the allies. But... So
64 we have that. Then we have this, you know, this new projection of Russian power though
65 the new technologies and the way they take it out, they could, they didn't have to have nuclear
66 war heads to be the superpower, if you control the internet you can influence other countries
67 in a way that were unimaginable a few years ago, like, you can elect somebody's president,
68 or, you know, steer country into leaving European Union, and through that... And the politics
69 are becoming a reality show. So I'm giving you all these arguments that are actually not
70 specific for Bosnia, but are creating like, an environment in which it is really difficult to do
71 what we are trying to do, to build a nation, to stabilise a country, to heal it from the war
72 wounds and stuff like that. But I'm just saying it would be maybe easier to do that in 70s or
73 80s than today, you know. And plus, you know, the growing cynicism towards everything,
74 capitalism and liberalism, and, you know, also before you always at least had a kind of, I
75 mean okay, little bit European Union, but you had America as some sort of, like, moral
76 lighthouse, just like to keep you, like, direction, like, this is the way things should done you
77 know. And you really can't point finger to anybody and say, "this is how we should be", you
78 know, 'cause nobody is really so great anymore. [Sighs]

79 AS: I agree with you in the point that I think that change has to come from below, it has to
80 come from the people, there has to be a psychological change... But can you do anything
81 politically? Because you do have a couple of positions in... in the Federation Parliament,
82 right? Is there anything that...

83 PK: Well I mean we do things that are, where we are present we do things. It's thanks to us
84 that Sarajevo Canton implemented Sejdić-Finci six, seven years ago. I mean, it was... We
85 did that. Because we are strong in Canton Sarajevo. And we do what we can, you know, I
86 mean we really produce the most legal initiatives and concrete solutions, we really don't talk
87 much but we propose a lot. And... So... But you know, I think politically that what needs
88 really to change first is the overtone in the country, you know, and that's very important,
89 like, you know I was journalist in the States for twelve, I lived there for twelve, thirteen
90 years, but I worked for Reuters for twenty years and I covered a lot of elections. And, you
91 know, it's amazing how America changed from Clinton to Bush. You know, during Clinton
92 we were talking, you know, about like, during hours about Kyoto Agreement was at the time
93 and are we gonna live on Mars in fifty years, you know, and then Bush came and then we
94 were talking, like, how many Muslims live in your building, is that guy Sikh or a Muslim, I

95 mean, it's like the whole country went back four hundred years. And it was caused by the
96 tone that was broadcasted from the White House, you know, and people behave that way.
97 And I think here we have a similar situation. If different message was broadcasted from
98 Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I think people who are now really horrible the way
99 they behave they change it and would, you know, try to be better people. Yeah, you know, I
100 think every person has the same capacity for evil and good, and it all depends which wolf
101 are you feeding. And we are unfortunate to have government for the last thirty years maybe
102 that brings the worst out of us. And I remember when we had a government, I'm not a big
103 Communist fan, or left wing, just to make this clear. [Laughs] But we had a government
104 before that would bring the best of us. And that was nice. And now we have the one that
105 bring the worst of us, I hope it can change again.

106 AS: How can I imagine your conversations or your cooperation with these ethno-nationalist
107 parties, do you sometimes think, it's so transparent, these kind of conflicts that they try to
108 create just to keep the status quo or like, are they actually very smart in doing it?

109 PK: It's very effective you know, if you're, I mean, like I remember covering the Bush second
110 term campaign. Something like 75 per cent of Americans thought that economy is in free
111 fall, 80 per cent thought that they were involved in a war that they shouldn't have been
112 involved, and then Karl Rove comes with that photo of Bush standing on the rubble of the
113 World Trade Center and writes down "do you want this to happen again?", and [slams hand
114 on table] Kerry was out. So, if you're are blasted enough to use fear and I saw this in Congo,
115 Sierra Leone, I saw this everywhere in the world where I worked, if you are blasted enough
116 to use politics to scare people then what kinds of possibilities are open to you in politics. All
117 kinds of things.

118 AS: It seems crazy when you hear what they're saying publicly that...

119 PK: If you promise them that 375 million Pounds a week will now be used for the national
120 health system, you know, and then you say "I told my campaigners that was wrong" we're
121 not gonna do that the morning after the people voted, so I mean that's the world we live in,
122 you know, it's like you can manipulate things and people and people are losing trust in the
123 concept of democracy because of people like that.

124 AS: Yeah, it's the same here.

125 PK: Yeah. Except it's even worse, because, you know... Certain standards do not apply here,
126 you know. Which are, which did apply, at least. But anyway... [Sighs] It's very hard, it's an
127 uphill battle, you know, definitely. But we don't really have a choice. It's either we do this
128 or we just... Mainly the reason I got into politics was, I mean I, this was not my plan [laughs].
129 I quit Reuters in 2008, I was working in Washington D.C., came back here to write short
130 stories and poetry. Like kind of early retirement saying that, you know, I found it
131 unacceptably in morality just living in my little bubble and pretend like I didn't see anything
132 that is going on outside. I mean, I'm not that kind of person, I wish I was. Sometimes.

133 AS: Would you... Do you have any allies in what your party is trying to do, do you have any
134 allies politically that kind of have the same agenda...

135 PK: We have some, there are some parties that always think like, that we have many
136 disagreements with them but we share the like, civilizational or foundational values, you
137 know, in terms of nationalism or this and that. We disagree on many other things. And I'm,
138 of course, think SDP and people like DF, not so much people from Građanski savez, GS,
139 but... You know, for me the way I see them, you know, they are... They, all of them are kinda
140 trying to... First of all, all of them, both nationalist and socialist are exploiting nostalgia, you
141 know, like nostalgia or like, if you define it as a selective fantasy about the past, you know,
142 like, socialist, how it was all great during socialism before the war, which is not true, and
143 nationalists how it was all great when Ottoman Empire was here or, I don't know, you know,
144 something. And they are both asking, seeking power in the name of some collective. Either
145 it's working class or ethnic group or this and this and that, you know. But still, I mean
146 obviously if we had to argue with somebody, make the government and then argue within
147 the government we would rather do it with SDP and DF than with nationalists because
148 between us and nationalists is...civilizational gap that cannot be bridged. Their attitude
149 towards fascism, the people who were fascists here during the Second World War, and that
150 kind of stuff, makes that gap unbridgeable.

151 AS: What were you, what happened in 2014 when the protests were going on, the plenum
152 movement, were you involved in any way or were you, I guess you were having an eye on
153 it...

154 PK: Everybody thought we were, and maybe we were a little bit, in the beginning. But it was
155 hijacked by this, really I would say naive extreme left, you know, with the concepts of direct
156 democracy and it's pathetic really. You know...

157 AS: Why is it pathetic?

158 PK: Because, I'm totally aware of the failures of the capitalism, I mean, absolutely. I don't
159 think it's a just society, I think we saw it everywhere, I mean, it doesn't work for the majority,
160 it works for very few people. It has a cyclical economic crisis which bleed deep wounds into
161 societies and coming out of this crisis is very often not moral, basically using taxpayer's
162 money to bail, to bail out private investors who made wrong decisions, banks and guys you
163 know, all that. And I would be ready to, like, sit down and talk with anybody who has an
164 idea what's the alternative. But unless you offer me what's the alternative I'm not ready to
165 discuss the destruction of this.

166 AS: But maybe this experiment in direct democracy was not so much, you know, a realistic...

167 PK: It's not realistic, I mean listen...

168 AS: ... it wasn't supposed to be realistic but just to show an extreme alternative, to show that
169 something like this is possible even if it only lasted for a couple of months.

170 PK: It's not possible, it was never possible, the people who didn't own property in Greece,
171 in old Greece, couldn't vote, I mean women couldn't vote, the people who were not citizens,
172 who were slaves, could not vote. There is no such thing. It never existed. And even this
173 plenum which was interesting to me, it was like watching, you know, Tristan and Isolde,
174 like, Wagner's opera, like, now society coming out of the group of people, you know, this
175 whole structural like, more appropriate to watching the movie "Beach", which I think is a
176 great movie with Leonardo Di Caprio, I don't know if you remember it and watched it.

177 AS: I think I've seen it very, very long time ago.

178 PK: Yeah, it's like, like on that Thailand island, and there's like little commune, and they're
179 all equal and everything, but slowly you see a certain structure, leadership and structure
180 rising, society rising out of the... And... What I say, even plenum which start like, okay
181 everybody, then they divided themselves into, like certain committees for culture and stuff,
182 and very, very soon they looked just like any other parliament, you know. And they wanted
183 power. And I'm all for that. Go on elections, get legitimacy by getting votes, and then you
184 make decisions. But you can't get 500 people in a room and say "okay this is how it's gonna
185 be now in Canton Sarajevo, you know because I got like 7,000 preferential votes, you know,
186 I was standing on the street for a month to get those votes, so... If you wanna have the power
187 to make decisions you... to get the votes from people. You can't pretend like you are

188 revolution. Anyway, we saw how it ended. I'm not very... I was hoping that it could lead to,
189 you know, to something...cathartic. And I think it was more cathartic when we had floods.
190 When kind of the state, or the government, I mean, we are probably by all definition failed
191 state, anyway, but like, when we had floods, like, people felt that the government collapsed.
192 And then that they were on their own. And they started behaving like normal people, like
193 going and helping people without asking what ethnic group or religion they are and stuff like
194 it, and there was this, there was that atmosphere for a few days, you know, like of really
195 something cathartic happening within people. I was hoping that plenum can provide
196 something like that, but instead it just produce... I don't know, you know, I spent a lot of time
197 when I was Reuters journalist covering there what was called the anti-globalisation
198 movements, which was kind of violent and very strong and... From the very beginning in
199 Seattle when they had the third clash with the police, and then I covered Napoli and Rome,
200 meeting of G8 and Washington D.C. and all that kind of stuff. And apart from...an incredible
201 enthusiasm for destroying the system I didn't see that they put any effort in thinking okay,
202 what after? I spoke to, like, friend of mine, Žižek, philosopher from Slovenia, who was up
203 there in New York with these Occupy Wall Street things, and we had the same discussion, I
204 said "I'm ready to listen to what you think should be, I mean what system should replace
205 this." But, I think that what happened to Yugoslavia is that... And to Bosnia, of course, is,
206 you know, if West invested at least 30 per cent of the funds they invested in taking
207 Communism and Berlin Wall down into thinking what's gonna happen after, I don't think we
208 would be here. But they didn't. And the fall of Communism created the fall of, like a vacuum
209 of power. Which was fulfilled by the populist nationalist who are still in power. So I don't
210 think that was very smart thing to do. It's like in Iraq or in Syria, same thing. Okay, we're
211 gonna burn this place down, but then where we're gonna have the interview once we burn
212 down.

213 AS: Do you think the international community should have...intervened more?

214 PK: Ah they should have, could have done much more, you know, but... I'm not great fan of
215 blaming other people for my position, or my position in my country, and people that, you
216 know...

217 AS: And today, do you think that, for example if we say, you know, at one point or another
218 for EU integration for example there will have to be change of constitution, there will have
219 to be work done on the constitution. One of these topics that is so difficult probably to agree

220 on that a lot of people say, you know because Dayton was kind of, they often say it was
221 imposed from the outside, of course that's only half the truth because it wasn't just negotiated
222 by outsiders, but they say since Dayton, you know, was imposed on this country from the
223 outside, it should also be international actors that come back here and, you know, take part
224 in bringing a new political system. Do you think that the international community should be
225 more engaged and should take some, should take on some big project here or do you think,
226 you know, it should all be domestically led process, ideally.

227 PK: Ideally. Ideally. And you know, and I... I mean one of the reasons we are so interested
228 in a rapid, non-critical accession over joining the EU is because we know that that process
229 will actually require the change of Dayton constitution. Now, I understand the constitution,
230 you know, I mean of course it has to engulf not only the ambitions of people who live in that
231 country but also their fears. And I understand there are fears, you know. And I understand
232 those fears are very brutal fears. Bosniaks are afraid that it will happen to them again, what
233 happened in 92 to 95, Serbs are afraid of the revenge, Croats are...are, I mean, confused and
234 they don't know where, who they are, are they Bosnian people or they are the Croatian
235 minority who lives in this country and stuff like that... But, so we are focused on changing
236 those things in Dayton agreement which are discriminative. You know, and it's a
237 construction. I mean, I was in Dayton when it was negotiated in the time, as a journalist of
238 course. But I had very good connections to all delegations and I would wait for them at, like,
239 'cause they couldn't drink, 'cause it's a military base so they don't serve alcohol. So, like, you
240 know, I'd drive my car by the fence and then they would jump over the fence at night and
241 then I would take them to the bars and stuff, and, 'cause they they didn't even have any
242 Dollars or money, they were just, like, in there. So I had a very good information what was
243 going on inside, and all countries. And I know people from state department who were
244 writing Dayton Agreement. And, you know, they never thought that this would last more
245 than, maybe, like first elections, and then as soon as there are new parliaments they would
246 try start changing things. They never imagined, I mean generally I think the constitutions
247 written in military bases and airports are not meant to last really long time, this is just an
248 elaborate ceasefire agreement.

249 AS: Was there any thought of maybe putting in, you know, something like a deadline? Like,
250 until this point it needs to be...

251 PK: There were easier things, you know, like, there was a... I mean, they could look at this
252 whole problem like a, even though it's considered one of the most difficult logical problems,
253 prisoner's dilemma, but you know, every parent knows how to solve this problem easily. If
254 you have one piece of cake and you have two kids, and you don't wanna cut and decide, then
255 you can set up certain rules which will ensure that the self-interests are best served by doing
256 it just like, you know, so you say one kid, you gonna cut the cake and the other one is gonna
257 choose it first, so it is in the best interest of the cutter to really cut it in half, because otherwise
258 he will end up with a smaller piece. So, if European Union would say in '95 to Serbia and
259 Croatia, since you are interested in joining the EU, we would very much like to accept you
260 and Serbia and Bosnia all together, and, you know, since you attacked this country in '92 it
261 is your responsibility for Bosnia to be ready. So, give us a call when you're ready. [Pause]
262 It's one of the things that could have been done.

263 AS: Should have been, should have been... I feel like there is always a lot of "should have
264 been" in this country.

265 PK: Nobody knows, you know. I mean, I have a huge always respect for something that was
266 called RAND Corporation, I don't know if you're familiar with... RAND. R-A-N-D
267 Corporation America. It's like, an institution that they formed during the Cold War after the
268 end of the Second World War, which involved all kind of the best mathematicians, from
269 John Van Neumann and physicians and all stuff, it was basically their think tank, to decide
270 the questions, the big questions of the Cold War. Whether it's better to attack first, or to wait
271 for the attack and then attack, you know, but these kind of problems. So this people were
272 always given, like, with these really difficult tasks like, to solve for the American
273 governments. And they really had access to the best intellectuals of their times, including
274 John Nash. And... Even they were given a task, like, to make a manual for nation-building.
275 And if you go on Amazon actually there is a book there, and they said we don't know how
276 to solve this problem. And you read the book, it's very small book. They basically only
277 present the problems, not the solutions. So it's a very difficult question, what international
278 community can do. But it can certainly create an environment in which maybe the domestic
279 forces can do better, you know. It's very difficult to do better when European leaders come
280 here and take photo ops with the people we should remove from the power. And they don't
281 take photo ops with people they would like to see replace this kind of...

282 AS: But of course as long as these people are democratically elected it's hard for the EU to
283 say...

284 PK: And they will be democratically elected, one of the reasons will be because there are
285 more pictures of European and world leaders with them than with others. You know, Hitler
286 was also democratically elected twice. [Pauses] Majority is not right always. They are right
287 only when they are right. Just like any other person.

288 AS: But I mean... Legally of course it's hard to... The EU is not gonna be the one who is
289 ousting some kind of leader here from power...

290 PK: [Takes deep breath] I mean... That's a very long road, but if you wanna we can go down
291 that road as well and start, like, from 250,000 Dollars in a briefcase that was given to Dodik
292 in 2006 and go back to Osama bin Laden and his CIA watch in late 80s.

293 AS: Is that also...?

294 PK: No I mean in terms of like, talking only with legitimate... When Dodik was given all
295 this help he was not legitimate. He had no power, he was one of the candidates, the guy who
296 had two representatives in the Parliament of Republika Srpska. Then Osama bin Laden when
297 he was cooperating and given weapons by the CIA was not a part of the [intelligible]
298 independent government or anything like that. But you guys thought maybe it will be cool
299 to help these guys.

300 AS: But was that the EU in any of these cases?

301 PK: What?

302 AS: Was it the EU in any of these cases or was it America?

303 PK: Well, I mean, I'm just giving you, I mean I thought it's a very long road, we could go
304 down this road for a very long time and get the cases when the Western democracies
305 supported the wrong people for a long time and then when, but then after they were
306 disappointed in results and they refused to help in the same way the good guys, because like,
307 we don't do that anymore. 'Cause you know, it's very simple, like right now, like, Naša
308 Stranka is in a position of an extreme growth, and... And I'll give you like a plastic example.
309 I had now on my desk, request, like, you know, people in a small town in Bosnia they
310 organised twenty, thirty [intelligible] they sit in coffee shop, and they say "hey let's start
311 Naša Stranka here". They really like Naša Stranka, let's start. So they give us a call, you

312 know. I don't know, I'll take just same name, Bihać, okay. Say, "hey Peđa there is fifty guys
313 here sitting, we really like what you're doing, we wanna start Naša Stranka here, okay". I
314 have to rent them a space, furnish the space, that's like, usually cost me between 2,000 and
315 2,500 KM. Like, conference table, phone, a little computer, stuff. And that rents, I usually
316 rent spaces between 500 and 600 KM. And then I have to pay secretary for 350 KM that will
317 sit there eight hours, answer the phone, do the paperwork and stuff like that. So, I need like,
318 4,000, 5,000 KM to start shop and then I need like, approximately between 600 and 900 KM
319 a month to rent that shop. Okay? Now, we don't have that money. We don't have that money.
320 So I have fifteen cities now that don't have Naša Stranka there because I don't have money
321 to pay for this. And my, our last campaign... Ah sorry I said mine. [Laughter] Our last
322 campaign for the local election, the total budget was 370,000 KM. Of which 300 were
323 borrowed from our members, and we pay them back, and we just pay them back now. We
324 were competing in Canton Sarajevo against Democratic Front, who according to the
325 financial report they had to submit to Central Electoral Committee, spent 1.7 million. And
326 SDP who spent 2.2 million.

327 AS: Where does the Democratic Front have the money from?

328 PK: Yeah that's a good question, I would like that to ask them. But also I would ask some
329 people in IRI, International Republican Organisation... Who, as you remember the... Reuf
330 Bajrović was at the time DF, and interestingly enough his wife, Ire Četković, is the president
331 for the IRI for the Balkans. [intelligible] ...my explanation, probably not true. But what my
332 point is in this: I spent 370, 1.2 million, 2.2 million, we won. We have, we got more votes
333 and we have more representatives in local elections than these guys do. So, this is what I'm
334 saying. Now we are in a position of strength. We've been growing around, between 100 and
335 120 per cent in number of votes from election cycle to election cycle. Now we are ready. We
336 really do have people who are ready to go into elected government, and the reforms and stuff
337 like that. If I had 200,000 KM just for Sarajevo, so that I can spent 300 for Zenica, Tuzla,
338 Bihać, Goražde, Gračanica and other places, and running my, for the first time presidential
339 candidate, you give me 200,000 KM in Sarajevo, I will give you the government of Canton
340 Sarajevo with majority of Naša Stranka. It's very simple.

341 AS: How does it look for this October?

342 PK: Well it looks like we are, we are second party now with 18 to 19 per cent in Canton
343 Sarajevo, SDA is ahead of us by five, six percentages. And the SBB, SDP, DF are behind

344 us. I mean, we are focused now on Canton Sarajevo. We will have more representatives on
345 a federal level then we think we [intelligible] part of the State Parliament, too. But we will
346 have maybe very few representatives there. Maybe State Parliament one, maximum two. In
347 Federal Parliament we'll have between five and seven. But the real result we could make
348 here in Canton Sarajevo. And we think that we could maybe use Canton Sarajevo as a model
349 to show, as a showcase for the rest of the country. And I think it's appropriate also for the
350 capital to be a kind of leader and, like, you know. Not to be like New York is to America,
351 like, detached, but like, to be ahead in terms of, like, that everybody should look up to
352 Sarajevo and say, you know. So, here we have to do things that show to everybody, this is
353 your capital. You know, to have Cyrillic things on official buildings, I mean, just to do all
354 the things that nationalists don't do, you know. And as I said, you know, this is the best we
355 can do. I'm sure of one thing: We can offer them a government that, an expert government,
356 that's competent people, and who will not steal money. I can give them that. And then they
357 have to decide, if they like that or not. It's not, like, listen, I'm not, I totally understand that,
358 [laughs] and this is horrible, you will hate me maybe for this but... We need little Margaret
359 Thatcher here, you know. I mean, and, what I'm saying is, like, we'll have to make some
360 decision that will not be very popular. And will be hard. But it will be for the, you know,
361 long-term benefits and stuff like that. But we are ready to pay that political price and do, we
362 always did, you know. Like, when we, in 2008 when we decide that we gonna come out and
363 be the first and only party that will publicly support LGBT population in this town, we got
364 calls from all embassies. American Embassy said, "don't do it, don't do it". We did it. We
365 lost that day 30 per cent of our members. I mean the office were stormed with people who,
366 people were coming burning with their lighters their membership cards, I mean, all kind of
367 things. Thirty per cent. And I was so happy to get rid of these assholes. Because, you know,
368 we would lose them along the way anyway, so... They shouldn't be in Naša Stranka if they
369 don't understand that whole thing, you know. But what I'm saying to you, we are ready to
370 pay the, we paid political price for standing up for right of people from Republika Srpska to
371 come to the [intelligible] and lay down the flowers. Now, we paid the political price for
372 three, four years later it became a normal thing. And it became such a normal thing that Serbs
373 even lost interest in doing it, you know. Listen, we will not, we will, I mean, all the decisions,
374 LGBT and the [intelligible] were not based on particularities of these gatherings, but on a
375 general principle of free gathering and, you know, discrimination against the LGBT, I mean,
376 just on a basic European Convention of Human Rights, you know. And we sometimes of

377 course get these people that we lose when we make decision, when they cool off a little bit
378 [laughs] and kind of understand it, then... They come back. But it's interesting, you know,
379 like, you go to places like, like I get these phone calls, you know, from place like Živinice
380 near Tuzla, where everybody is a miner, they work in mine basically, and, you know, it's
381 certain educational, social kind of demographic there. And they say "we wanna start Naša
382 Stranka, come talk to us". And I go and there's like fifty people, and then I give them the
383 most brutal presentation of Naša Stranka, for them especially. Like, "you do understand that
384 we support gays and lesbians". They go, "yeah". And this is what I, because we explain to
385 them. Listen, it's the same thing as supporting Bosniak in Banja Luka and Serb in Sarajevo
386 or... It's people who are minorities, people who are different, they are always under the
387 pressure of the majority, so we have to stand for them. And when you put it that way to them
388 they go, yeah, so. I have a guy, he doesn't even know what gay means, probably, but he
389 supports that. Because he understood what's the issue, you know. So as I said, that
390 educational role of Naša Stranka in political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is as
391 important as a result that we achieve. 'Cause we change a lot party around is, too. Like, you
392 know, the, you know Konaković is direct result of Naša Stranka. SDA had to respond with
393 somebody who is...kind of, can compete with us. Young, honest, eloquent, you know, that
394 kind of stuff. So it force them to put the candidate that will match our candidate, so... That's
395 what I think is happening. I hope.

396 AS: Let me check the time... Maybe I will ask you one more question?

397 PK: Absolutely, I have...

398 AS: I was just... For the plenums, I was wondering, 'cause you know, my first idea for the
399 thesis was to maybe look into models of participatory democracy, and see if maybe that
400 would be a model for Bosnia and Herzegovina to have, to somehow, you know, encourage
401 citizens, also educate them in the process, what is politics, how does it work, why does it
402 concern you, and maybe from having this kind of, you know, a little bit like the, they have
403 the Citizen Assembly in Ireland, where ninety-nine citizens are selected randomly every year
404 and everything is broadcasted, everything is very transparent, people can follow the process
405 to bring, to educate, to bring politics closer to the people, to show the deliberate process
406 and... I was thinking if this might be, you know, an adequate model for Bosnia.

407 PK: Listen, could be alright, I mean, you know, all the, Ireland which is one of my favourite
408 countries [laughs], I spent all my vacations when I lived there, and, when I lived in America...

409 I think we live in a, unfortunately, [intelligible]. You know, they say Leonardo da Vince was
410 the last man who knew everything. You know, at his time, if you read like seven books from
411 biology, six from chemistry, na na na na na, you could know everything about science. Today
412 you can't know everything. I mean, there are physicists who are physicists and they have no
413 idea about quantum physics or quantum mechanisms. That's the one thing. So I think it's just
414 like it's, it would be very difficult to sit with ninety-nine people and discuss the progressive
415 tax system with them, and how it projects on economy and social class and stuff like that.
416 It's very, because it requires a certain background knowledge, which is [coughs] we all
417 became, what I'm saying is, very specialised in what we do. You know, we used to have
418 political analysist in the newspaper. But yow you have political analysists for Balkans,
419 political analysists for Asia. You know, and then even not that but, like, we are getting more
420 and more specialised. One. The other thing is that, my very good friend, designer from New
421 York, Mirko Ilić, [intelligible] but he works for the Colombia University and he is an
422 assistant to Milton Glaser, the guy who invented I love New York thing. He always says to
423 me as joke, like you know, "Peđa, camel is a horse designed by committee". You don't get...?
424 Camel is a horse designed by committee. Like, by many people. And it looks ugly and it's
425 not like, like, horses are cool and aerodynamic and shit, this thing has... I'm sure you have
426 the same in English about, like, when too many people are, we have, like, we say something
427 like "too many mothers, the baby's gonna be like, shitty or something like". When too many
428 people are involved into doing something, you know.

429 AS: I think in English and German you make reference to cooking. If you have too many
430 chefs you spoil the food.

431 PK: Exactly, yeah. Too many chefs. So that's what I think. But, like, we, the general, the
432 concept of representative democracy is exactly that. Like, I don't have time to read the laws,
433 to go into the background, why [intelligible] is bad or good for us and shit like that. But I'm
434 gonna elect a person. And I'm gonna put that person on that job eight hours a day. And I trust
435 that person because he represents, has that values that we share. And I heard him talking and
436 we think in a similar way, so I'm gonna let him make decisions for me. That's what the
437 representative democracy is. As I said in the beginning there was never any other. It was
438 always that.

439 AS: But of course you could say that, you know, the cost that you have in this country for
440 the political establishment is already so high that if you would, let's not talk about the way

441 how to get there but if you were somehow able to, to cut it down and you know, and to
442 replace a certain part with a citizens' assembly that do, for example, get certain topics that
443 they discuss. They're not involved in everything but for example there would be tasks with...
444 Constitution is maybe a big one, especially to start with, you know, but they would be tasked
445 with, you know, in Ireland it was the abortion law, it was the same-sex marriage, so... Topics
446 that, that probably most of people in the population have an opinion on, and that maybe
447 politician don't wanna get their hands too dirty with, because it might upset one side or
448 another.

449 PK: Listen, that's what we... [Opens laptop] I'm just opening this because I, once it connects
450 to the internet I wanna maybe show you something [laughs]. We are the only party, I love
451 townhall meetings. And we do tons of them, we do at least once a week. And when there are
452 important laws here in Canton, we organise a public discussion and we invite citizens and
453 sometimes we have to rent a bigger space. We really do that. And we love, we are the only
454 party, and I want to show you that, that we organise public discussions on a certain topics or
455 politics or...things. With citizens. And I just want to show you, last night we had Damir
456 Marjanović, I don't know if you know of him... It's a professor of genealogy, I mean, he's
457 professor, he was with DF, now he's with us. And he is very interested, he was the Minister
458 of Education here in Canton Sarajevo, like two, three years ago and then he quit. And this is
459 like, last night, in Vogošća, like little townhall meeting, I mean I don't like the setting, I like
460 these round, and me in the middle, but this is what we have, space-wise. And he was talking
461 about the reform in education that we are planning for the Canton Sarajevo. And I could
462 scroll down on Facebook page [scrolls] and, on, just on the wall, like you will see, like we
463 did, this is, okay, so this is Nasiha Pozder, who is the urbanism and architecture, talking
464 about the problems that we have in the country and things that we wanna do in urbanism and
465 stuff like that. So, what I'm saying is, we do that. With as much money as we have, like, for
466 example like, I would like, I think this settings would be better if people were seated in a
467 circle and the guy talking with a wireless mic was in the middle, going around and talking
468 to everybody, but you know, then I would have to rent space and organise it in that way stuff,
469 this I get free and then I have to deal with, you know, with what we have. But we do, I do
470 believe in that, you know. But... I mostly believe in that not the in a way that I'm gonna get
471 great advice from ordinary people about the education reform, but I wanna explain them so
472 that they understand what we want. And maybe, of course, I mean you hear things and certain
473 concerns that you maybe missed and stuff like that and we build them in, and I do believe

474 that. But I don't believe in this, like, you have elections, you elect people for the parliament,
475 and then you elect, what, randomly ninety-nine people...

476 AS: No of course they shouldn't take over the same, you know, legislative role. I think also
477 in Ireland what they look at is very much at seeing it as a way of educating people. 'Cause
478 especially for these very controversy topics I think it was more... Because you know, they
479 had a lot of people that were in there, that from the beginning they were strictly against same-
480 sex marriage, and through the process, through the experts they invited, through their
481 meetings, through the debate, they slowly... Not all of them certainly, but some of them
482 changed their opinion. And realised, no of course, of course there is, I have absolutely no
483 interest in oppressing certain people because I don't want to be oppressed in another area
484 so... And then, you know, they can go out and they talk to people and more people can relate
485 to it. So no, of course it wouldn't be a strictly legislative function.

486 PK: We'd like to do that, and you know, the way that we see things is mostly also, like, you
487 know, we, like, we are preparing this educational reform for Canton Sarajevo and, for
488 example like, the way the books are choose now, we wanna change it, we wanna give this
489 right to certain assembly of teachers that they decide which book. But then once that they
490 make a decision it's obligatory for everybody. We don't think that the government should
491 have an input in it. I mean, this should really be left to people who are in that expertise, you
492 know, whose expertise is that. And the same thing for many others, that's how we do see.
493 Now it's very difficult not to slip into what we had before the war here, you know, when we
494 had this, what is it called, self-governing socialism where people who work in a certain
495 corporation, company, they were considered like shareholders, and everybody's vote was
496 equal. You know, my father worked in a hospital here, you know before the war. And they
497 would have a meeting, I don't know, once a month where everybody, like the cleaning ladies,
498 the guy from a kitchen, the automechanic who was fixing the hospital car, they all sit and,
499 you know, then the director come and says "okay, I think we should really spend most of our
500 money this year, most of our budget to buy a magnetic resonance machine, which costs a
501 half million Euros", okay. And the cleaning lady goes, "oh I don't think we should buy that,
502 I think we should use that money to increase our salaries". That's what we had. And that
503 didn't work well. [Laughs] I mean there is a, listen, you know, it's all about the balance, I
504 mean, you know, just like the whole, I would say, political struggle of nineteenth and
505 twentieth century is a struggle between two contradictory principles. Principle of equality
506 and principle of individual freedom. I mean... And trying to find the balance is a 640,000

507 Dollar question, I guess. [Pauses] We are leaning on this individual freedom side of this as
508 a liberal party and the others are leaning to this forced equality. That's a debate that John
509 Meynard Keynes and Hayek had for, what, thirty years, and they didn't sort it out, I don't
510 think we will.

511 AS: No, and we have other things to worry about, or you do.

512 PK: Russians. It's really bad. Turkey, Russia, everybody's here. They just announced that
513 Erdogan's gonna be having a election rally here mid-May.

514 AS: For this election?

515 PK: Well, it will certainly help SDA... They consider him their big brother, if they get in
516 trouble he will come and help them. Like he did in '92, yes...

517 AS: He will probably try the same in Germany.

518 PK: Oh, he was forbidden in European... This is the only place where he... Yeah.

519 AS: Well he tried last year and then...

520 PK: Yeah and they were not allowed, yeah. In Germany first... No now it's the EU that no,
521 no political rallies. I mean, it can't be organised by Turkey in European Union, so...

522 AS: So he's coming here.

523 PK: But here... On the border.

524 AS: Okay. I think I asked all of my question. I mean, of course this is something that can
525 and has been discussed for years, decades, and it probably will be...

526 PK: [Sighs] Oh I don't know, who knows, maybe this election will change everything. We
527 have an interesting candidate, for the presidency.

528

529 *[Conversation continued after recording was switched off, and then reverted to topic]*

530

531 PK: And as I said, unfortunately what this country will first need is a little bit of [intelligible],
532 I mean the biggest employer in this country is the government. You know, that is not
533 sustainable. So, we have changed that. Nobody is gonna go in front of the thousands of

534 people [intelligible] and say, "we will cut your salary down by 10 per cent and it's gonna be
535 great". [Laughter]

536 AS: But I guess if, you know, if everything continues like right now until the election, maybe
537 there will not be so much change.

538 PK: If everything continues like now and ends up like now, or more or less like now in terms
539 of political power, then I give Bosnia five years.

540 AS: Until collapse?

541 PK: Yeah, until dissolution into three mini states. This social fabric, you know, during the
542 war in nineteen...just after the war, it was still an argument in the kitchen, it was sink, but
543 now it's just silence. It's becoming more and more silence. And that means there is no...
544 When you have an argument, there is a relationship, there is emotion...

545 AS: And you care about it.

546 PK: And you care. [Intelligible]

547 AS: The silence about this country, the future of this country?

548 PK: No it's like, what I'm saying is like, today, Mostar, Sarajevo and Banja Luka are further
549 apart than they were in '93. Psychologically, emotionally. So... Let the social fabric keep the
550 country together, and when the fabric is gone, really, why bother.

551 AS: Maybe it would be better to split up.

552 PK: It's true but, you know, that mentality doesn't stop there. You know, even if you... Then,
553 then Tuzla and Sarajevo will find, there is a, you know, [intelligible] it doesn't stop there. It
554 keeps coming.

**Interview with Asim Mujkić (AM) conducted by Anne-Kathrin Schmidt
(AS) University of Sarajevo, 20 April 2018, Sarajevo**

1 AS: Maybe, since you already mentioned the protests, do you... I think I wrote you that
2 question yesterday, do you feel like anything has really changed, do you feel like, like you
3 do see some change that you can attribute to the 2013 and 2014 protests?

4 AM: Well, not particularly in, let's say in empirical sense. Yes, there were minor changes,
5 for example [thinks] the legislature on benefits of the political elites, which were later again
6 dismissed, but that was short-term gain. Or maybe protestors managed to force politicians to
7 open issues of social justice in the elections of 2014. But I don't think we should measure
8 event of that importance with concrete, let's say steps or concrete empirical achievement. To
9 be, the best, the best outcome of the protests is that people here realised, first of all that, they
10 are not alone in their [thinks] in their existentially bad situation, that they share common set
11 of problems, that's one important thing. Another important thing is that through protests
12 people realised that, yes they want to participate in political processes. Maybe we couldn't
13 have found the right way to do it, but you know usually, and I think that's ideological truth
14 is, you know, people are only mobilised during the elections and then, I mean it's problem
15 in the West as well, you know. And political elites assume that people are so individually,
16 egoistically centred that they only care about their very egoistic goals and interest, why
17 bother them with political. But I think in Bosnian protests, but also I would say, I would
18 connect this with the general, you know, upheaval throughout Europe is, yes people want to
19 be asked. People want to participate. Yes, people are not happy with the present form of
20 representational democracy. So I think that's an important aspect of these protests, because
21 they opened up important issues on, not only on the future of this community but on the
22 meaning of political community in general. Another important issue, maybe outcome, was
23 that you can still mobilise people on a non-nationalist goal here. Because I was the first one
24 who didn't believe. I thought before 2013 you of course, you were right about 2013 and 2013,
25 I mean, it's...

26 AS: I have written about the previous history of some smaller things...

27 AM: Yeah, yeah, you should, there were even before that, in 2008... But, before 2013 at least
28 I believed that nationalists managed to take a grip on their peoples and, you know, this is
29 hopeless. You cannot actually mobilise people on anything else but, you know, typical
30 ethno-political stuff. And these protests showed that people can be mobilised transcending
31 the ethnic lines. And it was immediately after protests proved, there was these huge floods
32 in the north of this country, affecting equally, affecting everybody regardless of your ethnic
33 background. And people spontaneously, throughout this country, organised themselves and
34 collected and distributed. Well, since eight institutions of this country, be they state level or
35 entity or cantonal level, they were completely paralysed, they...they failed. They didn't do
36 their... We discovered suddenly that there are fifteen million Euros missing from the fund
37 dedicated to, yeah. So, they collapsed. And people spontaneously organised and assisted one
38 another way beyond ethnic lines, which was great event. So, that would be my initial, I would
39 say, initial...answer to your question on what actually changed. So, nothing much in a
40 concrete level, on a concrete level, but I think there was important change in the mindset,
41 mindsets of the people. You know, they can refer to that, "aha, you see what we did, what
42 we can do to you if...". So...

43 AS: But at the same time, I have also spoken to somebody who said that she and a lot of her
44 friends they felt so crushed after the protests, because again, you know, it was great while it
45 lasted but then again nothing really happened after it.

46 AM: Yeah, you know, I was crushed as well. I know, I share these feelings as well, but you
47 know, we have to continue our struggle. One of the ways I continue my struggle was for
48 example to participate in discussions and to sign this declaration which, to me, I mean...
49 [thinks] I can understand people, you know. I can understand their pessimism, you know,
50 you have, like, quarter of century of the domination of, I mean, it's a huge period. Quarter of
51 a century, twenty-five years they are ruling here, ethno-nationalists. So people desperately
52 wanted changes, but: On the other hand, if you, you know, common knowledge in social
53 movements, you know, you have to know that these processes are very, very slow and are
54 unpredictable, so... So, yeah, I mean, we should look at these individual protests as a part of,
55 hopefully, wider change, wider social process, yeah.

56 AS: And what would you say about the fact that in Republika Srpska there is still a lot less
57 protests and it seems that...

58 AM: I would say that's because regime is more thorough, regime is more authoritarian. For
59 example in 2013 you had busses coming from Banja Luka to Sarajevo, not only that they
60 organised protests and joined the protests throughout the country in their own towns, but
61 busses came from Banja Luka and other parts of Republika Srpska, in front of the... You see,
62 this is the picture, me and my colleagues in front of the 2013... There was about 15,000
63 people, from all over the place, from Republika Srpska they came with a transparent
64 supporting and then, other transparents saying "Republika Srpska sucks", it's regime tele...
65 You know, they, they really... However, for the protests of 2014 we, here, had support of
66 progressive people in the RS. And even some veteran organisation said they will join if
67 they're not...if their demands were not met. But regime, Dodik's regime was very militant,
68 he immediately started spreading paranoia amongst Serb population saying these
69 demonstrations are fake because in the background, actually, they want to export revolution
70 and through Republik Srpska... They even had information on, I don't know, so many busses
71 of Tuzla students coming with arms to Rep... Unbelievable, you know. But in a regime setup,
72 you know, people could believe in that crap, to be honest. But you know, they had very good
73 propaganda saying no no no, if you join these guys it's against Republika Srpska, it's against
74 Serb people... In other words, they were better prepared for 2014 than for 2013.

75 AS: And I can see how that becomes a problem if you have a very unequal situation of
76 protests, and the two halves... it's like, it almost enforces the division that...

77 AM: Exactly. It was same in the areas dominated by HDZ, Croatian nationalist parties. Oh,
78 they were very anti. And they also interpreted as, in nationalistic terms, like "oh this is hidden
79 agenda, so that Bosniaks could take over the entire Federation, don't join, this is, you know,
80 fraud", you know, all kinds of... And of course Bosniak elites had similar explanations, "oh
81 this is joint Serb and Croat... Why only in Bosniak areas, isn't it significant, it's financed
82 from outside", you know that kind of, that kind of... So, basically it's very hard here to follow
83 and fight for something in terms of social justice or generally in terms of civil society and
84 democracy in general, and human rights. Because, you know, not only you have to fight the
85 local establishment, but you have to fight the entire regional nationalistic setup, you know.
86 That's scary. Because you had immediately support by Plenković, by Zagreb official
87 Croatian government of HDZ, they condemned the protest, Belgrade as well, so, you know...
88 I had, maybe I mentioned it in the text, I had this, I gave an interview to Belgrade, pretty
89 much independent station. And they asked me a question, but, you know this is, this type of

90 question actually tells you about the perspectives you are, you have before you approach to
91 the problem. They said, “well, isn't it strange that only in Bosniak-dominated towns these
92 protests happened”. I said, “well, that's one way of looking it. Another way of looking it, the
93 protests happened in industrial towns”. (laughs). So... I mean, it's not my fault that all
94 industrial towns are actually, or majority of industrial towns are in the areas of, where
95 Bosniak are majority... I mean, what type of perspective you will choose, I mean, it tells me
96 about you, the way you wanna look at a problem. I mean we talked about frameworks,
97 theoretical frameworks you know. Theoretical framework will tell something about you,
98 what are your values, what are your... you know. So.

99 AS: So in this kind of environment, what channels do you have to disseminate alternative
100 information? As opposed to, you know, state media...

101 AM: Very scare channels, very scarce channels. We had very aggressive, hostile media. We
102 didn't have support in most of the medias, you know, they either, they either presented it as,
103 you know, they were looking for some incidents, some yellow type of events, sensationalist
104 part, or drugs, or some shop was robbed, you know. Or fire, oh my god, I mean every
105 demonstration in the West you have cars burnt, you have vandals, you know, that kind of
106 stuff. Or, they were ideologically instructed and developed and spread conspiracy theories,
107 oh who is behind, the other of course, oppositional group is actually paying these protests.
108 Or they were simply malicious, for example I remember we blocked a main communication
109 street, right in front of the Presidency. And they, for example one of the headlines was, oh,
110 due to the blockade one five-year old boy died because ambulance couldn't... Which is a lie.
111 We always let ambulance and police and fire cars go through, so... But, you know, what does
112 it mean for you if you're not from Sarajevo and you don't know the context, if you read it
113 somewhere else, ah you see how bad they are, and you know... [intelligible] So, they were
114 either malicious or sensationalist or very ideologically instructed. Not only media in RS or
115 Croat media but also media here, as well, most of the media. So... But, thanks to the support
116 of network of oppositional media, you know, I think some of our voices had been heard, in
117 Croatia, in Serbia, ...those are usual suspects, you know, oppositional media in Croatia you
118 know who, which, and in Serbia as well, so. But like I said, you know, it's... [thinks] We
119 were restricted in so many ways, you know. For example, in our plenums, you know, we
120 tried to avoid any discussion on changes of constitution, on anything concerning structures
121 other than cantonal. Because it is immediately interpreted as, you know, in nationalistic

122 terms. So, and I think we managed that but that also, how can I say, you know, fragmented
123 us. If you cannot tackle the issues concerning the entire political community but only local,
124 not that I'm saying but there are a lot of things to be done in the local, you know... We
125 realised, for example, as citizens, that public spaces are not public. You know. We had to
126 rent public space to have plenum or any gathering, we have to rent, to pay. Two thousand
127 Euros per session. Which we did, thanks to our friends throughout the world, there was a
128 network led by, you know, famous intellectuals and writers, Sasha Hemon for example in
129 America, you know, the gather some money, sent it, and things like that. We had to, for
130 example, on several occasions, which I participated in, at some point local elite rightfully
131 evaluated that protests kinda losing their strength. So, when we wanted to have our plenum
132 in Skenderija building, which is public building, they said “no, we don't, we will not allow
133 you anymore”. So we had to go to our friends in international community who could, which
134 I did for example, I talked to a diplomat here who used his influence and called local
135 authorities and asked, you know, to open the space for us, you know, but this is the kind of
136 things we had to deal with. In other words, to conclude, I fully agree, I haven't read Jasmin
137 but you told me, domination of nationalist in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region is
138 regional. So, and that's for me important lesson for the future resistance. So how do you
139 resist regional domination? Regionally, am I right? Okay, we did it on local level, okay there
140 are certain things that can be done, should be done, that's fine. But, unless we have anti-
141 nationalist platform or network on regional level, and I mean at least Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia,
142 I don't think the dominant nationalistic paradigm will ever disappear, you know.

143 AS: Because otherwise it will come, it will keep coming back.

144 AM: It will... It came from Serbia and Croatia, so there is, well analogy usually is not a good
145 friend of science but if I'm allowed, analogously it will, nationalism will go and it will be
146 initiated also from Serbia and Croatia. Or not. That's why the declaration of one language is
147 one important step, the way I see, you know. ‘Cause it takes from nationalist very important
148 weapon, which is language. Language equals identity, that's the formula. So if you take, I
149 mean everybody knows we understand each other. What is important, where is this capital
150 for resistance, symbolic capital for resistance. You know, Bosnia and this region is usually
151 interpreted, even in European official, you know, views and statements, you know, the area
152 deeply divided with conflicts. But ethnic relations is just top of the iceberg. People usually
153 are not ethnic in their own lives, people communicate. Personally, I participate scientific

154 conferences, I participate in association, you know, for Croatian Philosophical Association,
155 for Slovenian Political Association. Last year I participated in Montenegrin Academy of
156 Science conference, you know? I mean, there is this entire scientific, intellectual community
157 in arts, who normally, you know, communicate, participate in each other's events, to whom,
158 you know, nationalism doesn't represent much of a value, let's say. Okay, that's one segment,
159 trade, economy. People do have joint business affairs. I mean, people constantly are crossing
160 not only state and entity borders but ethnicity borders in their regular, everyday dealings.
161 Here we have students from the other side of the hill. Not too many that I would like to see,
162 you know, but... But also some students from Sarajevo are going over there. You cannot stop
163 it, there is no way you can stop it. So, my point is, this...and language reveals us this
164 possibility. Because none of that would have been possible or would have been possible to
165 that extent if we had different, really different languages. Think of Kosovo. You know, I
166 think part of the Kosovo problem is very different, you know, languages. Because if you use
167 Swedish when you talk to me, to me you appear as this wall, I mean, I hit on you as a wall,
168 you know, I cannot break through, I cannot get to you, for example you don't speak English.
169 You know, you appear to me as completely the other. Here, even if you want to you cannot
170 appear as the other. If you wanna establish the otherness then you have to ask "what's your
171 name" and then maybe, you know with your name you can be certain, to certain degree, "aha
172 you belong to the other group". Or religious affiliation which is the most precise... But what
173 if you're not religious? Oh my God. So, yeah. My point is these, you know, hundreds and
174 thousands of daily interactions among peoples throughout the region, which remain under
175 radar to me are potential for certain, you know because nationalists rely on only one type of
176 interactions. Which is conflicts, ethnic confrontation, and that's where, how they manage to
177 control. But my question is, what to do with the total spillover of interactions? How to, how
178 to get them together, how to organise them, how to articulate them, so that they can, you
179 know, be used as a tool of transformation, political transformation, or something, you know.
180 That's, that's why I am a little bit hopefully, I'm not pessimist, most of my... But, and I know
181 that this is process that we have to... It will last, it will last, unfortunately we don't get too
182 much help from Europeans, because they are very bureaucratically straightforward looking,
183 you know, "oh you elected these guys that means we talk to these guys". I mean, you don't
184 have to have a PhD in political science to know that elections are not actually ideal, rational
185 choice type of activity. I mean, even in the West people vote, most of the people vote
186 following their emotions. Who scared them most? Am I right?

187 AS: Or who do you wanna teach a lesson? You vote for somebody to teach...

188 AM: Yeah, exactly, so this is emotions, this is not rational. Nobody reads programme and
189 says "oh let me see, aha you're a party, let me see what do you think about LGBT". Ah, come
190 on. Nobody does that. So, especially in the atmosphere here, and you have political elites
191 heavily invested, for example in education institutions, they have to have control on the, you
192 know, on the socialisation of youth. Then media, you have spreading of paranoia and fear
193 throughout the election period. So, we cannot say that our elections are actually true
194 representation of people's desires, needs... There is a text that I did with my American
195 colleague, Hulsey, you can get it online, and it's in English, called "Explaining the success
196 of nationalist parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina".

197 AS: I've read that one as well.

198 AM: Ah, yeah. So, prisoner's dilemma. There is... You manage to create distrust and fear
199 and of course you are then in position to think, you know, I hate my nationalist leaders but
200 how I can be sure that you... So, best option is keep this way.

201 AS: And what about, you know, all these small parties that, that keep, like every now and
202 then there is somebody that founds a new party and, you know, sometimes I think, you know,
203 I wanna believe that it's actually young people that have a vision, that wanna break out of
204 the system and change something, but...

205 AM: Most of these new parties are entrepreneur parties. You know, you get certain funding,
206 you get... If you're elected and if you have your own party and you put yourself to being first
207 on the least, there are reasonable chances to get elected, and you will have decent, let's say,
208 pay for next four years. Which is great entrepreneuring type of behaviour. You just sit, you
209 don't have to do anything, you just sit and you get your 5,000. Which is two, three thousand
210 maybe Euros. Which is very decent pay. So...

211 AS: Do you think that most of these people don't actually want to change the system?
212 Because they benefit from it?

213 AM: No, no. They are... They got smart, they want to use the system, they want to milk the
214 system. So, most of them. But of course we should not discourage political association. But
215 in my view, look, nationalist domination, look, regardless of ethnic background, all

216 nationalist political leaders share the same interest. They are different, but in essence, you
217 know, I use the word "class", political class, they are, you know, the part of the
218 establishment, either as opposition or, but they are, they share the same interest and their
219 interest is of course to protect their gains and powerful po... I mean, every political setup is
220 by default [laughs] you know, they would like to reproduce themselves and continue with
221 their domination, so you have people, you know, ruling here for twenty-five years. And they
222 were saying, "look at these communists they ruled forty years". I mean, you are on your way
223 to, you know, to catch up with the communists with twenty-five years already you guys are,
224 you guys are ruling here. So, in my view, how to fight... In the beginning we had these social-
225 democratic parties but in time they manage, maybe sometimes even to get the power. But
226 the entire surrounding, institutional design, political culture, regional context moulded them
227 into nationalist setup of thinking, you know. So, how do you then confront this domination?
228 Well we have to, first, organise but on Bosnian level, on entire Bosnian level, we have to get
229 out of our fragmented positions and recognise our common interest and then based on these
230 interests then we can, we can also be different but the same, just as our elites. But we have
231 to have oppositional but truly national, nation-wide block. Hopefully, like I said in the
232 beginning, it has to be regional as well, you know. It would be best if it's regional, if we
233 would have support from similar-minded people in Croatia, in Serbia. That would be the
234 best. But we'll see. There are contacts, there are supports, mainly on the left. Although, you
235 know, people of the left are not very happy with the dominant so-called left social-
236 democratic types of organisations, so they are looking for new ways for organising, maybe
237 that could be one of the ways to... But I don't know, we will see how things will develop.

238 AS: I sometimes think that with the entire system that is so encrusted that, as you said, every
239 time there is somebody who is actually trying to change something the system swallows
240 them back in and they have to conform to it.

241 AM: But, but look. You are... It swallows us if we are small. If we are Sarajevo-based social-
242 democrats, if we are... well, Banja Luka-based social-democrats are actually nationalist
243 party. But, if you are Banja Luka-based some party, we are then swallowed into this. But if
244 we make stronger or wider or deeper type of political alliance, especially backed with, you
245 know, people from Serbia and Croatia, then...then we will... But it has to be movement, it
246 cannot be exclusively political party. Because part of our problem is representational
247 democracy. Which is actually problem in Europe as well. Here it's even more obvious since

248 the political representation is ethnically biased, so... It has this, I quoted Lisa Howard, she
249 has this very good text of ethnocracy. And she described how this type of representational
250 democracy with ethnically-based type of representational democracy actually, not only it
251 doesn't work but actually encourages certain elites to go towards further split and, you know,
252 division, deepening division. Which in our case is the case, is the proof. So, but, you know...
253 Do you mind? [Takes cigarette]

254 AS: No, go ahead. [Pause] 'Cause yeah, I mean it's an election year...

255 AM: Oh this year, this year nothing will happen crucially, I mean, nationalists who will...
256 You know, if you analyse political vocabulary on our elections, each new election is opening
257 a new gates of hell, I mean, vocabulary becomes more and more radical, you know, it's
258 simply, it's going towards very militant, radical type of language. You know, so... And to
259 me, you know, I have a lot of discussion with some of my colleagues who, you know, who
260 thought okay, maybe okay, we have to accept this domination of nationalism and give our
261 best to kind of tame it. My position is you cannot tame it, you cannot tame it. There was
262 European and American attempt in 2006 to tame it. And key political players agreed to
263 certain, certain important changes. But once they did it, they left political space of
264 mobilisation open, then you had Dodik entering into it, and other, so it was actually shift of
265 elites. You voluntarily gave up mobilisational, radical speech, somebody else got it. And
266 they actually managed to mobilise people and actually to dismiss previous elites and, you
267 know, that's very dangerous because of the setup. Setup is ethnocratic, and you have to
268 outbid your competition. How do you do that? By radical talk. You have to be more and
269 more radical. That's why... You know, we need to stop it. We need to stop it.

270 AS: Because where does it end, otherwise.

271 AM: And then, you know, Europeans come and say "oh you guys need to sit together and
272 discuss and compromise". You don't, I mean, compromise alright, I mean I'm all for
273 compromise, but, you know, definition of compromise, okay, compromise is some, middle
274 ground between the two rational, argued views. Here you have irrational views, who do
275 you compromise with? You cannot compromise with total madness. [Laughs] If you do that,
276 what's the point?

277 AS: I've already... Last year I was talking to a Dutch politician who is the rapporteur for
278 Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Council of Europe...

279 AM: Oh excuse, are you Dutch? Nationally? What's your...

280 AS: No, no I'm German. I did my Bachelor in the Netherlands, I did my Master in Sweden.
281 But...

282 AM: You see, but you're in Bosnia, I have to ask a national question.

283 AS: No but, his name is Tiny Kox. He's a Dutch politician from the, he's in the European
284 Socialist Party.

285 AM: I heard of him.

286 AS: Yeah, and I was speaking to him because he actually did a very nice job, they were
287 presenting the report of monitoring procedure on Bosnia and Herzegovina in the
288 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and he called out the Bosnian delegation
289 on not doing their job. And of course then you know, when, he was defending, because he
290 was presenting the report and then they could give comments, and then he was commenting
291 on their comments because... You can probably imagine the kind of political nice-talk that
292 they gave and they were trying to make some excuses, and he was like, you don't have an
293 excuse, you know, it's your country, you are the elected politician. Nobody wants to start a
294 country in the same way you had to, but you have to deal with it. So I actually went to talk
295 to him because I thought it was such a good speech.

296 AM: Exactly. Look how it works here. Serb and Croat elites on different levels of the country
297 or sometimes joint, they obstruct. And say, and when you obstruct, and then you say "oh you
298 see it doesn't work". Okay, when you don't give, put effort into work something, it's easy for
299 you as a bystander to say "hey, I told you it won't work! You see how this country is
300 unfunctional". Or Croats say, "how you see this Federation is function". What the other elite
301 say? "Look, they don't want it. What can we do alone?" So, it's kind of alliance in not doing
302 anything, blaming each other, you know. This is perfect circuit.

303 AS: So Tiny Kox said, "I don't usually wish any country a revolution, but Bosnia is the
304 country in the world where I think they need... you know, you need tabula rasa."

305 AM: I agree. I agree totally.

306 AS: Because you said you need a regional movement, ideally, because the system is so...
307 Because every time when you change a small thing in the system it's not big enough to
308 change the entire system.

309 AM: Sure, sure. Sure. I felt some of that during the protests. Some of us are, were invited
310 and called by diplomatic corps. We had discussions and they were, you know, and then I
311 realised to what extent actually they hate the political elite as well. We were joint in our
312 dislike of political elites and you can, you could have felt, you know... But, maybe we could
313 have coordinated better or, I don't know, we didn't feel supported. Unless, you know, in,
314 with these small steps like, you know, like I told you, a guy calling, diplomat calling the
315 local, cantonal politician to allow us to join public... You see how absurd that is? Can you
316 imagine in Germany for example, you know, calling Baden-Württemberg governor to allow
317 a German citizens to use public space, which is per definition public. I mean, this is...

318 AS: Doesn't sound like a democracy.

319 AM: Crazy. This is... But, yes I could have felt this, they expected that some more important
320 changes could have happened but... Maybe if they were more prepared maybe some changes
321 would have happened, I mean... I was even asked by one diplomat, Western diplomat, "oh
322 what is the ideological background of this? Because if it's communist, leftist thing, we cannot
323 support". I said, "give me a break", you know, give me a break. I mean, what communist,
324 what... I mean. This is typical, maybe they're the... I mean, plenum was open to citizens. You
325 had citizens with anarchist views. I mean, this is democracy. They couldn't make majority.
326 They were not support... But, yes you have right to... There were organisation of single
327 mothers coming and saying. Some veteran organisation had their platform to say, and share
328 their views. Some national, kind of nationalist type of unitarian... But they didn't get support.
329 And these media, especially media under Dodik's and Croat control, would only insert this
330 guy who is, who belongs to Anti-Dayton movement, who wants republic of Bos... you know.
331 But this is demo... I mean, unless you are a racist, Nazi, fascist, you are free to share your
332 view... I mean, this is democ..., this is what plenum is about. And, you know, all conclusions
333 that such people would propose we're not actually, I wasn't happy with some conclusions.
334 For example, let me tell you, first demand was government of experts. I hate the idea, neo-
335 liberal idea of government of experts. But majority voted for it, you know, I said okay, I

336 agree. I mean... I will live with it. [Laughter] And, you know. So, I mean, I just wanted to
337 tell you, I didn't support some of these conclusions as well. But, we had anarchist, we had...
338 And you know, media were selective. You know, if they would see some of these, for
339 example Anti-Dayton people talking on plenum they say "aha, this is the actually...", you
340 know. Or if they see a flag with lilies, "aha, this is obvious proof that unitarian, Bosniak,
341 hegemonic...activity is ongoing... Croats beware, you know, they will...". So, this is the type
342 of setting that we had to, you know, deal with.

343 AS: One of my initial ideas when I first read about the plenums was that maybe it would be
344 possible to establish some kind of deliberative, participative body, you know, some kind of
345 institutionalised citizen assembly. Like they have in other countries, for example the one
346 they have in Ireland I think is like a model example of this deliberation process, has worked
347 so well in make people understand how things work, how other people think, and really...
348 You know, the pure value of deliberation, I don't know, I read some...

349 AM: Yes but we were bombarded at that moment, this is illegal, this is... And I spent a great
350 deal of my time explaining people, "no no no, this might be illegal, but its legitimacy is
351 totally out of the question. We are legitimate". Whenever group of citizens gather and
352 discuss, the common concern, you are legitimised, you know, that's... [Telephone rings,
353 speaks on telephone]

354 So, you know, we struggled a lot. One of the good things is that we managed to open, to
355 organise, establish open university during these days. I think, was it the Rosa-Luxemburg-
356 Stiftung that helped us in that regard. And we for example, you know, we... And this is the
357 most important problem in my view, maybe because I'm philosopher, maybe because I deal
358 with these problems, you know. Okay, you have rage, every country has rage, in Germany
359 we'll find rage, in Holland, you know. But how do you channel the rage? How do you
360 articulate? It's important, you know. Otherwise rage, you know, it can disperse, or it can go
361 in totally opposite direction, you know. How do you control, how do you... What do you
362 make out of it? So we thought, some of my friends and me, we need to offer vocabulary,
363 new vocabulary to articulate it. That's why we organise, besides plenum and demonstrations,
364 we tried to offer a platform for deliberation and discussion, in order to clarify first of all to
365 ourselves, what we really want, you know. What do we wanna make out of this? And we
366 addressed to some of our friends in Europe, for example we had Belgians, they had this civic

367 activity, thousand days something, you know... For thousand days, Belgium didn't have
368 government, you know, it was terrible. So citizens organised, occupy practically, institutions
369 and, for a day they had some, they brought some decisions and things like this. So they came
370 to tell us, to share their experience. Then we had colleagues from Maribor, because at that
371 time they took over Maribor, they took over municipality and all important institutions, and
372 they practically... So, you know, we wanted to hear experience and we wanted to develop
373 discussion, what is the direct democracy, what is... You know, what's wrong with
374 representational democracy. We tried to... And it was excellent actually in a, you will see
375 Museum of the City of Sarajevo, you know where that is? You should visit anyway.

376 AS: The Museum of the City of Sarajevo?

377 AM: You know the old museum, across Holiday Inn, the old one, right next to it, kind of
378 modernist building, is the museum... Historical Museum.

379 AS: The Historical Museum, yeah, that's the one. Yeah, okay, I've been there.

380 AM: And we had very progressive lady director who opened the doors... I mean, that's
381 different story, our museums are not funded properly, and they couldn't... They're not on a
382 budget so... So, practically they don't have heat, and it was February. And we came in there,
383 you know, freezing, and discussing, it was great. We had like, five or six sessions, and I
384 think that was important aspect of our struggle. But... I mean, you know. We have to learn
385 from experience and maybe... For example, in 2013 we didn't organise in that way. You
386 know, we didn't have plenums, we didn't have assemblies, we didn't have... And that's why
387 maybe [intelligible] dispersed. In 2014 we had these bodies and maybe that was something
388 that articulated and kept our energy for a longer period. Maybe next time... Some people will
389 do better.

390 AS: Was there any talk about, in the plenums, was there any idea of having them
391 institutionalised somehow?

392 AM: Yes we talked, but... It was just our discussion points. We had idea that plenum should
393 be kind of civic, independent body, platform for citizenry in general, that would in some way
394 monitor the work of the government. But of course... You know, we didn't last long to have
395 this idea. But, you know. And then of course we were heavily, why do you use the word

396 plenum which is Communist word... Or it's a Soviet... 'cause in Russian, in Russian language
397 "soviet" means council. In our language it's "savjet", which is similar to Russian, also
398 means... Aha, so you're councils, or plenums, or you are soviets, you know, that kind of
399 propaganda type of... But anyway, I mean, you have to count on that when you are entering
400 into it... But I'm proud, you know. We didn't have a single racist, nationalist or any kind of
401 incident that I would be ashamed of. I'm proud to have taken part of this. But what are my
402 concerns? I told you about possible alternatives of organisation of the struggle, what are my
403 concerns. We are very small country, very small. I mean, three million. If you do not have
404 critical mass of people...not only intellectuals, physically people. That's why... And as you
405 are aware, there is a tremendous process of migration of people from here, not only from
406 here, from Croatia as well which is in European Union, but... [laughs]. You know, Croats
407 are leaving, from Croatia. People from Bosnia Herzegovina are leaving, people from
408 Serbia... The less people we have, the less chances that we can organise and become a serious
409 opposition or threat to our regimes, whatever regime we are talking about. That's what I'm
410 afraid. People will go.

411 AS: And especially young people go.

412 AM: Especially young people. So, there is always this magic of elections. Approximately 50
413 per cent of the people of this country vote. And almost 50 per cent of these people actually
414 are, in some way, connected to the elites.

415 AS: Yeah. Working in public sector.

416 AM: Public sector, or relative to, or friend, or... Or in private sector but you are very much
417 dependent on certain...

418 AS: Networks.

419 AM: Certain networks, or, you know... You know, you name it. The other 50 per cent, which
420 I'm hoping that could be mobilised in the strategy that I told you, trans-Bosnian or
421 transregional strategy, I think they can be mobilised. And that's, that's how you... But,
422 unfortunately, out of these 50 per cent, they are leaving. You know, not from these... I mean...
423 Practically I am in these 50 per cent depending on, you know, my position is pretty much
424 safe or, I don't know, I should be happy with the situation. But the bad thing is that the other

425 50 per cent is slowly dispersing, going away, young people, and I fully understand young
426 people, I mean, why would I.. You see, I'm fifty. Half of my life went with dealing with,
427 you know, if I was thirty I would go. To be honest, you know. I'm talking to my wife because
428 we were together even before war started, you know. And we had the opportunity to go to
429 Holland in 92. And we said no, we wanna come back, we wanna build Bosnia, we wanna
430 fight for our community, and we said. And we sometimes joke today saying "oh fool, what
431 a fool, fools we were! We should have gone to damn Holland", you know, by this time...
432 [slaps hands on table]. So, why am I saying this, I fully understand these young people, they
433 don't wanna waste time... It's wasting your life. I'm thinking about... My daughter is second
434 grade, sophomore high school. You know, I'm seriously thinking of, you know, sending her
435 after, after this high school to go somewhere else and study, and hopefully stay there.
436 [Laughs] You know.

437 AS: Yeah, and I've heard that a lot from a lot of people, that said of course...

438 AM: Exactly, and that's my concern about the possibility of change. Literally we are
439 crumbling down, melting away. Not only people in Bosnia but in the region. Which is good
440 for the dominant structures, political structures, and entrepreneuring structures, and... We
441 should always have in mind that, you know, political, politics goes with the economy, you
442 know, certain... You know, they have to have some funding and some support in the grey
443 business, which they do have, unfortunately some of them have, you know, terrible financial
444 support in, you know, in drug or some smuggling activities, which is per se dangerous thing.
445 But... I'm concerned, I'm concerned.

446 AS: As long as this brain drain doesn't affect the economic situation, the economic situation
447 doesn't affect the political elites, so...

448 AM: Look, we are marginal economy. Global market should, you know, care less what
449 happens to us, you know, and that's our tragedy.

450 AS: And as long as the political class doesn't feel any economic...

451 AM: Exactly, why should they. I mean, they are in charge of public resources and they can
452 rent it, they can sell it, they can resell it, they can... You know, it's all about resources. They
453 can do this forever. And that's... That's scary thing.

454 AS: And another problem I see is that even if, you know, if the other 50 per cent would vote,
455 who would you vote for? You need a political alternative.

456 AM: Exactly, that's why I'm saying we need a... We need something between movement and
457 party. Having party is not enough. We need to have something that would be deeply rooted
458 in the bottom, you know, with the people, you know. With entire cluster of different
459 organisations. Think of Syriza, before they, before German intervention. I mean before 2015.
460 Syriza was just political branch of wider movement, which for example cared for elderly,
461 offered free food for, you know, offered health assistance, offered legal assistance,
462 voluntarily, all kind of things that they do. It's a huge movement. Like civic movement. And
463 Syriza, as a political party, was just one faction of that. And I think that would be the type
464 of, even on the right these things are... I mean, Alternative for Deutschland is movement.
465 Five Star Movement is movement. Le Pen pretty much has this...type of... So, I think that's,
466 which to me clearly reflects deep dissatisfaction of people with the present elitist type of
467 political organisation, you know.

468 AS: One thing after the plenum movement was also, there was no way to translate things
469 into political action. Because you didn't have a partner on the political side that you could
470 go to, credibly.

471 AM: Well to be honest it was 2014, which was election year, nothing you could have done,
472 basically. And I knew from the start that at some point mobilisation, ethnic mobilisation
473 would come back and, you know, 'cause elections, existence of nation is under threat, you
474 have to be ready, you have to, you know. That kind of talk. But nevertheless, it was great at
475 least for month or two, to me, that was revelation, you know. For a second, at least, this
476 dominant nationalistic mobilisational discourse stopped. They couldn't mobilise anybody
477 with this. It was panic for the political elites. You know, okay we didn't achieve anything.
478 But, we didn't achieve except that event. Which to me reveals that we can do the other, that
479 we can do better, that we can be different, you know. But you are right with, we need to
480 organise as well. As Naomi Klein in her last book says, "no is not enough", you know. You
481 have to, of course say no to unjust order but you have to find a way to organise. You have
482 to find a way... And party is bad because party in my view insists on hierarchy, on levelling,
483 on uniformisation. People don't want that any more. People want to maintain their
484 subjectivity, autonomy, their difference, they want to be different. They want to maintain

485 their autonomy. How do you find... What is the magic formula for that kind of alliance, that's
486 what we all have to discover. Bosnia is not only one that has to deal with this problem, I
487 think entire Europe actually is... I think we are on the verge of shifting the political, all of
488 us. All of us. Bosnia is just one sign, symptom. Before that there was Turkey, Gezi Park,
489 fighting for the common. Spain, Syriza, Greece, rightist backlash in Germany and Eastern
490 Europe... Now, I mean... We'll see. It can go that way as well. Look at Hungary, it is growing
491 towards authoritarian... [Sighs] And he has support for it [laughs]. Look at Trump. I mean,
492 what would happened, can you imagine, if Democrats were conscious enough to allow
493 Sanders to, you know, to be their candidate. 'Cause Sanders had this... I'm sure that if Sanders
494 was the candidate, I don't know if he would have win, but he would have definitely won the
495 votes of the people in Wisconsin, in these workers' population, you know... 'Cause they hate
496 elite, they hate establishment. And Hillary Clinton was the establishment, you know. So.
497 They didn't like Trump, let me be... [Telephone rings, talks on telephone]

498 So anyway this is [laughs] interesting times for all of us. [Quietly] For all of us, let me tell
499 you.

500 AS: First time I heard about the plenums I wondered why I heard about them so late. It
501 actually took a really long time until I heard about them, and I was like, why is this not, you
502 know, why it is not the first thing that you read about when you try to read about recent
503 developments and political developments in Bosnia.

504 AM: Exactly, this is democracy in a nutshell. But no, of course we will all read rather about
505 drugs that were...or burnt building, or I don't know.

506 AS: Yeah, and...and politicians insulting each other and burning the flags...

507 AM: In the beginning, there was some groups within demonstrators... You see, in the vicinity
508 of Sarajevo there is a place called Poljine, which is very nice, on the top of the hills, sunny
509 hill and type of Malibu kind of. This is where our elite actually have their estates and
510 swimming pools and, you know, horses running around freely. And so, people wanted to go
511 up there and burn it. You know, they were outraged, and it took a lot of time to, you know,
512 discourage them from that. [Pauses] Maybe it was wrong thing to do. You know... 'Cause
513 unfortunately you can send the message only if you hurt other people's assets or property.

514 Maybe then he or she will listen. They were ready to go there, torch the place, and we said
515 we are not vandals, let's not...

516 AS: Yeah, because usually it's peaceful demonstrations that are able to change...

517 AM: I was there when it started. Police started the physical conflict. My colleague and me
518 we went there to join the citizens, we are invited to, you know, to support people in
519 Tuzla. And there was, it is the park in front of the cantonal government, you know probably
520 where that is. It was nice property, it is now under construction, but it was, you can still see
521 traces actually of the flames. But it was lovely day just like this, February, sunny day, there
522 were mothers with babies in, you know...people with dogs, walking the dogs I mean, we all
523 gathered, discussed, having drinks, cigarettes, you know, chatting... Police was all around
524 but they were very, how would I say, loose, you know, you would say hi, we know some of
525 them. And then in a moment they formed a cordon, you know, and they started pushing
526 people. That's act of aggression. While pushing, there is this small creek if you have noticed.
527 Park and then this small creek, water, and then street. They pushed some people in it, you
528 know, people were hurt. And then you had these guys, younger guys, who started taking
529 these cobblestones and throw them back at them. And that was... Then we had tear gas, then
530 I had to run away, you know, in the next block. But they started it. First actually, this is
531 interesting, after protests ended and things like that, after few months, first decision of the
532 cantonal government is to invest 23,000,000 Dollars in shields and equipment for riots. So
533 you have money for that.

534 AS: And you can agree on that, between all three parts.

535 AM: And you can agree on that, unanimously. Exactly. But to me plenum was really
536 democratic event. It helped people to realise, to develop solidarity network, to realise that
537 they were not alone, cause the system is based on, you know, isolating you from the others,
538 actually. Maybe to you it might appear strange for me to say this because collective ideas
539 are important, belonging to nation... But this belonging in reality is based on your solitude.
540 You have to fight for your own life, don't care about others, you have, you know. This
541 solidarity that we are talking about is abstract. Only through my membership in a nation we
542 are, you know, collective body through abstract category. That means to me this is
543 alienation, this is abstraction, this is the way how they do it. 'Cause regularly... And that's
544 why nationalist ideology is dangerous, not only in this country but also in Germany,

545 elsewhere. Nationalist ideology gives you the impression that through belonging to your
546 collective Germanhood you are equal as, you as poorest German, you are equal with the
547 wealthiest and... You are the same. We are Germans, brother. It gives you false sense of
548 equality, you know. Here as well. And this is... That's why it is so captive. Of course
549 supported by mythological stories about our descent, about our special historical place in the
550 world, our unique language, our, you know, your name it. Then you have this convincing
551 narrative, it gives you equality, instead of social justice type of equality it gives you abstract,
552 ideal equality... This is common Marx. Heilige Familie. This is how he actually demasked
553 the ideological domination of certain group of people. This is the point of, according to
554 Marx, the point of ideological domination is that you as minority, ruling minority somehow
555 manage to present your particular interest as general. How do you do that? Through
556 education, through media, through films, through some events, rituals... And this is how
557 ideology works. They manage to present their very particular economic interests as general.
558 This is very...this is what I... I mean if nothing, this event made me to certain degree Marxist.
559 I was always leftist, but... But then I said, you know, when I was student I hated Marxism,
560 you know, because I was in that system and I wanted everything against that system. But
561 events like this made me, for the first time to read Marx. And I was...amazed, I was amazed.
562 Now as a more mature person, you know, individual, when you read it, it has powerful
563 message. Yeah, that's...

564 AS: I think, we've been talking for a long time so, I think...

565 AM: No please, if you would have any additional question you can drop by, you can send
566 me by mail.

567

568 *[Conversation continued after recording was switched off, and then reverted back to topic]*

569

570 AM: And state is who? Moi! Not everybody, state was me, or people who are ruling. Or at
571 that moment, elite, representing the state. And then, they transform it, there was a
572 privatisation after the war, it was huge. I mean, nobody writes about this economical rip-off,
573 people were, as Harvey said, it is a great word, dispossessed. You see, you are mobilised,

574 they gave you rifle, you go out there and, you know, shoot. Four years after you come. Your
575 factory is not yours anymore, it's privatised. And they inform you that you are, let's say,
576 surplus that you don't... There's no need for you. So we had this famous category of the
577 "workers on waiting". That means that you are waiting for a chance that if the business
578 develops then they will call you first. And that was the reason why the people in Tuzla said
579 no. And while you are waiting you see new owner taking your machines and stuff from the
580 factory, driving it away. And you are, you know... That's why in Dita workers took off and
581 they said "no, we will protect our factory with our lives, you are not taking this". And that's
582 why they managed now to, you know, to transform and they are now, I hope decently
583 included into... They were privatised but... I think in legal manner. So, there was huge... You
584 know, process of pulverisation that happened after the war, you know, people were literally
585 dispossessed and thrown on the margin of existence. That's transition. Transition is visible.
586 Country who made successful transition is huge glassy skyscraper and in their vicinity
587 favelas. [Laughs] You know, shacks. That's the picture of successful transition,
588 unfortunately, in Eastern Europe and especially in Southeast Europe. So... Those were, you
589 know, people wanted revision of privatisation so they demand, we want to revise
590 privatisation. Because it was, enterprises were sold for a one Euro. You know, this is... Our
591 economy is so, I mean we had firms who built in Zambia, in Iraq, we had huge enterprises,
592 Unioninvest, Energoinvest, they built, they constructed powerlines, you know, throughout
593 Africa. We had market in so-called non-aligned countries because Yugoslavia was.... Now,
594 you know. So, I don't know. It's very important aspect, very important part of the overall
595 story.



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Appendix B:
Conversation notes

Date: 4 April 2018

Time: 11:00 – 12:10

Respondent: (Anonymous representative of an international organisation)

- Main point is how to translate protest momentum into political action, how to bridge that gap? - in 2014 protests, nobody wanted to cooperate with political actors, so momentum was lost
- Generally politics regarded as toxic, nobody wants to go there
- Citizen assembly could be good idea, despite all the “buts”, but people lack civic education and interest/belief in politics to want to get involved
- Students and young people, the next generation, they need to be involved because there is willingness too, engagement, student unions are well interconnected and working together
- If people do not believe in the system, why would they participate in it?
- Those who vote are mostly those working in public sector, who have an interest in keeping status quo, who are also not challenging the system much because why would they, are well paid considering BiH levels, and loyalty to party will keep it that way
- Only trigger for new protests would be e.g. if public sector salaries would not be paid any more (in BiH situation is reversed, public usually better paid, private sector is often behind with salary payments and less well paid too)
- This won't happen though as long as government receives funds from international community, they keep the system alive
- People seem to rally mostly around issues of public security, they are used to not having much so expectations are not that high and much is being put up with
- On paper, all big parties make commitments to reforms and propose reform, but they lack road map for implementation (which by experience will likely not happen anyway, so strategies are made for satisfaction of international community who demands them)
- Election promises are mostly not held, but nobody is really holding people accountable on their unfulfilled promises; media is not working as the watchdog it ideally should be

Date: 6 April 2018

Time: 10:00 – 11:20

Organisation: Friedrich Ebert Foundation

Respondent: Marius Müller-Hennig (Director)

- Protests seem to be increasing, but against background of the situation in the country you could be surprised that not more people are protesting; significant share of the dissatisfaction in the country recently seems to rather be expressed through substantial emigration instead
- In previous years there were repeated protests, even in the RS, from different groups, often over perceived injustice (examples: ongoing “Justice for David” protests in Banja Luka, or protests when two young women were killed by reckless driver in Sarajevo)
- Also number of protests organised for economic interests/grievances by specific interest groups (e.g. pensioners, veterans), yet not much systemic alliance building taking place between different groups
- Media landscape quantitatively appears to be more pluralistic in FBiH but most media in both entities are perceived to be under some form of political influence
- There is some investigative journalism and generally quality is not too bad (especially in some print media); yet roughly two thirds of population get their political information from TV and most of the TV media are therefore particularly attractive targets of political influence
- One should not underestimate how disappointed and disillusioned people were after the 2014 protests, which in the end did not result in sustainable and systemic political change - experience has been a serious discouragement for those citizens that were still politically engaged
- Conspiracy theories are perceived as lurking around every corner and are frequently instrumentalised by political actors from all sides
- Aside from the types of civil society groups familiar in Western Europe (e.g. human rights-oriented NGOs) one should not underestimate the role of other civil society actors, like religious or veteran organisations in the country; the former type usually set their own agenda but are often portrayed by certain political actors as supposedly being

directed from abroad (→ conspiracy theories) due to funds they obtain from international donors

- In practice however, these sorts of liberal/rights-focused NGOs rather seem to attempt to deliberately keep safe distance from the political sphere (government and opposition alike), which they perceive as in large parts as clientelist and corrupt
- Therefore, these organizations face structural problem: they promote political reforms and better policies on the one hand but are highly reluctant to engage with political parties who play role in the policy-making process on the other
- Approaching the October 2018 elections the most notable tendency seem to be various splinters from the SDA (used to be dominant party in the Bosniak electorate for most parts of the post-war period); it will be interesting to see how that will influence the election results of SDA and how coalition dynamics will play out afterwards
- There is Bosnian term for people that “fly over from one party to the next”: preletači; such changes of party affiliation have become significant feature in the political arena in BiH
- An important and maybe underappreciated factor influencing the political process in BiH is the size of this country: sometimes it seems as “everybody knows everyone” and everybody talks about everyone; few people come in with a clean slate, and even when people enter politics with a personally clean slate, people might still judge them by their family background, place of birth etc.
- The psychological dimension of the threefold transition (from one-party to multiparty system, from socialism to free market, and the post-war recovery transition) should also not to be underestimated - especially with regard to the legacy of violence, many people are traumatised and even those people and families who did not experience war and violence personally are likely affected by sort of a societal neurosis stemming from the violent past
- A lot of hope associated with the election success of SDP in 2010 (multi-ethnic party with a social democratic program), but even them have shown while forming and participating in government that the system cannot be changed easily, got caught up in the dysfunctional political dynamics that have developed over long period of time.
- This development was another discouragement for actors interested in substantial reform and change, contributing to the perception that all politicians and parties “are more or less the same”

- Against this background of a - by now most likely systemic - distrust in the party system and political system, it seems to become more and more difficult for established parties and new parties alike, to (re)gain credibility and attract enough support and trust by the reform-minded part of the electorate to achieve an electoral victory that allows for a genuinely new reform momentum

Date: 23 April 2018

Time: 17:00 – 18:00

Organisation: GIZ

Respondent: Brigitte Heuel-Rolf (Director)

- What makes development cooperation more difficult in BiH is multiple and unclear responsibilities – more than one ministry for each theme (state, entity, cantonal level), several layers of administration, lack of qualified staff and too many people involved in decisions
- For political reasons, discussions often deal with language and formulation rather than technical content, thus sectorial issues suffer
- Last years have seen positive development in strengthening private sector, necessary to develop alternatives to the predominant public sector employment and the dependency of entire families on the public administration and governing parties
- Generational change needed to overcome inertia – after war people seem to retreat into private life and to focus more on their own immediate survival and wellbeing, no great interest in dealing with more political topics like state and society
- Situation maybe comparable with post-war Germany but not entirely, Germany had the 68-movement that challenged the older generation over their responsibility for the war and everything that it brought, in Balkans there is not even any admittance of any fault yet
- Ethnic groups live generally homogenous with little exchange and interaction between groups – also means people often do not know any of the “other constituent people”

Date: 24 April 2018

Time: 14:00 – 15:30

Presentation: “Bosnia and Herzegovina and EU approach – perspective and challenge” organised by the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, open to the public

Speaker: Christiane Hohmann (Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bosnia and Herzegovina)

- Western Balkans up against a lot of competition in EU foreign policy
- It has always been full agenda though, crises do not take breaks
- There are ups and downs, BiH is getting lost in itself and its self-produced crises
- EU integration: rules will not be changed for BiH so same procedure as everybody else
- Likely second round of questionnaire coming, and coming very likely during election campaign
- Technical aspects are one side, but the political willingness to do the things required are another
- Regional influence: Croatia and those more advanced candidate states could serve as proud learning examples to BiH, help each other
- Albania changed constitution over 20 times in past two years only over the process of vetting judges as according to EU acquis
- Situation is closing down on the Sejdić-Finci case, needs resolving soon
- Where deficiencies of BiH are is very clear
- Media: should serve as fourth pillar of state, but journalists in BiH are even self-censoring and there is much political control on media
- Brain drain: normal development that people leave to get a comparative experience abroad, but challenge is to bring them back
- EU is union of diversity, but we have a foundation we all agree on
- BiH received more post-war funding than Germany after WWII
- Situation of both countries relatively comparable, allied forces present in Germany until reunification but never as intrusive as in BiH
- Comparison between BiH today, 23 years after war: Germany 23 years after war was economically on the rise but also saw the beginning of the '68 student revolts and in

early 70s home grown terrorism – i.e. despite big economic progress, democracy in Germany was challenged

- Dayton is being used as scapegoat for many shortcomings in BiH, but Dayton does not forbid rule of law, it does not prescribe corruption; political culture is not written down in Dayton
- Two constitutional reforms failed in Bosnian parliament, one by just two votes short
- Where are those people, why is reform work not picked back up again?
- Some major companies are still not privatised, and used for fishy deals by the state – corruption, nepotism
- Experience shows there is limited capacity to concentrate on more than one topic in Bosnian politicians
- Too few people here with a political vision
- Politicians need to develop concrete, tangible goals in the form of “achieve xy until xz” instead of merely “Euro-Atlantic integration”
- BiH needs to become better at showing what it is today; example from a German delegation she welcomed recently for two days of meetings about situation of country, but afterwards when they went for walk around the city the people could not believe the level of energy and happenings on the street, after hearing such defeating things about the country’s stillstand
- You need to start working from reality and not dwell on the past and what you would have liked to have happened in the past
- Need to work on a joint vision between citizens of BiH
- Unless people start to challenge the flaws in the Bosnian system, like corruptive structures, they will not change
- Country reputation is not irrelevant point in EU accession: in countries like Germany or France the national parliaments need to approve candidate status; most people still associate BiH with war so in current crisis situation of EU it is imaginable that some would rather see EU sort out internal problems before admitting some war-torn place they do not have much other knowledge about
- Politics are often somewhat disconnected from reality: BiH already exports 70 per cent of its exports to EU
- Dealing with the past is important point but it requires willingness by entire country to face the past and work on one joint story
- Role of elites from different areas should be to set example, e.g. religious elites

- Essential to come to terms with history to be able to develop confidence as a nation and be able to move on
- Past is integral part of who you are but it should not prevent you from moving ahead and creating a clear vision for the future
- Support for nationalism comes from outside BiH, both from EU and other non-EU countries
- Social fabric in a country needs to be healthy to withstand
- Nationalism is used to overplay deficiencies, politicians are playing with people psychologically and nobody stands up against it
- Ethnic segregation now seems stronger than immediately after the war
- “Unless you see each other as one country, being in the same mess together, it is not going to work out”
- Geographical challenges to infrastructure development: roads are expensive to build in a mountainous country like BiH
- If not full restructuring/privatisation, at least more public-private partnership arrangements
- BiH has done some first steps but is still far from real market economy

Date: 26 April 2018

Time: 11:40 – 13:15

Respondent: (Anonymous diplomat)

- EU integration of BiH will completely transform the country
- First of all, ethnic quotas will need to go, as completely against European fundamental freedoms
- EU integration like corset, which will be pulled tighter and tighter on the politicians of BiH to comply and reform
- Privatisation of companies may to some extent deprive politicians of their money sources
- Problem is that for the remaining state-owned telecommunication companies, for instance, real value is dropping every day, so who wants to buy them?
- Bottom-up democratisation really needs to start from the very bottom, from local level
- There is a lot of good initiative and great examples on local level
- There is examples of at least one almost monoethnic town that has still had a mayor from a “minority” ethnic group for many years simply because he is the best person for the job
- Democratic understanding is still on an entirely different level; we need to remind ourselves that we cannot take certain things for granted here
- High political positions are often not aware of what role they should play in state and policy process
- Diplomats and foreign actors need to be very assertive in BiH, with behaviour that would not be accepted in other countries; need to be very outspoken, direct and persistent
- When going into local communities, speaking with people, there is often large demand on citizen side of just being listened to; also shows what politicians should actually do, presents a standard that should be upheld, but local politicians often do not show enough willingness to be true representatives of the people’s interests, and to be in touch with their electorate
- Need to explain what EU integration really needs, pointing out all the standards and rules that need to be in place and respected for EU membership, for many of which BiH

is still very far away, for example social standards, working conditions, minimum wage, grey labour market, market economy

- Societal change still very much outstanding
- In BiH all areas are linked, politics, economy, education, none can have much change if no work is done in other areas either, e.g. if people are not taught to think critically they cannot hold their politicians accountable
- Only slowly more instances of people saying that enough is enough are taking place, protests and realisation that this is not normal and not acceptable
- People need to learn to demand rights and put pressure
- Apprenticeship education still such bad quality it is basically on level of 1970s
- PISA now coming to region, first results in 2019, initial observations of delegation have pointed to the poor performance in critical and creative thinking among students; countries usually score at 60-70 per cent, BiH scores closer to 6 per cent
- There is still authoritarian style of upbringing and education, just listen and do not ask questions
- Elites of society must take on responsibility, from science, arts, culture, religion, business etc. – there is no understanding that they have societal role to play, simply see themselves as their profession
- No “gesamtstaatliches Denken”, thinking in terms of entire country rather than fragments of it
- Few are taking on societal responsibility
- Compromise is a foul word in this country, not an accepted political concept – another reason why EU accession would be unthinkable now, they could not keep up with the pace at which decisions are made, and would have serious difficulties to take decisions considering how many stakeholders need to be involved in all decision-making in BiH
- Coming to terms with history has still not happened
- Regional Youth Cooperation Office might be chance to break with existing patterns; they have received a lot of great initiatives to choose from, every project will include at least three countries to avoid the usual ethnic bias
- Two challenges for young generation: become active, and break out of patterns and responses that they were conditioned to in their upbringing
- Example Foča: local youth was asked what they needed, what complaints they had - they asked for a basketball pitch and international actors supported them in the process of going to authorities, securing funding; way to educate of how processes are done

instead of just placing something without sustainable approach in community; created a lot of pride and feeling of empowerment in local youth and inspired new initiatives

- Lack of thinking big, thinking holistic – example tourism: Sarajevo ski areas area competing with each other instead of cooperating and this way attracting more people with more offer of skiing terrain; cities do not exploit their touristic potential well enough, do not partner and cooperate with potential they have in surroundings, no cross-links
- It is the same way that they are thinking about country as whole, no recognition of synergy
- Apathic situation in country, people are very accepting: problem analysis is on spot, but then they only complain but do not take corrective action
- Problems do not stop at ethnic lines, all affected equally
- This process will catch up with country at one point, and it needs to be tackled domestically, international community cannot do it for them
- Critical mass of people needs to be reached