

Eldar Sarajlić and Davor Marko, eds.

## ***State or Nation? The Challenges of Political Transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina***

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In this compilation of essays written by six different authors and edited by Eldar Sarajlić and Davor Marko, the state, society and culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina (henceforth BiH) are analyzed.

In the introduction of the book entitled: "Between State and Nation: Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Challenge of Political Analysis" Eldar Sarajlić explains why Bosnia and Herzegovina is selected as the subject of state or nation-building analysis. For him it is obvious, "In an almost ideal-type fashion, the country appears to embody most of the challenges the literature aims to understand and face: a difficult transition from socialism to democracy and the consequent problems in transformation of the social, political and economic spheres, ethnic diversity and ethnic conflict, revival of religion, low trust in institutions and an underdeveloped civil society."<sup>1</sup>

It is said that the importance of the obvious failure of state building in BiH is not in the state itself, but in the values such as human rights, equality, freedom or prosperity, which can only be delivered through the state. Sarajlić says that nation and state are indeed inseparable, and that every talk about the state inevitably implies the nation.

The first two chapters of the book contained in Part One, entitled "State", explore the state/nation-building process in an endogenous and exogenous way, providing an overview and analyzing the factors which impact BiH from inside and outside the state in a nation-building process. Mateja Peter and Sead Turčalo give readers an insight into exogenous state-building in BiH and the role of the international community in it and an overview of externally driven nation-building practices. Sead Turčalo

1 Sarajlić and Marko, 2011, p. 9.

provides a theoretical framework of the issue, not necessarily specific to BiH.

The first issue analyzed by Turčalo is the fragility of state and state-building in which he examines the distinctions between a stable and a fragile state, the elements from which each is built and the levels of fragility of a state. Security and the implementation of the rule of law, along with state territory, permanent inhabitants, sovereign government and international recognition are the basic elements considered to define a state. Consolidated states or those that are in the process of being consolidated, weak states, failing and failed states are the levels of fragility. Turčalo says that sometimes it is hard to assess the differences.

In the rest of his chapter he analyzes the phases and strategies of state-building. "The first phase is related to the post-conflict stabilization of existing structures and institutions, after which we then enter a phase of reformation and transformation of these institutions and the creation of new ones. The goal of the second phase, which is the most demanding and longest, is to make state institutions self-sufficient, especially those that can survive the withdrawal of foreign help. To a large extent, the third phase overlaps with the tasks of the second phase, and it involves the development of institutions and structures which did not previously exist."<sup>2</sup> According to Turčalo there are certain problems regarding externally driven state-building due to different strategies implemented by the international community, with evident differences between European and American conceptions and priorities of state-building.

In her chapter, "The Shifting Contour of International State-Building Practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina", Mateja Peter also analyzes externally driven state-building in BiH, claiming that both exogenous and endogenous state-building is needed in BiH. The focus of Peter's chapter is the Office of the High Representative and its effect on state-building related to its own degree of development or weakening.

Part two of the book is entitled "Society" and contains two chapters from authors Adnan Huskić and Ivana Howard. The chapter entitled; "Democratization Against Democracy: Accessing the Failure of State-

2 Ibid, page 29.

Building in Bosnia and Herzegovina," written by Adnan Huskić is about the failure of the democratization process in BiH, and how BiH embodies the difference between the process and its goal, democracy. Huskić states that the process of democratization collided with the process of post-conflict stabilization and thus resulted in a lack of democratic development. The post-war elections controversy of 1996 is what the author calls the beginning of the fall, stating that every other state-building attempt made after that proved to be unsuccessful and inadequate. One of Huskić's theses is that the international community gave up too soon on BiH, and he claims that the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (henceforth OHR) created some serious damage to the structure of the Dayton Peace Agreement and the post-war efforts by allowing the political elites to create ethnic divisions as a consequence of their poor decision making.

"Society", the second part of the book, continues with the chapter "Building Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Challenges and Mistakes". Ivana Howard points out ten mistakes from a local perspective of NGO's and to issues about the channeling of resources from donors to NGOs. She criticizes the amalgamation of NGO's with civil society. In her essay Howard discusses the matter of civil society being strong enough to survive once the international community is set to go out of BiH. Additionally, she discusses if the foundations will be strong enough to provide a stable and secure society and whether war and violence will escalate after the departure of the international community. Howard also raises the question of donors and their policies, expectations, strategies, practices, communication and respect towards their local partners and offers her criticism on these issues.

The third part is entitled "Culture" and starts with an essay from Nataša Bošković, with the title "Happy Holidays for Whom? Ethno-Cultural Diversity and the Politics of the Regulation of Public Holidays in BiH." She discusses how the political elites use public holidays to show the implications this has for human rights in BiH. She also poses a question: why are ethnic diversities such a big issue in South-Eastern Europe? She shows how public holidays and honoring them in BiH is extremely important for state-building and is a symbol of respecting human rights. In this chapter the identity of Bosnian citizens is questioned and she says that it remains unrecognized

at the state level. The author admits that the issue of public holidays in BiH is not the biggest problem in the country, but it does reflect the general situation and it could generate further instability. Bošković analyzes possible solutions with reference to North America and its multiculturalism, even though she is well aware of the differences between the two and of the obstacles that do not allow the transfer of such a model to BiH.

In the final chapter, "Religion, Nation and State: The "Holy Trinity" of Disunity of post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina" authors Tatjana Ljubić and Davor Marko discuss the role of religious communities in state-building processes and the process of democratization of the country in each of them. Religious communities are often policy-makers and their frequent interventions into politics and education actually produce a *status quo* in the country. Their actions are presented through examples from textbooks used for religious education classes in schools. "This is important because these books promote particular values that have an impact on individual behavior, as well as on forming opinions, and even voting decisions."<sup>3</sup> In this chapter the authors try to answer why religious communities take these actions and why the importance of religion is increasing in BiH.

This book is highly recommended for social science students and researchers interested in South-Eastern Europe, especially in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nikola Marijan

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3 Ibid, page 152.