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NATO Integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina: The pursuit of local ownership in externally-led state building

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Abstract

The NATO integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is closely tied to a strong surge in externally led state building following the conflict of the 1990s. Informed by the ideals of liberal peace, one of the key components of state building was security sector reform and a restructuring of the armed forces. A shifting approach by the international community, varying between imposing decisions and insisting on local ownership, managed to establish the joint BiH Armed Forces, but allowed for the appropriation of the NATO integration process by local ethnic party elites. As a result, NATO integration in BiH regressed into an exercise in institutional reform, pursued in disarray and primarily addressing technical issues. Even if successfully brought to fruition, NATO integration will have failed to achieve the objectives of fostering substantive peace in BiH.

KEY WORDS:

NATO integration, Bosnia and Herzegovina, state building, international community, liberal peace

Introduction

Prevalent in writings about Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is the idea that the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), brokered by US diplomat Richard Holbrooke, was designed to end the war but not bring a positive peace or build a functional state. The Agreement was unique in its design – it affirmed the wartime division of the state brought about by the use of organized force, granted the international community enormous extra-institutional powers and provided space for ethno-nationalist political parties to maintain the power they had established at the beginning of the 1990s and consolidated during the war from 1992 to 1995. In its original form, the DPA created a state consisting of two entities, the Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH, within which three mono-ethnic geopolitical units, three armed forces, and three police forces existed alongside the faint silhouette of a state institution.

The DPA did not provide the state level with any law enforcement powers or means to use legitimate force (armed forces, police, intelligence, etc.). In Weberian terms, "Daytonian Bosnia" only partially met the standards of *de jure* statehood; it has a defined state territory, a permanent population and international recognition, but only shared sovereignty.[1] In terms of *de facto* statehood, BiH remains fragile and unable to fill the power vacuum that was formed in the post-war period. To rate a state as consolidated, it has to perform at least three functions: security, welfare, and rule of law. To perform the function of security, "... the state has to provide physical security for its citizens – internally as well as externally" (Schneckener 2006: 31). Furthermore:

> "[The] state should be able to control its territory and borders, safeguard the security of its citizens vis-à-vis each other and defend against external security threats, ensure public access to natural resources and enforce tax administration. In short, the state has to ensure the monopoly of the use of force as well as the monopoly on raising taxes and revenues." (Schneckener 2006: 31)

1 The DPA established the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which is responsible for implementing the civil aspects of the Peace Agreement.

Providing for welfare demands that the state be engaged in different public policies and rule of law entails an effective judiciary that compliments the political system, decision making procedures and political participation (Schneckener 2004: 513–514). Immediately after the war, BiH lacked all three of these functions. With an estimated figure of around 400,000 soldiers[2] conscripted in all three armed forces[3] and considering the contradictory political agendas of the three ruling political parties[4] and the overall lack of democratic control of the security sector, the international community grew aware of the need to prioritize security sector reform and a reorganization of the armed forces in order to prevent a possible renewal of violence.

The liberal peace agenda and state building in BiH

State building in BiH took place with strong international involvement and internationally-led conflict resolution efforts. These activities were implemented concurrently by the same actors through the framework of liberal peacebuilding and are almost indistinguishable in the BiH context. This brief overview of the theoretical foundations for international involvement in BiH does not aim to be comprehensive, but rather to present the debates that informed the everyday practices of international and local actors and were simultaneously shaped by their actions.

The advent of liberal peacebuilding that came about after the end of the Cold War exerted a strong impact on international post-conflict engagement in BiH. This approach was based on the assumption that peace and social progress could be brought about through "external engineering of post-conflict societies through the export of liberal

2 For different estimations of the number of people recruited in BiH during the war, see Pietz (2006: 156 157).

3 Immediately after the Bosnian war, there were three, mostly ethnically defined, armed forces: the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Armija Bosne i Hercegovine, or ARBiH although multiethnic, its members were predominatly Bosniaks), the Armed Forces of the Republika Srpka (Vojska Republike Srpske, or VRS Serb-dominated) and the Croatian Defence Council (Hrvatsko vijece odbrane, or HVO Croat-dominated armed forces).

4 The Serb Democratic Party (SDS), the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the Croatian Democratic Union of BiH (HDZ BiH).

frameworks of 'good governance', democratic elections, human rights, the rule of law, and market relations" (Chandler 2010: 137–138). The introduction of democracy and free market economies alone was supposed to compel former adversaries to act cooperatively. Under international guidance and pressure, elections were held in BiH less than a year following the end of hostilities and the privatization of state enterprises followed soon thereafter. However, rather than producing conditions for a stable peace, these efforts reinforced the political and economic power of the nationalist elites who were least committed to inter-ethnic reconciliation (Paris 2010: 341). The introduction of political and economic competition preceded the establishment of local capacity and robust institutions that could channel and contain conflicting ethnic demands. Roland Paris (2004, 2010) argues that regulatory frameworks need to be established before liberalization processes are undertaken in order to reduce unwanted effects. Liberal peacebuilding must account for the specific local context of each intervention and enable it to handle competing interests that arise within the liberal framework. Along with the overarching goal of ensuring a strategic exit to international involvement, Paris advocates the need "to pay greater attention to building or strengthening governmental institutions" (2010, p. 342) through a policy of "institutionalization before liberalization" (Paris 2004). This approach, with a focus on strengthening institutional frameworks, has become known as "state building". The failure of early liberalization in BiH and the subsequent results of forceful institutionalization seem to confirm Paris's (2004, 2010) argument.

The period of assertive, internationally led state building in BiH lasted from late 1997 through to mid-2006 and was spearheaded by the Office of the High Representative (OHR). In late 1997, with the introduction of the so-called "Bonn powers", the role of the High Representative was newly interpreted to include the authority to dismiss elected officials and directly impose laws. This led to the creation of several institutions aimed at strengthening democratic governance and security at the state level and the removal of local officials found to be obstructing implementation of the DPA.[5] Some of the most significant achievements

5 From December 1997 to July 2011, the OHR imposed more than 914 decisions. Of these, 150 were related to removals and suspensions from office (mostly between 1999 and 2002). See: http://www.ohr.int/decisions/archive.asp (accessed 27 July 2011).

in post-conflict state building in BiH were accomplished through the exercising of the Bonn powers by circumventing elected local officials. The heavy-handed involvement of the OHR became known as a period of protectorate democracy. During this time, the promotion of genuine democratic governance and local ownership was brought into question as international actors focused on immediate outcomes and persistently used key decision-making authorities to address crucial issues (Donais 2009: 4). Chandler (1999) argues that the assertiveness of the OHR's actions undermined the very Bosnian institutions they were supposed to strengthen, creating relationships of dependency, with little done to support self-government in BiH. The period of protectorate democracy came to an end with the mandate of Paddy Ashdown as High Representative. Even then, internationally-led state building consistently followed the principles of liberal peace, focusing on outcomes rather than process and on structures rather than actors. The importance of local ownership, referring to "the extent to which domestic actors control both the design and implementation of political processes" (Donais 2009: 4) was accepted in theory by international staff but rarely practiced. Only after the enforced strengthening of state institutions did the focus of peacebuilding begin to shift towards local ownership and engendering a broad acceptance by those it affected most.

This shift toward local ownership was rather abrupt and was marked by a change in OHR leadership as well as more significant EU involvement. The immediate consequence was a significant reduction in the pace of reform due to a habit of reliance on the international imposition of decisions. With local politicians unaccustomed to taking responsibility and constrained by consensus-based decision-making procedures, the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts in BiH was called into question. New models to compel reform through local ownership were needed in order to keep the liberal peacebuilding project on track. In line with Schwarz's proposal of local ownership coupled with international standards, an attempt to reconcile a locally-driven but internationally-focused process of reform was conceived (Schwarz 2005). This approach attempted to build on the imperatives of liberal and sustainable peace and achieve them through a concentration on technical criteria and international standards, while shifting the responsibility of implementation to local actors. At the same time, it

abandoned the transformational ideals of liberalism by narrowing the focus of institutional solutions to managing a post-conflict society (Chandler 2010: 146–147). This became most evident in various rounds and stages of EU accession and NATO membership negotiations. In BiH, this meant that local politicians could further pursue ethnic and particularist agendas, as long as they did so within the institutional framework of the state and paid lip service to the principle goals of Euro-Atlantic integration. Substantive reform and post-conflict reconciliation never really had to be an important issue on their agenda. Nevertheless, by transferring the responsibility for decision making to local politicians, this focus on local ownership managed to instil a sense of public oversight and lay bare the ineffectiveness of local politics in BiH in terms of pursuing a sustainable peace agenda.

Current international engagement in BiH has displaced the ideals of a liberal peace through a framework of institutional standards, norms and rules, modified to fit local circumstances. Instead of enforcing liberal peacebuilding, the focus is now on inducing compliance with international Western standards through institutional reform. In this sense, planned actions geared towards NATO integration, if pursued fully by all political actors, might prove to be a major stepping stone in achieving a sustainable peace in BiH. Alternatively, if pursued in disarray, these efforts may prove to be an exercise in institutional reform that will not live up to the liberal ideals they strive to achieve.

Security sector reform: The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH)

During the initial post-war years, peacebuilding in BiH made little progress in alleviating the economic and security concerns of citizens. Uncooperative elites, weak and compromised institutions and a lack of common will to govern the state resulted in ethnically divided or ineffective institutions essential to the rule of law and security. This was especially true of the armed forces, which remained divided into

separate armies with independent command structures, recruitment and budgeting. The most serious efforts in international state building were aimed at reforming the security sector, first and foremost the armed forces, as a prerequisite to consolidating peace. Through the assertive approach of the OHR, a range of institutions were created or redefined, altering the competencies of the two BiH entities and their relationship with the state. Undoubtedly, the creation of a single armed force turned out to be one of the most substantive undertakings in BiH peacebuilding, as former enemy combatants now work side by side in the military service. Initially vigorously opposed by Serb parties, the Armed Forces of BiH (AFBiH) were created following significant international pressure, taking over all responsibilities from the existing militaries in January 2006.

Immediately after the conflict, the number of soldiers in the BiH armies was 419,000, of which 264,500 were in the Army of the Federation of BiH – into which the Croatian Defence Council was incorporated as a part of the DPA – and 154,500 were in the Army of the Republika Srpska (DRC 2003). In addition, a 60,000-man NATO-led international force (IFOR) was deployed to BiH under a United Nations (UN) mandate, to facilitate the implementation of the DPA. These troops had a short, one-year tenure within which to facilitate disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, as well as the first post-war elections, and were tasked with patrolling the border between the two entities of BiH (the Inter-Entity Boundary Line). The IFOR troops were soon replaced with a smaller stabilization force (SFOR), also under NATO leadership, entrusted with a longer-term stabilization of the peace. In 1999, the decision was made gradually to reduce the number of SFOR soldiers to a few thousand and in 2006 SFOR ended its mandate and turned over peacekeeping operations to the EU-led EUFOR. Simultaneously, the two Bosnian armed forces[6] were greatly reduced, down to a total of around 40,000 soldiers in 1999.

Even with the large reductions in numbers of soldiers, having two separate army infrastructures proved to be economically unsustainable.

6 After the war, a new armed force called Vojska Federacije BiH was created. It consisted of the former members of Armija Bosne i Hercegovine and Hrvatsko vijeće odbrane, but it was only unified in formal terms. At the practical level, there were two chains of command.

Since the Constitution of BiH[7] did not provide much guidance on security sector issues, it soon became clear that additional provisions were needed at the state level. In July 2001, the BiH Presidency[8] made the significant decision to support the integration of BiH into NATO and an accession process towards EU membership. To this end, the first Defence Reform Commission (DRC) was established by the OHR in 2003 to prepare a strategy for a single defence structure. The DRC proposed the restructuring of the two existing armies to form the AFBiH, with a single operative chain of command and a single administrative structure. The reform proposal was adopted by parliaments at the state and entity levels and laid out the foundations for a unified armed force and the abolition of the defence ministries of the Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH.

Participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme called for a "single defence establishment" and single armed forces "under fully functioning state level command and control" (DRC 2005: 1), bringing about a second Defence Reform Commission, established to amend the initial proposal. The second DRC completed its task in September 2005, issuing a report titled "AFBiH: A Single Military Force for the 21st Century". The report suggested a series of measures and their implementation within a specific timeframe. The measures called for, among other things, the establishment of a single chain of command, assignment of responsibility for policies and plans to the Ministry of Defence and Joint Staff, the abolition of the defence ministries at the entity level, a reinforced role for the state parliament in the oversight of defence institutions, the abolition of conscription and the professionalization of the armed forces, a downsizing of the armed forces, a new structure and regimental system of armed forces along the NATO model, and the adoption of a new Law on Defence and Law on Military Service (DRC 2005: 6–10). At the same time, the Presidency of BiH expressed a commitment to continue efforts towards fully fledged NATO membership. In 2005, laws were passed in both entities, together with necessary amendments to the entity constitutions – with much pressure from international actors – that allowed for the creation of a

7 The DPA contains the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Annex 4.

8 The BiH Presidency is a tripartite model, consisting of three members, one from each main ethnic group, who are collectively responsible for ensuring inter-entity cooperation.

state-level Ministry of Defence and the unified AFBiH. As of 1 January 2006, the entity defence ministries were abolished and a single state-level institution took over all responsibilities. The AFBiH are exclusively comprised of professional personnel as mandatory conscription was also abolished.[9] Parliamentary oversight of the security sector at the state level was proposed in the first DRC report and was established along with defence structures. The Joint Parliamentary Commission on Defence and Security was established in 2003 within the BiH Parliament to ensure democratic control of the armed forces (Klopfer et al. 2012); towards the end of 2006, NATO decided to invite Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the PfP programme.

The rocky path to NATO membership

Since 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina has taken part in the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP). This is a tool used to identify the capacities and capabilities of partner countries to determine how they can be used in NATO-led operations, as well as to "develop affordable capabilities for their own security needs" (Pond 2004: xx). The first cycle of PARP was completed in 2009 and BiH is currently in the fifth cycle, working on a third set of 40 partnership goals. According to interviewees, the main obstacle in the implementation of the partnership goals is a "… limited military budget, especially for the goals in the field of capacity and the ability of air forces".[10] Besides PARP, BiH has also been involved in the Individual Partnership Programme (renamed the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme, or IPCP, in 2013) since 2007. The country has completed six cycles of IPCP with increasing success in implementing activities. In the first cycle, BiH was able to implement 50% of the activities, while this rate reached 82% in 2012.[11] A third form of cooperation between BiH and NATO is the Individual Partnership

9 Active military troops numbered around 16,500 as of 2012.

10 Interview with officials of the Ministry of Security (13 May 2013) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (26 May 2014).

11 Interview with an official from the Ministry of Security (13 May 2013).

Action Plan (IPAP), one of the most important partnership mechanisms. It is designed to help partner countries deepen their cooperation with NATO and advance the implementation of reforms. It comprises four fields of reform: 1) political and security; 2) defence and military; 3) public diplomacy, science, environmental security and emergency response planning; 4) administrative and resource protection.[12] BiH is currently completing the second cycle of IPAP. Beyond participation in these mechanisms for cooperation, BiH also contributes to NATO-led peace operations and regional defence[13] and security initiatives.[14] Since 2009, members of the AFBiH have been deployed to the ISAF Mission in Afghanistan, with a total of 443 members contributing to the Mission. BiH has also expressed readiness to participate in a post-ISAF mission that will be launched after 2014.[15]

While the technical and military aspects of the NATO integration process have been largely successful, there is a lack of cooperation among political elites in fulfilling the political goals needed to join NATO. A prevailing negative stance towards any meaningful reform began with the failure of the "April package" of constitutional reforms in 2006 and continued throughout the elections and post-election periods in 2006 and 2010, characterized by inflammatory political rhetoric and hate speech (Azinović, Bassuener and Weber 2011) and a reluctance to engage in political compromise and shared rule. This has exerted a negative impact on the country's progress towards NATO membership in recent years. Yet, as BiH plunged into political chaos, the North Atlantic Council (NAC)[16] decided at its meeting in Tallinn in April 2010 to "award" BiH a conditional invitation to the Membership Action Plan

12 "BiH u NATO - Sigurnost za sve," 2013, Individualni partnerski akcioni plan. Available at: http://bihnato.com/2013/02/11/ipap-individualni-partnerski-akcioni-plan-individual-partnership-action-plan-ipap/ (accessed 23 May 2014).

13 The country is involved in two regional initiatives based on the "Smart Defence" concept. One is the "Balkans Regional Approach to Air Defence" (BRAAD), which aims to decrease the costs of air defence for participating countries and help in developing interoperability between these countries and NATO (Tigner 2014; Balkan Regional Approach to Air Defence: Role of NATO n.d.: 5). BiH is also part of the initiative to establish a "Balkan Joint Medical Task Force".

14 BiH is an active participant in the South Eastern European Defence Ministerial Initiative (SEDM Initiative), the US Adriatic Charter (A5), the SEEC Forum for Western Balkans Defence Cooperation, the South Eastern Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP), the Conference of Heads of General Staffs of Western Balkan Countries, and others.

15 Data gathered from interviews with officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence and an officer of the AFBiH (19 May 2014).

16 The principle political decision-making body within NATO.

(MAP). The NAC linked activation of the MAP for BiH to the completion of registration of immovable prospective defence property with the state of BiH (assigned from the entities). One possible explanation for this conditional invitation is the expectation among NATO decision makers that "resolution of the immovable defence property issue would instigate regulation of the registration of the state property" which "has been at a standstill since the formation of the State Property Commission in 2004 and the OHR decision to impose a ban on the disposal of state property in BiH and both entities" (Bećirević, Ćurak and Turčalo 2014: 31).

In order to fulfil the requirement set by the NAC, the BiH Presidency identified 63 prospective military locations and the Ministry of Defence proposed two documents (the "Agreement on the Implementation of Agreed Principles of Distribution of Property" and "The Decision to Use Immovable Defence Property") to the Council of Ministers in order to initiate the process. In addition, based on agreements between the leaders of key political parties in BiH, the Council of Ministers established a Working Group, tasked with developing a proposed solution to the defence and/or state property issue. However, the Working Group has met just once since its establishment in February 2013 and has not reached any conclusions regarding its core task.[17] Instead of prompting political leaders to resolve the state property issue, the condition set by the NAC has in fact immobilized the process; this has been exploited politically by party elites, particularly from the Republika Srpska. They have demanded a comprehensive solution to the state property issue and have rejected a separate solution for immovable defence property.[18] As the leader of the Party of Democratic Progress, Mladen Ivanić, pointed out, the "unresolved issue of defence property is an instrument for the freezing of the process of BiH integration into NATO", adding that "it is easier for [politicians from the Republika Srpska] to talk about a dispute over property than a dispute over membership in NATO" (Bećirević, Ćurak and Turčalo 2014: 34). Although leaders from the ruling parties at the state level have repeatedly declared the

17 Political disputes also prevented the country from preparing a "Defence Review", an essential document for specifying different security and defence issues that are not regulated by law.

18 This was in disregard of a decision of the Constitutional Court of BiH (Case No. U-1/11) in which the judges declared the existing Law on the Status of State Property in Republika Srpska unconstitutional.

state property issue solved and have signed several agreements, every proposed Law on State Property has been rejected due to a lack of support from Republika Srpska-based parties.

NATO membership: A bargaining chip in the political arena

Various declarations of the entity parliaments, decisions of the BiH Presidency, the Law on Defence, the "General Directions and Priorities for Implementation of Foreign Policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina"[19] and other documents have all stated that NATO membership is a strategic interest of BiH. However, this official support is countered by the actions and discourse of political leaders, who are influenced by external and internal structures that are shaping the geopolitical vision of BiH. In terms of external actors, on the one hand, there are the neighbouring countries that are guarantors of the DPA, the attitudes of which towards NATO have a strong influence on the behaviour of Serb and Croat political elites in BiH. On the other hand, there is the international community, with the exception of Russia, which vehemently supports the membership of BiH in NATO, but considers the fulfilment of necessary requirements a commitment that must be made by local politicians.

Disagreements among political elites over the issue of state property signal a deep mistrust and a lack of a common vision in relation to the country's foreign policy priorities, as well as the structure of the state itself. The Serb member of the BiH Presidency, Nebojša Radmanović,[20] claims that this mistrust among political elites is the main reason for the condition set by the Republika Srpska to solve the issue of defence property together with the issue of state property. However, debates in the State Parliament and the discourse of political leaders indicate that Radmanovic's explanation is not the only view (Klix.ba 20113).

19 Available at: http://www.predsjednistvobih.ba/vanj/?cid=3564,1,1 (accessed 21 May 2014).

20 Interview with Nebojša Radmanović, conducted by Daniel Omeragić, Sarajevo, 20 December 2012.

Past experiences with NATO intervention in the region, as well as the influence of external actors such as Serbia and Russia, play a significant role. President of the Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik has repeatedly declared his opposition to NATO membership and stated at a Christmas reception for the 3rd infantry regiment of the AFBiH that he "will never vote in favour of BiH's NATO accession, both as RS president and when I retire; I will not forget that NATO bombed Serbs with depleted uranium" (Desk 2014). Together with the leader of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), he has stressed that any decision on NATO membership must be made through a referendum in the Republika Srpska (Blic Online 2013). Dodik has also emphasized that "BiH's NATO accession would lead to the establishment of a borderline of the North Atlantic Alliance on the Drina River, and bearing in mind Serbia's military neutrality, the RS authorities do not want to make this possible" (Desk 2014). These views are also shared by other political leaders from the Republika Srpska. Mladen Ivanić underlined that "we cannot reach a consensus on full-fledged NATO membership as long as Serbia is neutral and does not want to become a member of the Alliance. There are purely security reasons for such a stance. No one politician from the Republika Srpska is ready to accept a scenario in which the Armed Forces of BiH as members of NATO are at the borders of Serbia, and tomorrow, hypothetically, would be in a situation to fight against Serbia as a non-member state. I believe, at the moment when Serbia decides to join NATO, we will also go further in that process. I am also sure that Serbia won't stay outside".[21] This reluctance concerning NATO membership in the Republika Srpska has been strengthened further by Russia's negative stance towards the Alliance. Russia is regarded as a traditional ally of the Serbs and some analysts claim that political leaders from the Republika Srpska are working to appease Russia by slowing down or freezing the NATO integration process of BiH (Vanjskopolitička inicijativa 2012: 6).

Other external and internal actors look favourably upon NATO membership for BiH. The current government of Croatia strongly supports the inclusion of BiH in the NATO integration process. It recently offered a strategic partnership to the BiH government based on an interstate agreement on Euro-Atlantic integration that should help accelerate

21 Interview with Mladen Ivanić, conducted by Sead Turčalo, Sarajevo, 17 January 2013.

the process of meeting necessary membership criteria. This approach by Croatia contributes to the considerable support for Euro-Atlantic integration among Croats in Bosnia and Croat political parties in BiH readily promote and advocate NATO membership. Nevertheless, in the case of the defence property issue, the key criterion for activation of the MAP for BiH, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ BiH) – the strongest Croat party – has been adapting its position "to changing political alliances with Bosniak or Serb political leaders" (Bećirević, Ćurak and Turčalo 2014: 13).

Bosniak and multi-ethnic political parties strongly advocate fully fledged NATO membership. The attitude of these parties and their supporters is based on an almost mythical conception of NATO as the guarantor of a Bosnian state, a notion which is often used to divert the attention of voters from pressing economic and political issues, as well as from political corruption, professional incompetence and the unwillingness of political elites to implement necessary reforms.

Public opinion on NATO

The views of the general public on NATO integration are largely emotionally driven and related to perceptions of NATO's role in the region's wars in the 1990s; they are further shaped by political disputes and a lack of knowledge of the benefits and challenges that full membership might bring. For example, 25% of respondents in a survey conducted by the Sarajevo-based Centre for Security Studies accounted for their disapproval of NATO by simply stating "I don't like NATO" (Hadžović 2009: 84). In an official opinion poll conducted in 2008 for the purpose of developing a NATO Communication Strategy, "34% of the respondents described NATO as a 'Foreign Army', a 'European Army', or an 'International Force'". In addition, 71% of respondents in that survey reported that they "feel either insufficiently informed or not informed at all about 'the process of BiH approaching full membership in NATO'" (Communication Strategy of Bosnia and

Herzegovina in the NATO Integration Process 2009: 4). The group that considered themselves well informed (30%) were mostly respondents from the Republika Srpska. Another study on attitudes towards NATO, conducted in the Republika Srpska in 2011, showed similar results regarding respondents' perceptions of their own knowledge of NATO. In that survey, 65% of respondents considered themselves well informed about NATO. But the results from focus groups have revealed a general lack of knowledge in the Republika Srpska on the role and purpose of NATO. In one study, a majority of focus group participants answered that their views of NATO were related to the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo (Atlantic Initiative 2011). Apart from intervention in the region as the main reason for a lack of support for NATO, respondents from the Republika Srpska also cited a possible increase in the military budget, the involvement of members of the AFBiH in NATO missions and increased threats from terrorism as other concerns (Hadžović 2009: 84). In the last few years, public backing for NATO membership has been rising. According to the local Foreign Policy Initiative think tank, public opinion polls conducted from 2009 to 2012 have indicated increasing support. Still, there is a clear difference between respondents in the Federation of BiH and in the Republika Srpska. In the Federation, support for NATO increased from 73% in 2009 to 82% in 2012, whereas in the Republika Srpska it increased from just 30% to 38% in the same period (Vanjskopolitička Inicijativa 2012: 7–10). This rise in support for NATO may be related to an increasing number of public discussions about the benefits of membership, as well as to a growing awareness of the importance of being part of a collective defence system.

Conclusion

Security Sector Reform (SSR), particularly defence reform, was introduced as part of broader state building efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A lack of democratic control was one of the main reasons the international community instigated reforms of the entire security apparatus. The three ethnic and deeply politicized armed forces that

emerged out of the war were seen as a threat to the fragile peace in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and their reorganization was intended to introduce more transparency, as well as mechanisms that could unite the interests of former antagonists in order to prevent intra-state conflict in the future.

While pursuing its goals, the international community has applied a number of state building approaches and shifting strategies. This inconsistency has allowed BiH political elites to pursue their own, particularist agendas and to take advantage of political instability and state fragility to consolidate their hold on power. The country's NATO integration process has thus become a victim of both the vague approach of the international community and the unwillingness of ethno-political elites to compromise.

While the international community has attempted to promote local ownership by offering NATO membership as a reward for successful reform in the defence sector, Bosnian political elites have consistently avoided taking responsibility for resolving the key issue that is the major stepping stone towards achieving a sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because NATO integration has been pursued in disarray and with a focus on technical solutions, it is questionable if the process will live up to the liberal ideals it is meant to achieve.

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