

# DEMOCRACY, CULTURE OF DIALOGUE, TOLERANCE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

*REVIEW SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE*

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**Abstract:** Today's Bosnia and Herzegovina is a highly segmented state and society, taking into account ethnic, regional, religious and cultural-historical differences that undoubtedly exist within the state. As a state with a complex state system, Bosnia and Herzegovina is dominated by opposing and particular national and social interests that do not contribute to the establishment of unity and social compromise. After the fall of communist ideology and entering a long process of political and economic transition, Bosnia and Herzegovina is shaped by national exclusivism and ethnocentrism, or national (collective) identities, which inevitably leads to complete neglect of the individual (citizen) as the basis for civil society in full. The mentioned negative tendencies, along with the noticeable lack of democratic tradition to rely on and low level of education of the population could significantly slow down political and economic development, as well as the successful development of democracy in the country. On the other hand, ethnic relations play a crucial role in the distribution of political power in the state and although ethnicity itself can be a source of problems and instability in the state and society,

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it can also serve as a useful political tool for state regimes to build parties, mobilize population and combat opposition. In order to achieve a lasting solution to ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a radical change in the distribution of political power and influence in society is necessary, with emphasis on the ethnic reorganization of the police and army as the basis of the security system. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, state-building largely takes precedence over nation-building, as indicated by various indicators such as the centralization of power, building of the army and police, and the strengthening of the bureaucracy. In order to continuously strengthen the development of democracy in the country, it is necessary to constantly work on the development and strengthening of dialogue and tolerance between the three ethnic groups, improving the understanding of other cultures and the adoption of cultural pluralism.

**Keywords:** *Bosnia and Herzegovina, democracy, ethnic relations, national and religious divisions, dialogue, tolerance.*

## **1. Challenges in development of democratic pluralism in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a segmented state**

When the ethnic, regional, religious and cultural-historical characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state and social community are taken into account, it is undoubtedly concluded that it represents a highly segmented state and society. However, despite all these specifics, the political structuring of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state does not accept this de facto plurality, which in itself indicates problems in building democracy, especially modern, pluralistic democracy, which stems from the political subjectivity of various organizations, regions, groups, collectivities, as well as ethnic communities.

Ethnocentrism and national exclusivism, as the dominant principles in Bosnia and Herzegovina, significantly hinder and slow down political, economic and overall social development, as well as the successful building of a democratic state, which are all essential for any state that emerged after the fall of communist ideology in the early 1990s. All post-communist societies of today, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, are characterized by a negative tendency to promote primarily national (collective) identities, which inevitably leads to the neglect of individual self-esteem, which is

marked as an undesirable characteristic. After the fall of the communist order, a kind of paradox occurred in which national collectivism, by resisting “socialist collectivism”, wiped out individualism that had already been underdeveloped in Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout history.

As in many post-communist societies, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a noticeable lack of democratic tradition, which brings us to the fact that there is no real differentiation of autonomous spheres of social life, ie developed political consciousness. The immediate consequence of the existence of such conditions is the political production of unity motivated by ideological reasons, which used to be class unity, and now it is a national unity. The lack of a developed democratic tradition from previous periods still results in a lack of clear division between civil society and political state, although the process of European integration, in addition to implementing community acquis, implies a transition from “real socialism” with a planned economy to a liberal-democratic political system, with an economy that operates on the principle of the free market” (Dmičić, 2010, p. 227).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a kind of symbiosis of communist and nationalist collectivism is being realized, to the detriment of democracy, which is a characteristic of most post-communist societies, with certain differences conditioned by socio-historical, ethno-cultural and other specifics. Governing structures established on such bases are unable to stabilize the political order, any compromise reached by such structures is solely a compromise for gaining and retaining power directed against democratic values, and “due to the impoverishment of Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina we have no real pluralistic points that could resist the regime and defend their independence” (Vejnović, 2003, p. 7).

In addition to the lack of democratic tradition, national collectivism is the biggest obstacle to the democratic order of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because any system that assumes national, class, etc. interests to interests and goals of the individual himself is essentially an undemocratic system.

National collectivism inherited and took over the already established model of class collectivism which dominated the communist order and which deprived the individual of political subjectivity and deprived him of his freedom, and without these elementary liberal assumptions there is no

democracy. Democracy as a system of government is a way for the people, who are often submissive and subject to manipulation, to form themselves as politically aware demos. The state and society that are organized on a democratic basis represent the best possible society and the best possible state, primarily because the mechanisms of democratic organization of society and the state in certain socio-historical conditions maximize consent and minimize coercion.

## **2. Ethnic relations and distribution of political power in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The relationship between ethnic groups and the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multifaceted and dynamic relationship. When making decisions regarding the composition of their coercive bodies, state policy makers usually do not leave it to chance to resolve such crucial issues. On the contrary, state policy makers have divided the population according to the ethnic principle and are guided by the application of this principle in the selection of social bases for recruitment in various types of conflict. The relationship between ethnic identification and the state is very complex and while ethnic identification can have an impact on shaping the state, much more often the state can shape and in reality it does shape interethnic relations and ethnic identities. Thus, ethnicity is a category of political nature both in that it serves as a basis for the mobilization of interest groups and in that it is a crucial factor in the creation, development and maintenance of the state as the most powerful political apparatus.

Contemporary political theory concludes that state-building and nation-building are not as inextricably intertwined as modernization theorists have concluded. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, nation-building and state-building are not only two completely separate historical processes, but state-building largely takes precedence over nation-building. The state's supremacy over the nation is indicated by various tendencies, such as the centralization of power, the building of the army and the police, the strengthening of the bureaucratic apparatus, as well as the militarization of many primarily political issues.

Two phenomena emerge as clear indicators of focusing on the state: the growing failure of central policy-makers to build a nation and the reaction to tendencies of foreign power interference. Ruling orders empower the nation only if it is certain that they can successfully control the mobilization of the people in order to strengthen their own dominant position, while the opposite tendency is present when mobilizing forces express support for such orders. As it becomes apparent that nation-building poses potential risks to central government, regime elites seek to either channel mobilization of people into state-oriented flows or demobilize ordinary citizens, and by doing so strengthen state institutions and thus turn to state-building.

Foreign interference also contributes to the supremacy of the state over the nation, through intergovernmental aid programs, multilateral loans and investments, which directly strengthens the role of bureaucratic, military and police institutions of the recipient state, which are the main channels for receiving such foreign aid and investments.

States are specific political organizations that differ from other forms of political organizations in that they have a monopoly on the power of coercion. However, if the authority of the state depends exclusively on coercion, it cannot be permanent and efficient in performing its functions. Nevertheless, in the creation of most state systems, the political elite uses coercion to a considerable extent, and assumes that it has the possibility of coercion at its disposal.

In order to understand the processes and means of strengthening the state, it is necessary to consider the relations between various state bodies (bureaucracy, army, police, semi-state corporations) on the one hand and the relations between the state and ethnic-class social stratification on the other. Ethnicity can be viewed from several aspects, as it can be a source of problems in the state and society, but it can also serve as a very useful political tool and state instrument for state regimes to build a party, mobilize citizens and suppress opposition forces. The key to the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina's politics is the ability of existing political institutions and processes to anticipate and find relevant solutions to ever-changing public problems.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is an ethnically fragmented community whose constitution was preceded by ethnic conflict. The ethnic conflict itself was influenced by various factors such as class, culture, institutional structures as well as external factors. Low levels of trust between different cultures and differences in power have led to ethnic hostilities. Also, the abuse of force and, paradoxically, the lack of force contributed to the conflict. The abuse of force produces an unjust distribution of state power and public services, while a lack of force leads to an escalation of force without a real increase in the sense of security of ordinary citizens. Both of these elements (abuse and lack of force) stem from the fact that the state elite is primarily committed to maintaining the state order. Neglecting the role of force in the formation of interethnic relations in the state means the same as formulating unrealistic policies. The police and the military and their relationship are part of the cause of ethnic polarization, not just part of the reaction to ethnic polarization, and police and military structures often worsen instead of resolving conflicts in multiethnic communities such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. State regimes that feel insecure about the ethnic diversity of their electorate often maintain state security by adjusting the ethnic composition of their coercive bodies in a way that transforms interethnic mistrust into distancing weaker communities from the political system itself. At the same time, such policies of recruitment and promotion often give members of favored ethnic groups the conviction that the state has the function of their private protection service and therefore resist any request from weaker groups for greater participation in the police force or army. The increase in the size of the police force and the militarization of the police emphasized its importance for interethnic relations, with a significant part of that increase and militarization being made possible by trade and gifts of foreign patrons.

In order to resolve interethnic conflicts, it is necessary to reconsider the police and the army not only as neutral instruments for solving problems, but also as potential sources of those problems. When considering the security system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the following should be borne in mind: the influence of the ethnic composition of the security forces on the resolution of the conflict; the impact of police-military relations

on conflict resolution and what ethnic formulas and the division of labor between police and military can tell us about the concept of state security. In order to achieve a lasting solution to the ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a fundamental change in the distribution of political power and influence in society will be necessary, and as part of that change, ethnic reorganization of the police and army at both the top and bottom. The resolution of interethnic conflict cannot be permanent if only the security of the state is achieved, and not the security of every community within the state.

All aspects of democracy - conceptual, moral and empirical - can be seen in the compromise between the requirement that, on one hand, no person can be governed or imposed on rules of conduct without his consent and, on the other hand, the imperative to respect general consensus. At the empirical level, this compromise is reflected in the relationship between the majority and the minority. The model that is closest to the democratic ideal is the principle of majority democracy, which is closest to the ideal if it is not absolutized or abused, and the application of that principle in a country can be largely verified by analyzing the level of security and freedom enjoyed by minorities. A democratic system of government does not lead to absolute harmony in society, nor is it a guarantee of general harmony, but it is certainly the most appropriate form of regulating relations in the community, in which the unequal will be less unequal, the unfree less unfree, and the powerless less powerless than in any other order.

One of the fundamental problems of democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is how to translate *de facto* pluralism into political democratic pluralism, ie how to resolve objective differences and conflicts of interest according to agreed rules of the game, and not through violence and repression. The political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is extremely complex, or as Čepo (2014) states: The political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina was not created with the aim of optimally regulating relations in that country, nor is it a reflection of the wishes of its citizens. It was a tool to stop war conflicts, and it became an anchor by which political elites maintain the status quo, that is, keep the ended conflict in its frozen state (p. 56). Democracy as a system of government, unlike totalitarian orders, does not hide and eliminate differences, disagreements and conflicts, and especially does not

do so by applying coercion. In a democratic process and a democratic order, conflicts are legitimate and one of the crucial features of democracy is the attitude towards conflicts and their management through dialogue, without coercion. In democratic systems, the permanent and perhaps most important problem is how to constantly develop and preserve all the benefits of representative democracy and majority decision-making, while preventing “tyranny of the majority” that may jeopardize democracy itself and the values it protects. “Bosnia and Herzegovina’s function as a state should enable the coexistence of certain interests, through rules that should prevent, reduce and mitigate conflicts” (Vejnović, 2003, p. 4).

The national principle of state and political constitution can ensure neither democratic order nor protection of ethnic minorities, but necessarily leads to national-totalitarianism because it subordinates the individuality that is the basic premise of democracy to a collective, supra-individual entity, and desubjects and discriminates against all other ethnic minorities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a result of the war, there is a certain degree of hatred among different ethnic communities, and hatred as an integrating factor of the people always proves to be a limiting factor for the development of democracy. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs a democracy that guarantees lasting peace and good decision-making, and at the same time gives citizens the right to make (and change) judgments about the quality of such decisions, there is a necessity for democracy which implies the rule of the public, which (publicly) judges and in which there will be no “cult of personality”, but consistent implementation of laws and equality before the law, democracy in which voters need to free themselves from the tyranny of party organizations and monopoly. One of the basic advantages of democracy is the existence of a mechanism for collective decision-making in a way that ensures the most complete and qualitatively best participation of stakeholders.

Every democratic system implies equal and universal suffrage for adult citizens and rule of majority, but also implies the guarantee of minority rights, the rule of law, procedures according to which collective decisions must be approved by a large number of those entitled to make them, and constitutional guarantees of freedom of association and expression, as well as other rights and freedoms. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, democracy

is threatened and undermined by various undemocratic tendencies, such as the weakening of the position, role and importance of parliaments as legislatures and by the proliferation of secret bodies and organizations and other forms of state censorship.

Nowadays, the following liberal-democratic values are dominant: the creation of civil society and the constitution of citizens; division of power; parliamentarism and political pluralism; freeing the economy from the tutelage of politics; legal state and rule of law; systemic control of political power holders; democratic type of electoral system; institutionalized public and freedom of information and participatory-democratic type of political culture and civil society. Social turmoil in the global context, and even turmoil in Bosnia and Herzegovina, creates a growing “need for the state”, which indicates the dangers of the new statism and totalitarianism, and sets the demand for democracy and democratic order as an imperative. The notion of interest implies the existence of conflict, and according to the model of liberal democracy, interests are controlled through political rule by separation of powers, respect for human rights and freedoms and the right to opposition, which presupposes free elections.

### **3. Dialogue and tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a “categorical imperative”**

In the modern age, the world is divided in various ways, and for that very reason dialogue and tolerance are demands of the times and strong barriers to the rule of one-sidedness. People, things and ideas move in a horizontal and vertical direction and in today’s world all differences and opposites have a place in human reality. The need for conversation clearly indicates that not everything is fine with the relations between people in society. Only when the essence of dialogue and tolerance is taken into account, one can see the extent to which a certain society has declined in people’s everyday relationships, and the key controversial issue to focus on is the issue of communication between people.

The degree of democratic development of a society is also reflected in its attitudes towards dialogue and tolerance. The level of development

of democracy can be measured by the limits of tolerance and the way conversations are conducted. Societies that do not nurture dialogue push dialogue subjects and their opinions to the margins of social life, and tie overall social communication to a given type of consensus. First of all, communication of equal social subjects should be established, and then lead to the expansion of dialogue in society.

Today, all over the world, dialogue is a kind of “categorical imperative”, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where several religions and nations exist in the same area, where either the basis for mutual tolerance or the basis for mutual extermination is created. Mutual tolerance is a necessary condition in a society of religious and national diversity. A dialogue that does not mediate between the real and the possible is not current and has no fuller significance for the culture to which it refers. There is a need in society to replace the culture of speech, which includes concepts such as hierarchy, necessity, coercion, power, despotism, structure, dogma, with a culture of conversation characterized by the concepts of freedom, equality, cooperation, discovery, pluralism and choice. In a society where only speeches are held, and not conversations, we have relations of power, not relations of cooperation. When in particular society conversation replaces speech, then it is a sign that society is moving from necessity to freedom, from structure to culture. The transition from one way of thinking to another is closely connected with leaving one way of life in favor of another.

Since the culture of dialogue requires not only the culture of interlocutors, but also progressive democratic awareness, developed environment and the habit of checking everything that is assumed or suspected, it becomes clearer why dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina is often pointless because it had no other ambitions than to monologue. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has not long been remembered that one interlocutor acknowledged to others the superiority of argumentation. In situations where there is no dialogue as active consciousness, there is no progress in social and cultural life. Being ready to have a conversation means rejecting any thought of violence, and non-violence, given its goal, implies covert power. Interpersonal relations can be viewed from two aspects: as relations of power or as relations of cooperation, ie the conversation can

be conducted either from the position of power or from the position of equality in conversation.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, tolerance is indeed the only way forward and it is inseparable from freedom and autonomy that can truly be achieved only in dialogue with others. In multicultural and multinational societies, which are not homogeneous nationally, religiously or culturally, the issue of tolerance is essential. Hence the demand for tolerance in the entire social life, politics, ethics, social criticism. With this in mind, tolerance begins to be understood as enduring and suffering in community that is tied to a person or society, to the opposite beliefs, declarations and actions of individuals and groups. All areas of social life and different values are taken into account - religion, worldview, science, art, politics and customs. Any community, which does not look ahead and does not incorporate and develop in its young generations the need for conversation and the habit of tolerance for others and the different, has no prospects for the future. It will have those prospects if it directs the upbringing and education of its young members towards dialogical opinion, towards advantages and values that result from differences. New cultural diversity is a much more direct challenge to traditional culture and education, and tolerance and dialogue is a new way of presenting the issue of pluralism and cultural diversity.

Education for dialogue and tolerance, should first of all keep in mind the possibility and the right to choose. The goal of upbringing and education is to teach people to be educated for change. Tolerance and dialogue is the state of mind in Bosnia and Herzegovina that allows it to function well. Intolerance can be a product of time, but it is far more often the result of wrong upbringing and education, hence the increasing efforts to include issues of tolerance in educational content. In today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, by rejecting the intercultural dimension monoculturalism is openly forced, but knowing and understanding other cultures and establishing positive relations of exchange and mutual enrichment among different cultural components within a community is the essence of tolerance. Training for tolerance means promoting cultural diversity, multi-formity, adopting cultural pluralism as an opportunity to express our own personality and human potential as comprehensively as possible, to fight

against all forms of exclusion and exclusivity.

Tolerance is a necessary condition for the possibility of coexistence with others. Since they are not possible outside the community, individuals are directed to coexistence with each other. It is impossible to be free without others, and in that sense, freedom is an individuality confirmed in self-relation with others. It follows that the struggle for the freedom of one's own identity is also manifested as a struggle for the freedom of the identity of others. Tolerance is a non-antagonistic, group and individual relationship, which enables the coexistence of differences in the community. The condition for tolerance is the freedom of the individual, because only a free man can be tolerant and only a free man can be tolerated. In order for tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be possible, it is necessary to achieve awareness of differences, the right to differences, openness to dialogue and a willingness to associate.

Phenomena that significantly threaten dialogue and tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina are hate speech and language manipulation. Hate speech is a tool used to describe and present an ethnic, national, racial, religious, social or political group in a negative context, or an instrument that uses the language of politics aimed at silencing or removing opponents in order to mobilize mass. Hate speech, combined with lies and distortions of facts, is very present on the public scene of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the highest representatives of state and party authorities, as well as the regime media, produce huge amounts of intolerance, aggression and xenophobia. In practice, hate speech uses two closely related weapons: labeling and slandering a political rival, with the pronounced use of lies, and also "hate and hate speech are always suitable as a mechanism and instrument for acquiring and maintaining identity, and for full and effective social control" (Šijaković and Đukić, 2010, p. 92).

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is characterized by pronounced political (national) and cultural (religious) divisions, which create significant difficulties for the creation of civil society in the long run, and "civil society

means a spontaneous form of association and connection of citizens regardless of power and authorities, but with the aim of influencing the bearers of key political roles and political processes in a society ”(Popov-Momčinović, 2009, p. 136), ie we can conclude that “ therefore, civil society is a society of order, cultural relations and cultural way of living, a society of free individuals-citizens ”(Kuzmanović, 2002, p. 205).

In addition to these divisions, the creation of civil society is thwarted by the basic features of political culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as: low level of trust in the other and different; provincialism and patriarchal mentality, combined with the already traditionally low educational level of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, the definition of politics implies a bloody struggle of social groups and individuals to gain, preserve and increase power and authority, and the essence of politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the struggle for the distribution and control of social power.

The new world order is dominated by universal values, norms and rules of conduct, which creates a problem for countries based on national culture, as is the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, because such countries can hardly fit into these patterns. Any community based on national myth opposes change, creating an obstacle to broader integration processes and the development of tolerance between the three peoples and their cultures in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The basic and crucial task before us in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to teach new generations dialogue and tolerance through upbringing and education.

The relations between the three political communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina are reflected in the language and speech they use in their communication. The analysis of such communication shows that hate speech constantly marks all phases in the politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina - from the first stage of chauvinistic nationalism, through the second stage: artificial peacekeeping, to today's synthesis of xenophobia and mercantile patriotism. Given today's public speech, far greater development of democratic awareness is needed in order to affirm unencumbered, non-ideological and balanced language in the public sphere, especially in the sphere of politics and political life, noting that “regarding possible trends and

recommendations to achieve full maturity or full level of development of civil society, it should be borne in mind that this is a long-term and arduous path that has not yet been traversed even in transition countries that have democratically consolidated”(Popov-Momčinović, 2009, p. 142).

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