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The Republic of Srpska - Quo Vadis?

Abstract

The Republic of Srpska (RS BiH) achieved independence within Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995. Since, numerous questions have arisen regarding the quality of Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty. In order to offer a transparent analysis of the situation in the Republic of Srpska, this paper is divided into four parts. The first section contains an analysis of the political situation. The author presents the constitutional basis upon which the RS BiH operates, followed by information from the recent parliamentary and presidential elections. The second part contains a brief analysis of the economic situation in Republic of Srpska, including a series of data with an impact on the status of the Republic of Srpska's economy. In the third part, the author focuses on the social situation in the Republic of Srpska, by providing the facts and figures on various social aspects such as population census, migration, unemployment, mines, etc. In the fourth section, the author suggests a few possible scenarios of the future developments in and surrounding the Republic of Srpska.

Key words: The Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbs

Introduction

The analysis of the current political events in the Post-Yugoslav states naturally brings to mind the problem of the international status of Kosovo. However, it should be noted that, in the region, there is also increasing uncertainty as to the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in particular as to the policies of the Republic of Srpska. On the strength

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of its constitution, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a federal republic comprised of two administrative units²: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Muslim-Croat Federation³) and the Serb Republic (the Republic of Srpska, Republika Srpska) (Bujwid-Kurek 2008: 143). This special political entity was created in 1995 pursuant to the Dayton Accords, which put an end to the Bosnian civil war (Ibrahimagić 2006: 85-101). That bloody conflict led to an ethnic division of the independent Bosnian state into the Muslim-Croat Federation inhabited mostly by Bosniaks (Muslims) and Croats, and the Serb Republic with a predominantly Serb population (Catic 2011: 8-9). Bosnia and Herzegovina is undoubtedly an artificial political entity which is bound to undergo deep transformations over time (Waldenberg 2000: 453-461). With a view to future scenarios, the author gives a brief account of three solutions for the Serb Republic. First, Bosnian Serbs may want to establish tighter relations with Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats to build a centralized Bosnia and Herzegovina. Second, the Serb Republic may veer towards Serbia to create an “enlarged” Serbian state in the future. Third, the Serb Republic may proclaim independence, similarly to Kosovo. The question which political direction will be chosen by Bosnian Serbs is extremely important not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also for the Balkans and Europe as a whole.

Political situation

The constitution of the Republic of Srpska established a unique political system, under which the Republic is one of the constituent entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus being a *quasi* state with its own legislative, executive, and judiciary bodies (Osóbka 2011: 18). The legislative powers are vested in an 83-member unicameral National Assembly (Narodna skupština) with a term of 4 years (*Ustav Republike Srpske* 1992: art. 70-79). The winning party or coalition is obliged to nominate a candidate for prime minister and form a stable government. Importantly, the government should include some ministers who are members

2 District of Brčko, officially the third separate unit (condominium) since March 1999 has the same competences as the two other entities, however, only in coordination with them.

3 Muslim-Croat Federation is informally named Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the sake of clarity, the author will consistently use the informal name in this paper.

of national minorities (Ibid: art. 92). Along with the government and prime minister, the executive powers are vested in the president of the Serb Republic, elected from among Serb nationals by popular vote for a term of 4 years. Additionally, the Constitution of the Serb Republic demands that two vice-presidents, a Bosniak and a Croat, be elected, thus ensuring that the ethnic minorities participate in the central state administration (Ibid: art. 80-89).

Being part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serb Republic is subjected to the central government in Sarajevo; however, it also has its own capital in Banja Luka. The current boundaries of the Republic of Srpska were demarcated by the Dayton Accords, under which the state of Bosnian Serbs occupies the north-western part of Bosnia, covering an area of 24,619 km², bordering in the north with Croatia (310 km), in the east with the Republic of Serbia (355 km), Montenegro (247 km) and in the south with the Muslim-Croat Federation (1113 km) (Chandler, 2000: 45). The heterogeneous and extensive border line is certainly a disadvantage in terms of the administrative consolidation of the state. The Serb Republic takes up about 49% of the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In October 2014, the Serb Republic held combined elections⁴. The office of the President of the Republic was filled by Milorad Dodik again, who had been nominated by the social democratic coalition (SNSD-DNS-SP) and received as much as 45,4% of the vote. A Bosniak, Ramiz Salkić (Domovina), and a Croat, Josip Jerković (HDZ BiH, HSS, HKDU BiH, HSP Herceg Bosne), became vice-presidents (*Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske* 2016: 52). It should be noted that the vice-presidents received very little support, as did other Bosniak and Croat candidates (See table 1. Results of the presidential elections of October 12, 2014).

4 Citizens of the Republic of Srpska elected representatives to the central authority on October 12, 2014: 1 member of the Presidency of BiH, 14 members of the House of Representatives of BiH. Also elected were representatives of Republic authority: president of RS and 2 vice-presidents, 83 members of the National Assembly of RS.

Tab. 1. Results of the presidential elections of October 12, 2014.

Candidate	Political party / coalition	Number of votes	% of votes
Milorad Dodik	SNSD-DNS-SP	303 496	45,4
Ognjen Tadić	Savez za promjene	296 021	44,3
Ramiz Salkić	Domovina	24 294	3,6
Sejfudin Tokić	A-SDA - Stranka Demokratske Aktivnosti	11 312	1,7
Dragomir Jovičić	Stranka pravedne politike	7 569	1,1
Enes Suljkanović	SDP - Socijaldemokratska Partija BiH	6 809	1,0
Josip Jerković	HDZ BiH, HSS, HKDU BiH, HSP Herceg Bosne	6 562	1,0
Emil Vlajki	Partija ekonomske i socijalne pravde	3 202	0,5
Amir Horić	BPS - Sefer Halilović	2 216	0,3
Sanda Stojaković	Komunistička Partija	959	0,1
Vladan Marković	non-party	948	0,1
Miko Stojanović	non-party	873	0,1
Ivo Blažanović	Demokratska stranka invalida BiH	812	0,1
Mladen Nešković	non-party	783	0,1
Senad Bešić	Narodna Stranka Radom Za Boljitak	754	0,1
Senad Palić	SDU BiH - Socijaldemokratska Unija Bosne i Hercegovine	605	0,1
Toma Sedlo	Stranka pravde i povjerenja	582	0,1
Indira Muharemović	Prva stranka	565	0,1
Patrit Čenaj	non-party	166	0,0

Source: Self-reported data from: *Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske 2016*, p. 52-53.

Elections for the National Assembly of the Serb Republic were held at the same time. The winning party was Milorad Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) with 32,3% of the vote. The runner-up was the coalition of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), Party of United Pensioners (Penzioneri, PUP) and Serbian Radical Party (Radikali, SRS RS) with almost 26,3% (Ibid: 56). Other political parties had much weaker results, not exceeding 10%. Thus, out of a total of 83 seats, 29 were awarded to Dodik's party, 24 to SDS-PUP-SRS, with the remaining parties receiving from 5 to 8 seats (See table 2. Results of the parliamentary elections of October 12, 2014). It should be mentioned here that the Parliament of the Serb Republic is characterized by substantial party fragmentation. Apart from two dominant political forces, it comprises 5 other political groups with small representation. Relative to the 2010 election, the situation in the National Assembly did not

change much⁵. It goes without saying that most political groups in the Serb Republic are ethnicity-based (Serbian, Bosniak, or Croat parties) and espouse extreme ideology (nationalism, national conservatism). Following the election, Milorad Dodik - the President of RS proposed Željka Cvijanović for Prime Minister (she formed the government in March 2013, before the 2014 elections). This candidacy was accepted by the National Assembly, and Cvijanović was able to retain her position. The priorities of governmental policy presented by the Prime Minister mostly include measures focused on the improvement of the socio-economic situation of the state. Characteristically, both the government and president of the Serb Republic do not touch on the issue of consolidation or centralization of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Tab. 2. Results of the parliamentary elections
of October 12, 2014.

Political party / coalition	Number of votes	% of votes	Number of mandates
SNSD - Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata - Milorad Dodik	213 665	32,3	29
SDS - Srpska demokratska stranka, PUP - Penzioneri, SRS - Radikali	173 824	26,3	24
DNS - Demokratski narodni savez NS - SRS	61 061	9,2	8
PDP - Partija demokratskog progresa	48 845	7,4	7
Domovina	34 583	5,2	5
Narodni demokratski pokret	33 977	5,1	5
Socijalistička partija	33 695	5,1	5

Source: Self-reported data from: *Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske 2016*, p. 56.

For more than a decade now, Milorad Dodik has enjoyed considerable support in the Serb Republic. A graduate in political science from the University of Belgrade, he built a political base in the early 1990s. During the Bosnian civil war he served as a member of the National Assembly of the Serbian Republic and took a conciliatory position toward the conflict. He did not support the radical stance embraced by the then ruling Serbian Democratic Party. After the war, he became the leader of the newly created Alliance of Independent Social Democrats. In the years 1998–2001 and 2006–2010 he was Prime Minister, and since 2010 he has served as President of the Republic of Srpska. Dodik holds social democratic views, although he has also subscribed to some nationalist ideas. Undoubtedly, he developed his political potential by combining

5 SNSD with 29 mandates dominated in the parliamentary term 2006-2014, but the number of seats systematically decreases from 41 in 2006, 37 in 2010.

a social agenda (i.e. combating poverty and unemployment, promoting social benefits, etc.) with a nationalist one (i.e. safeguarding the interests of Serbs, maintaining the independence of the Serb Republic, prioritizing relations with Belgrade, etc.). His political views clearly became more radical in 2006. In that year, during the election campaign, he identified with the slogan “The Serb Republic – the better part of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. This was a response to initiatives aimed at the abolishment of the Serbian autonomy in favor of a centralized, unified Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dodik went even further and appealed for a referendum on independence of the Serb Republic. He then restated his demand in the context of the secessionist tendencies of Kosovo and threatened that if the Kosovar Albanians broke away from Serbia’s control, Bosnia would follow suit. Despite the failed attempt to create an independent state, Dodik and his party still support an independent Republic of Srpska (Oklopčić 2012: 96).

In the Serb Republic and across the remaining part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there still remain some international institutions aimed at protecting the political stability of the state. An important function is fulfilled by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, responsible for oversight of the civilian implementation of the Dayton Accords (Banović, Gavrić 2010: 166). Since 2009, this position has been held by Valentin Inzko. Furthermore, about 600 EUFOR Althea troops (a peace mission) continue to be stationed in Bosnia. These international forces are tasked with, e.g., protecting civilians, guarding the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and tracking down war criminals.

Economic situation

The economic situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is rather grim and particular sectors of the economy require immediate reform (Tomaš 2010: 27). Agriculture, which is mostly concentrated in the northern part of the country, is at a low level of mechanization and not very competitive as compared to the neighboring regions (Croatian Slavonia and Serbian Vojvodina). This is mainly due to unfavorable relief and poor agricultural methods. The main crops in 2015 included maize (561,000 tons), wheat (127,000 tons), and fruits (especially plums – 67,000 tons and apples – 48,000 tons). The prevalent types of livestock are sheep (486,000) and pigs (452,000); cattle farming is conducted at a much smaller scale (229,000 head) (*Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske* 2016: 245). Also, industrial manufacturing is insufficient relative to the

country's needs. The Serb Republic is rich in natural resources, especially in iron ore and ores of non-ferrous metals, but companies are in dire need of modernization. The few existing heavy industry enterprises are located in mining regions and the largest cities. Besides, there are some light industry facilities in the main urban areas. The service sector is still at a low level, but has developed dynamically over the past several years.

In 2015, the Serb Republic's GDP was only KM 9,1 billion (EUR 4,7 billion), which meant that GDP *per capita* of KM 6,465 (EUR 3,306). However, it should be noted that the situation has significantly improved over the past sixteen years. In 1999, GDP *per capita* was only 869 euro! (Ibid: 132). Economic growth is estimated at 2,6%, which should be deemed a success as compared to a fall of over 1% in 2012. In 2015, the average monthly wages amounted to as little as KM831 (EUR 425) (Ibid: 137 and 119). Bosnia and Herzegovina (including the Serb Republic) is one of the poorest states in Europe, with GDP *per capita* higher only than Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The Serb Republic's international trade trends show an excess of imports over exports. In 2015, the Republic imported goods in the total value of KM 4,4 billion (about EUR 2,2billion). The main imported products included oil and gas, food products, medicines, machinery, and cars. In the same year, exports amounted to KM 2,6 billion (about EUR 1,3 billion) (Ibid: 340). Bosnian Serbs sell primarily leather products, wood, metal ores, and other mineral raw materials. The major export partners are: Italy (18,3%), Serbia (13,1%), Germany (10,6%), Slovenia (9,7%) and Croatia (8,7%), while import partners include: Serbia (17,5%), Russia (15,7%), Italy (12,2%), Germany (7,7%), and China (6,3%) (Ibid: 352-353).

In their economic strategies, the policy-makers of the Serb Republic prioritize, e.g. construction of a network of motorways, modernization of railroads, development of the energy sector, legal measures facilitating foreign investment and entrepreneurship development, establishment of national airlines. These objectives are rather general and perhaps somewhat overblown, and they are not likely to be met during the current economic crisis⁶. A project that has enjoyed substantial support concerns the energy potential of the border river Drina. The two neighboring Serbian states have undertaken to construct small water power plants and equally share the energy obtained (Hebda 2012: 552). Also the development of overland, air, and telecommunication connections

6 More: *Republika Srpska's Eighth Report to the UN Security Council*, November 2012, p. 9-12.

is of interest to both. However, the Serb Republic is dependent on Serbia as far as these issues are concerned, as well as in terms of most industrial sectors.

Social situation

For the past few years, the population of the Republic of Srpska has been on the decline. In 2001, the Republic was inhabited by almost 1,5 million people, while now the figure is down to 1,415,776 residents (Bosnia and Herzegovina has a population of 3,5 million) (*Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske* 2016: 74). The Serb Republic is practically monoethnic. According to various sources, Orthodox Christian Serbs account for over 90% of the population, while some claim that figure may be even 97% (Eberhardt 2005: 96). Bosniaks constitute about 3–7%, and Croats only 1–2% of the total population of the Serb Republic (Rudolf 2011: 231). However according to the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013 there were 81,5% Serbs, 14% Bosniaks and 2,5% Croats (*Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini, 2013, Rezultati popisa* 2016: 54). Thus, the above data may be inaccurate and may not reflect the actual ethnic composition of the Serb Republic. Here it should also be noted that a study conducted by Oxford Research International clearly shows that Bosnia's society is deeply divided and tensions and hostility predominate between various ethnic groups. Research has shown that Bosnians do not trust each other, only 7,2% of the respondents trust other people. In addition, only 2 out of 10 people expected to have equal treatment with others (*The Silent Majority Speaks: Snapshots of Today and Visions of the Future in BiH* 2007: 14).

For a decade, population growth in the Serb Republic has been negative or zero, and in 2015 it was minus 5.7%. Over the past five years, there have been about 9,000 births and 15,000 deaths annually (*Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske* 2016: 74). The lack of a comprehensive pro-family policy may lead to further deterioration of the population growth rate. It should be noted here that a major problem for the Bosnian population is emigration. According to estimates of the Bosnian Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, as many as 1,350,000 people from Bosnia and Herzegovina live abroad, the main host countries being the United States (390,000 refugees), Germany (157,000), Serbia (137,000), Austria (132,000), Slovenia (100,000), Sweden (75,000), Croatia (60,000), Canada (60,000), and Australia (50,000)(Halilovich, 2012:

163). Interestingly, in the years 2006–2015, only slightly over 900 BiH nationals returned to their country with the International Organization for Migration assistance (*Bosnia and Herzegovina migration profile for the year 2015*: 38).

This is certainly attributable to the harsh living conditions both in the Serb Republic and in the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Over a period of five years (2010–2015), the prices of most food products increased from several to a dozen percent. Also prices of water, electricity, natural gas and fuel showed an upward trend. During this period of time, the average monthly wages in the Serb Republic increased from EUR 400 to EUR 425, but in most economic sectors employees earned less (*Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske* 2016: 119-120). One should also mention the problem of poverty. The process of social impoverishment was reversed only in the Muslim-Croatian Federation: the poverty rate decreased there from 18,8% in 2004 to 17% in 2007, while in the Serb Republic it increased from 17,8% to 20,1%. The greatest rise was recorded in the Brčko District (9,5% to 25,8%) (*Bosnia i Hercegovina Study for Poverty Profile in the European Region* 2010: 3). The problem of poverty affects to the greatest extent residents of rural areas, elderly citizens, young uneducated individuals, the disabled, and Roma people.

Undoubtedly the main underlying cause of the situation discussed above is the issue of employment. In 2015, only 246,000 citizens of RS had a job. Most of them were employed in manufacturing (20%), wholesale and retail trade (17,3%), public administration (9,8%) and education (9%). It should be noted that more over 30% were employees of state-owned companies and administration (*Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske* 2016: 104). The failing labor market led to an excessively high unemployment rate, which was 36,2% in 2015 (official statistic). Actually, this figure may be even worse as many unemployed persons are not registered with employment offices. However, the problem in the Serb part of Bosnia is less severe than in the neighboring Muslim-Croat Federation, where as much as 46,4% of the population is jobless (*Baza podataka o ekonomskim indikatorima RS*). Statistical data show that, over the past ten years, the unemployment rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina has remained between 40 and 45% (Obradović 2010: 14). Importantly, as many as 67,6% of Bosnian citizens aged 15 to 24 remain without jobs, which is the highest unemployment level among young persons in the World (*The World Bank*)⁷. The faltering labor market is conducive to corruption, often at the administrative level.

7 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?end=2016&name_desc=false&start=1991

A rather grave problem affecting both the Serb Republic and the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina is connected to minefields, which have not been completely cleared. Following the 1992–1995 civil war, Bosnia remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. According to the latest estimates (*Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action*)⁸, approximately 2% of the country's area is riddled with this dangerous weapon (about 1,149 km²). Under the adopted strategy, Bosnia's territory is to be completely cleared by 2019 (*Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Strategy 2009-2019* 2008: 9-16). From 1996 to the end of 2010 landmine explosions killed almost 1,700 persons; however, the number of casualties has regularly decreased year to year, which is a positive symptom (91 people died due to mine blast in 2000, while 6 people died ten years later).

By analyzing the economic indicators of the Republic of Srpska, it becomes evident that the state is a political entity characterized by weak economy and a difficult social situation. (See table 3. Selected socio-economic indicators for the year 2015).

Tab. 3. Selected socio-economic indicators for the year 2015

Population	1,415,776* / 1,228,423**
Ethnic groups	Serbs 81,51%, Bosniaks 13,99%, Croats 2,41%**
Official languages	Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian
Confession	Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Catholicism
Birthrate	-5,7%
Main cities – population	Banja Luka - 199,191; Bijeljina - 114,663; Prijedor - 97,588; Doboj - 77,223; City of Istočno Sarajevo - 64,966; Zvornik - 63,686; Gradiška - 56,727; Teslić - 41,904
GDP	9,152,866,000 KM (EUR 4,679,858,000)
GDP per capita	6,465 KM (EUR 3,306)
Average wages	831 KM (EUR 425)
Economic growth	2,6%
Unemployment rate	36,2%
Value of export	2,613,924,000 KM (EUR 1,336,498,000)
Value of import	4,369,179,000 KM (USD 2,233,960,000)

* Data from *Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske 2016*

** Data from *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini, 2013, Rezultati popisa*

Source: Self-reported data from: *Statistički godišnjak Republike Srpske 2016; Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini, 2013, Rezultati popisa*

8 <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2017/bosnia-and-herzegovina/mine-action.aspx>

Towards Sarajevo? Belgrade? Or independence?

The choice of the political direction of the Republic of Srpska is difficult to predict but we should underline that it is crucial for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and European stability as well.

The first scenario envisions a strengthening of relations between the Serb Republic and the Muslim-Croat Federation with a view of developing a more centralized state (Daranowski 2011: 426). The preservation of a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina is a strategic goal of the Bosniaks. Undoubtedly, without the lands inhabited by the Serbs and Croats, Bosnia would either cease to exist, or a Bosniak rump state would be untenable from a practical point of view (another problem is the Muslim enclave in the Bihać area). Taking into consideration the vast diversity of the country and the possibility of a renewed conflict, EU policy-makers also opt for a unified Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stojarova 2008: 64-65). However, cherishing the idea of separateness, the Bosnian Serbs prefer their own internal policy maintaining the status quo and are vehemently opposed to a full centralization of the Bosnian state. Reforms aimed at the unification of some institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina are met with great reluctance and Bosnian Serbs have accepted some of the administrative changes key to the country as a whole only under the pressure of European leaders. The Serbs are certainly not going to give up their constitution and separate institutions, which makes the consolidation of Bosnia very difficult (Milardović 2009: 94). Apart from the intricate political situation, relations between the political centers in Banja Luka and Sarajevo are also hampered by the social situation, as one of the underlying causes of the Bosnian conflict was ethnic and religious differentiation. The Serb Republic, as the name suggests, is inhabited by Serbs, who are Orthodox Christians, while the Muslim-Croat Federation is populated by the Muslim Bosniaks and the Catholic Croats. Thus, it is extremely difficult to attain a unified strategy for the Bosnian state. Cooperation between Islamists and Christians is already a substantial challenge to developed countries, and in the case of such a poor country as Bosnia and Herzegovina, it becomes a problem of paramount importance. Unfortunately, many of the resentments caused by the war in the 1990s are still alive in Bosnian society, and it may take many decades to overcome them.

The second scenario predicts that the Serb Republic will veer towards Serbia. Objectively speaking, the Republic of Srpska opts for tight

relations with its neighbor from across the Drinariver, which is often reflected in its pro-Serbian policies. From the point of view of the Serb Republic, Serbia is a more attractive partner than the Muslim-Croat Federation as both states are inhabited by Serbs. The Bosnian Serbs look to Serbia primarily for political and economic support. Their priority is to maintain autonomy of the Serb Republic within Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is helped by the backing of politicians in Belgrade. Importantly, many Serbian politicians are fiercely opposed to the centralization of Bosnia, citing the provisions of the Dayton Accords. Moreover, the best proof of close ties between the two states is their economic cooperation. From 2007 to 2015, more than 50% of foreign investments in the Serb Republic were financed with Serbian funds (*Republic of Srpska Foreign Investment Encouragement Strategy 2016-2020* 2016:17). In view of the developments of the past several years, the Serbs inhabiting the two countries appear to embrace similar foreign policy objectives. The Serb Republic has not recognized the independence of Kosovo and supports Serbia on the international stage, mostly in terms of preserving the latter's territorial unity. It may also be speculated that if the Serb Republic gains independence (like Kosovo) it may decide to merge with Serbia (Krysieniel 2012: 351).

The third scenario envisions independence of the Republic of Srpska. This possibility was created by the emergence of Kosovo on the map of Europe. Prior to that event, independence of the Serb Republic had not been considered a viable option (Milardović 2009: 96). However, after the Kosovo precedent, other nations with similar characteristics may attempt to follow suit. The Serb Republic is a perfect example of an autonomous state which may declare independence following the model of Kosovo. The Republic meets all the criteria based on which Kosovo's sovereignty was recognized, while from the point of view of international law it has more valid claims to independence than the state of the Kosovar Albanians. Obviously, both Bosniak and European policy-makers will not allow a break-up of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the process of decomposition of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been in progress since the very beginning of the post-Dayton state, and without internal consolidation the country will lack a *raison d'être*. Both politicians and society of the Serb republic lean towards the option of independence and breaking away from central Bosnian control. Importantly, the political elite and the ruling Social Democratic Party opt for the broadest possible autonomy, and possibly independence (*Bosnia: What does Republika Srpska want?* 2011: 19). The Bosnian Serbs'

aspirations to secede are perceptible and in 2010 the Parliament of the Serb Republic passed an act allowing for the staging of a referendum concerning any issue in the Republic (this is an important instrument for creating an adequate basis for sovereignty). Obviously, according to the constitution of the Serb Republic, any acts aimed at gaining independence from the central government would be illicit (*Ustav Republike Srpske* 1992: art. 1).

Conclusion

The scenarios of the future of the Serb Republic suggested above are not final. They are rather meant to be examples of possible developments that shed some light on the issue of justification for the existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It should be stressed that the politicians responsible for creating Bosnia and Herzegovina established an artificial political entity with the aim of ending the tide of violence that was sweeping the Balkans. Unfortunately, little has changed over time, and the Serb, Bosniak, and Croat citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina do not form one nation or state. In the past several years, the process of separation of the Bosnian Serbs from the other ethnic groups has significantly advanced. Moreover the “ethnification” process of all spheres of public life is ongoing (Bieber 2002: 206). Bosnian Serbs are increasingly vocal in their reluctance to create a unified, centralized state with the Bosniaks and Croats. This situation shows that in underdeveloped, or downright poor countries, issues such as national or religious identification are fundamental to future developments. In this context, support for an independent Kosovo from the main political figures in Europe may have far-reaching consequences. The Kosovo precedent gave a green light for the Serbs in the Serb Republic. While it is true that Kosovo and the Republic of Srpska are two different cases, the effect of both may be the same.

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