

# ***Protection of "Vital National Interest" and Ethnoreligious Conflict: Western Balkan's Unethical Political Economy, with an Emphasis on Bosnia and Herzegovina***

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper presents a theoretical, analytical, and ethical examination of B&H political economy, Constitutional "protection of vital national interests," and its effects on human security - socioeconomic conditions. The phenomenon of vital national interest and a theoretical and practical question focused on a constitutionally conditioned political point of view, not on economic, human security, legislative, peace & conflict dynamics, and normative framework. The paper argues that structurally manipulative and nepotistic ethnopolitical processes and the idiom "protection of vital national interests" demonstrate the institutionalization of post-war ethnoreligious conflict. It reduces the rule of law framework, the country's integrity, sociopolitical, economic, and critical human security progression. The ethnoreligious conflict of "vital national interest" undermines the country's economic system. The narrative of protecting "vital national interests" is the ethnopolitical elites' manipulative instrumentalization and interest that has risen above the state and used for personal objectives. In a "constitutively" manner, the ethnopolitical arrangement is reduced to a struggle over territory. It directly territorializes and divides B&H into ethnoreligious areas. Contemporary Machiavellians use intrigue and manipulation to gain or retain power. It has a character of more deceptive than violent behavior. The Balkan-B&H demonstrates Maciavelism more profoundly than Machiavelli's authentic perspective. Ethical, political behavior and intention can consolidate institutions' capacity, regardless of ethnoreligious disparities and past. The development of civic awareness and plural civic space must articulate responsibility in government through the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes, reducing the recorded and current irregularities/criminalities, and strengthening the rule of law in the public administration. There must be continuing conditions to maintain cooperation between all three ethnopolitics through formal and mutual commitment until the preconditions for stability are met. Thus, the employment sector, especially for well-educated unemployed young people, improving social security and health services, monitored by the honest/ethical government and constructive public administration.

**Keywords:** *Western Balkans & Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethnopolitical & Ethnoreligious Conflict, Vital National Interests, Political economy & Public administration, Ethics, Human Security, Socioeconomics*

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## INTRODUCTION

The revolutionary transition to liberal democracy and a market economy is a trial for post-socialist Western Balkans states without a tradition of liberalism. The Global Initiative to Combat Transnational Organized Crime report, part of the Integrity Infrastructure series, focuses on corruption and anti-corruption in the Western Balkans. This piece addresses organized crime and the anti-corruption political economy in the Western Balkans. However, the position and role of political and economic crime, nepotism, systemic corruption, and patronage on citizens' political economy and socioeconomics are not investigated thoroughly.

The protection of the vital national interest of the constituent peoples is the so-called mechanism within the House of Peoples of the B&H Parliament that should ensure that no decision "of vital national interest" is taken against the interests of any constituent people. However, if we examine the B&H Constitution<sup>2</sup> and Constitutions of B&H Entities and Statut of Brcko District (R.S.<sup>3</sup>, F.BiH<sup>4</sup>, and BD.BiH.<sup>5</sup>), the B&H Constitution does not define/explain what vital national interests are - State Constitutional Court interprets this term on a case-by-case basis. The Constitution only declares a vital national interest, but its content is not determined, unlike the Constitution of B&H entities, where the constitutional amendments determine what is meant by vital interests. All the hypocrisy of the issue of so-called "protection of vital national interest" draws as an unquestionable axiom of local ethnic-oligarchy, who are critical protagonists of local ethno-politics. (Bajtal, 2016) Moreover, these are structurally manipulative and nepotistic ethno-political/ethnoreligious processes. The idiom "protection of vital national interests" demonstrates the institutionalization of post-war ethnoreligious conflict. It reduces the rule of law framework, the country's integrity, sociopolitical, economic, and critical human security progression. In a "constitutively" manner, the ethno-political/ethnoreligious arrangement is reduced to a struggle over territory.

The Balkan and its political geography is an area of a century of colonialism, national liberation struggles, two world wars, brutal conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the mass exodus of refugees, the fall of one-party and authoritarian political regimes, the collapse of socialist economies, and the deprivation and frustration of their emerging economic and political systems. The former Yugoslav countries, placed at East and West's crossroads, are reservoirs of ethnicities and religions. Culminating series of bloodstained conflicts in the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, then a prosperous multicultural nation, originated from the contention between ethnoreligious "fuels" and ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Constitution of B.H. <https://www.paragraf.ba/propisi/bih/ustav-bosne-i-hercegovine.html>

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of R.S.

[https://www.narodnaskupstinars.net/sites/default/files/upload/dokumenti/ustav/lat/ustav\\_republike\\_srpske.pdf](https://www.narodnaskupstinars.net/sites/default/files/upload/dokumenti/ustav/lat/ustav_republike_srpske.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Constitution of F.BiH. <https://skupstinabd.ba/images/dokumenti/ba/ustav-federacije-bih.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Statut of BD.BiH. <https://www.paragraf.ba/propisi/brcko/statut-brcko-distrikta-bosne-i-hercegovine.html>

homogenous political projects, resulting in genocide, ethnic cleansing, culturicide, mass rapes, and infrastructural and economic destruction. After almost four years of war, the Dayton Peace Accords, signed at the end of 1995, brought "peace" to the Region and created independent nations organized along ethnic and religious lines. Consequently, the most significant collision and disputable processes were maintained in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) (frequently called the "small Yugoslavia") almost thirty years after the wars.

Today, according to Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime Report, the Balkan region is one of the world's most challenging transit hubs for transnational organized crime (Referencing, because this is a definite quoted statement). The countries of the Western Balkans experience corruption, and most of these cases - from petty incidents to major frauds - never enter any public or official register. Moreover, the financing of political parties, election campaigns, and maintaining political power are among the most critical challenges in the combat against corruption in the Region. (Kemp et al., 2021) Due to its history and geography, the Western Balkans is an area where the principal interests of world powers like the E.U., the U.S., Russia, and China are competing alongside others like Turkey. Moreover, the internal political climate and corrosive ties between the political, economic, religious, and criminal elites threaten to undermine democratic and economic stability. This area is characterized by extreme fragmentation of states originating from the beginning of the crisis at the end of the last century within the historical reasons, geopolitical periphery, and "entities" defined in ethnoreligious conflicts. Today, former Yugoslav countries show "captured states" elements with interrelated negative influences on conflict transformations. "The problems arising from the state's criminalization arise mainly in environments characterized by institutions' weakness and the moral crisis that usually accompanies weak institutions." (Hadžić, 2020). In the former Yugoslavia political environment, politicians often act without moral responsibility, nor after the lawsuits against them and the publicly announced crimes they committed as officials. There is almost no prominent politician in the Region who has not been accused of abuse of power. Investigations are mostly not completed, and even if there is a trial, it ends with an acquittal. While the salaries of parliamentarians in E.U. countries amount to two or three average salaries, this ratio in B&H (the highest paid in former Yugoslav countries) is as high as eight average salaries, which puts them among Europe's highest (Hadžić, 2020). The profession of "politician" has become a synonym for the best paid social elite, which has the right to "white bread" after the expiration of its mandate.<sup>6</sup>

Based on numerous examples (which will be analyzed in the following chapters) of the current legal-political doctrine of the dominant ethnopolitical parties in the western Balkans, particularly B&H, we

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<sup>6</sup> Presidents, prime ministers, ministers, deputies, advisers, and heads of country institutions can receive a salary even after the end of their term. This right is given to them by laws authored and adopted at the country, entity, and cantonal government levels.

can notice significantly undemocratic, nepotistic, illegitimate, unethical, and amoral behavioral practices. Thus, it directly impacts the citizens' inferior socioeconomic framework and the country's progression in general. The expression "He managed" in the Balkans is a euphemism that justifies that someone has taken something that does not belong to him by any logic of things (or morals). "Coping" means doing something against or against the law and not answering anyone. However, in a legal and moral state, no one needs to "manage because everyone has (or should have) an equal chance to put their knowledge and abilities in the service of their existence and build their life success within the framework of morality." (Bajtal, 2011)

Today, one cannot speak of democracy and democratic legitimacy from the point of view of any sociopolitical community if it, in any way and to any extent, adversely shapes a country's economic status and healthy sociopolitical relations. Twenty-seven years after the devastating war that ended with the Dayton Peace Accords, B&H is mired in a corrupt political economy that enriches political leaders, parties, and their loyal followers, thereby collapsing the country's economy and taking away institutions, authorities into Bankruptcy, and citizens into a state of utter scarcity. During the first decade of the post-war period (1996-2006), external assistance and international mediation aided the rapid economic growth to create government institutions. However, the reform results were minimal. Losing speed on the path to membership in the European Union (E.U.), B&H needs to find ways to limit the greed of politicians, relieve entrepreneurs, and enable a prosperous population. The necessary impetus can no longer come from an international intervention such as during the first post-war period practiced by the High Representative for decades. The European Union (E.U.) expects B&H to meet the conditions for membership by applying one's sovereignty and will instead of expecting imposed solutions. Nevertheless, today it does not exist because many of those in power expect to lose benefits or even fear that they will end up in prison if an independent judiciary, free media, energetic civil society, and genuinely democratic processes hold corrupt political parties accountable for abusing the public trust, and it works gaining personal gain. (Blagovcanin and Divjak, 2015) According to the Corruption Perceptions Index and Transparency International (T.I.), B&H is among the two worst countries in Europe, and the catastrophic situation could worsen if the country's existing political blockades (the State institutions) escalate further. (Hina, 2022)

Ethnoreligious identities in post-Yugoslav countries were formed as part of ethnonational-political projects. Local orders based on ethnic violence turned into open war economies and entered into dynamic and symbiotic relations with illegal global markets and post-war neoliberalism. The essence of sometimes misunderstood national issues is a space in which multiple ethnonational interests and capitals conflicted. Consequently, it was suitable ground for the proliferate of corruption and immorality, favored by the dense and strong military ties, political, criminal, and commercial structures, and the establishment of the structural factors of nepotism. It created socioeconomic

injustice. The foundation becomes a powerful element keeping the countries within the mutual consolidation of ethnonationalism, fear of others, and social injustice. (Hadzic, 2020) In post-Yugoslav societies, war-parties ethnopolitics were maintained in power within criminal choreography guidance by the remnants of evil, conspiring political beneficial - national entrepreneurs or capitalist politicians. The occupation "politician" became synonymous with the highest social class. In the optics of the mimicry of corrupt power (i.e., Transparency International Report (T.I.), "Captured states in the Western Balkans and Turkey," 2020), political language and ethical irresponsibility enable continuous guidance of nationalized and ethnicized masses. Ethnonational and clerical mutual processes instrumentalize the ethnoreligious paradigm. Religious leaders give political discourses, and politicians speak the religious language. More than any current empirical study related to the clerical-ethnic collective behavioral rehearsal, and ethnonational contingency, it serves the undeniable facts that war- euphuism ethnopolitics have been in power for thirty years after the wars. Nationalism and democracy are mutually exclusive concepts due to their opposing action within one community. With the values propagated by democracy and the priority of unity, respect, and acceptance of others and differences, nationalism degrades and imposes one value or nation as dominant.

At the start of research on the legislative framework, we must indicate the following: B&H is a state consisting of two entities - the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (F.BiH.) and the Republika Srpska (R.S.) and the Brčko District (D.B.). The federal arrangement of B&H, the complex structure of two entities and one District, the ethnoreligious division, and European Union (E.U.) and NATO integration is complicated. At the same time, in B&H, the entities have increased the possibilities of monopoly and power over the territory. (Hadzic, 2020) Ethnonational policies in B&H are procedures of so-called endangerment within "vital national interests." Ever since then, the international community, OHR (Office of High Representative B&H), made decisions on the introduction of the new constitutional institute and the implementation of regulations on the constituency of the people, and the protection of the vital national interests of the constituent peoples, all segments of societies, and especially the professional and political audience, showed a particular interest in the institute of protection of vital national interests. The term "Vital national interests" is an authentic and well-known political and Constitutional phenomenon within the ethnoreligiously guided "Dayton Peace Accords" Constitution. The term "Protection of vital national interest" includes, among other things, issues relating to the right of constituent peoples to be adequately represented in all organs of government; the identity of a constituent people; constitutional amendments; education, religion, language, nurturing culture, tradition; territorial organization; public information system; but also all other issues. Nevertheless, unfortunately, too broadly defined, instead of a protection mechanism, it has become a blockade mechanism, which politicians invoke whenever something does not work in their favor. The B&H Constitution defines Bosniak/Muslims, Croat/Catholics, and Serbs/Orthodox as constituent people. The demographic remnant is unconstitutional in the B&H's ethnoreligious model,

which is formed by the agreement of the three constituent peoples. For the most part, a mere constitutional decor is appropriately enshrined in the last article of the Preamble of the discriminatory B&H Constitution. Therefore, the term "Others" in formulating "hybrid" identities is an unsentimental description of their position in this ethnoreligiously divided society. (Hadzic, 2020)

In addition to many requests addressed to it as the primary subject of international law and related to specific ongoing processes of state-legal adjustment to modern international relations, the current state of the people faces a significant challenge of inner nature - the emergence of multicultural (plural) societies. Ethnic, national, and religious/confessional affiliation in former Yugoslavia add to political radicalization. As a form of political power, politicized religions are, psychologically speaking, unconscious non-faith. Due to new national-state theoretical inadequacy (i.e., nationalism as an ideology), religion is used as an instrument of socialization and legitimization of new national-political state subjects. When nation and religion become "controversial" identification and mark others as potentially dangerous, through a policy that allegedly aims to "affirm" and "protect" its people and their faith, then in local historical and current occurrences, it practically implies antagonism in the most melodramatic conflicts and violence. Historical revisionism and the memory of "evil" developed into a behavioral practice in the western Balkans. (Hadzic, 2020)

In democratic societies, national security, rights, and freedom are fundamental national interests. So how do we distinguish and characterize national interests in B&H? The protection of the national interest is something like a non-violent agreement, similar to a social contract based on Hobbes' model. No one renounces their right to self-preservation but renounces the right to interfere in and prevent others from self-preservation. However, unlike Hobbes' theory, the place of the one who has the right to decide on behalf of all is vacant. Thus, to protect their national interest, each group is a hostage to the others. As a national collective's notion of its position, vulnerability closely corresponds to the antagonism that should be understood in society as an inevitable fact, but in political terms, it means the destruction of the political. It implies the totalization of exclusivity, which abolishes politics as the art of balancing between inclusion and exclusion, opening and closing, which is only one of the views of the notion of justice. Politics during the war of the 1990s was territorialized but delocalized; today, we have a similar pattern. (Hadzic, 2021) B&H, as the most intricate multicultural country in the Region, has one of the world's most complex governments and three constituent peoples, Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs, and unconstitutional "Others." Within the sociopolitical, legislative, and security framework, the "protecting the national interest" paradigm occurs within the (ethnoreligious) political structures.

Accordingly, it often paralyzes the country. (Hadzic, 2022) Instead of socialism's challenging and axiologically exclusive atheism, today, there are three equally exclusive ethnic frameworks in the

function of a new, radical-revaluing ideologizing and dismemberment of society on a religious basis. Otherwise civilized and civilly indisputable "freedom of religion," the ideologization practically grows into an alarming abuse of religion in life, school, politics, and society. Using Clausewitz's speaking on politics and war to the current B&H moment, we get the paraphrase that today's ethnoreligiously segregated B&H education ("two schools under one roof") is peacetime war/conflict or hybrid war/conflict. Evolved societies and countries invest in academic knowledge for future generations as a condition of life survival. However, B&H ethnonational ideologues, under the guise of protecting "vital national interests" objectively (regardless of the possible sincerity of their confused intentions), fight - against understanding, multiethnic society, and conflict resolution.

Collective psychology is individuals' mental and emotional states and processes when aggregated in such groups as audiences, crowds, mobs, and social movements. People are conscious of an inward psychological fact, awareness of an external state, and presence. B&H events and processes and its exemplary environment include different ideological, axiological, and psychological levels. It is a matter of cunning exploitation of nations and peoples to benefit newly formed and firmly established national elites. Only through rigid Balkans ethnopolitical control of consciousness can a well-grown socioeconomic crisis successfully prolong its survival on an enormously well-paid political scene despite all the existential difficulties of a well-grown socioeconomic crisis. "Two schools under one roof"<sup>7</sup> model in B&H negates emancipation's educational process proclaiming systemic exclusion and ethnoreligious discrimination, amplifying security stalemate. (Hadzic, 2021) According to Hans Enzensberger, "exploitation is not only an economic fact but also a fact of consciousness. "Who is the master, and who is the servant, is decided not only based on who has capital, factories, and weapons but - the further, the clearer - who has the consciousness of others." (Enzensberg, 1982)

In the study by Freedom House Organization (2016, 2017, 2018), the Serbia, B&H, Kosovo, and North Macedonia were assessed and characterized as transitional, hybrid regimes. Thus, regimes with elements of democracy and authoritarianism say sufficiently that these countries face essential issues. It diminishes political, social, and economic opportunities in the modern world. In Serbia, "the executive dominates all aspects of political life. Thus, ignores the Constitution and laws, and plays with the legislature, judiciary, and newly established regulatory agencies "(Vladisavljevic, 2011). Although the former Slovenian Prime Minister was convicted of corruption, Slovenia perceives corruption as over 60%, while Croatia has 48%. These indicators express a social and ethical/moral stumbling block. In Croatia, there is a daily discourse on new economic crime affairs, which confirms

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<sup>7</sup> B&H's educational institutions/schools are based on ethnic-religious segregation. For example, students from two ethnic groups, Bosniaks and Croats, attend classes in the same building but are physically separated and taught separate curricula. In addition, Bosnian Serbs have separate schools and Serb curricula.

the famous Balkan paradigm of Who moaned, moaned.<sup>8</sup> For example, the Bankruptcy and collapse of Croatian shipbuilding and other industry segments (steel, metallurgy) as strategic segments. (Vujic, 2019)

Simultaneously, unstable societies, including the societies of the former socialist countries of Central and Southeast Europe, are mainly marked by discussions about the political structure and political processes. The foundation of modern democracies should be a "trust." Public service ethics are a prerequisite to and underpin public trust and are a keystone of good governance. The government's legitimacy presupposed the existence of absolute fundamental democratic values that needed to be instilled, established, developed, and changed for institutions to function. Such values are social and political capital. In public (administration) responsibilities, the primary relationship is trust between the official and the community he/she represents and on whose behalf he acts. The relationship of trust is not limited to political responsibility towards its voters but the sovereign people. It cannot be reduced to a "trust" test in the elections. It should be a continuing obligation and accountability. Therefore, different norms should facilitate persons of higher morality and ethical qualities, knowledge, knowledge, and experience to engage in politics. In parallel, codes of ethics, legal principles, norms, individual declarations, acts of ambiguous legal nature, and rigid norms specify principles and often refer to the interpretation of unique bodies with legal and moral authority. Through the secularization of society and law, it has been shown that such norms cannot be based on clerical authority and appropriate norms. New political communities are half-confessional and multicultural, based on a consensus on the foundations of "social morality as the foundation of a legal community" (Rawls, 1971). Ethical codes are not legally neutral. They designate specific conduct standards, even in social anomie conditions.

The rule of law presupposes a collection of fundamental norms (Kelsen, 2005) over a law that justifies it and provides credibility and rationale. Legitimate political order needs moral, ethical, and professional motives and justification. It is not a question of abstract theoretical analysis but an efficient question of how and on what foundations to build insufficient or developing democracies. The position on the practical use of ethical principles in operation is essential. However, the privatization of political influence as a decision-making principle substitutes the decision-making approach outside formal institutions. It discourages the international community from exerting any significant influence and reduces civil society's influence on the state in favor of informal - personal influences. This position is a direction that has been present for decades in the Balkans, and former

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<sup>8</sup> The expression "Who moaned, moaned" serves the relationship between the small and big thieves. They praise the big one; take off the hat of the little one. That phrase became everyday knowledge when Ljubo Česić (Croatian politician) uttered it in the Croatian Parliament.



Yugoslav countries, suggesting that the political crisis is the essence of the social crisis. B&H and Kosovo are an example.

Moreover, "the whole process of ethnic mobilization ends with the imposition of pre-political equalization of the people and their political elite. Presently, it expects to guide them through the difficulties of the hostile transitional setting within the highly homogenized former Yugoslav ethnopolitical space. (Hadžić, 2020).

In this regard, there is a balance of powerlessness and inability to resolve the social crisis, increasing the government's degree of efficiency and the efficiency of security. In a survey conducted by the World Bank in 2003, B&H (the same can be applied to several other former Yugoslavia countries) ranked among the top few countries with the highest state captivity. The public and private sector actors influence law and regulation to their advantage. At the same time, about 40% of respondents perceive the authorities as dishonest and have minimal trust in them, while over 70% believe that corruption is part of the Balkans' culture and mentality. Amoral familism has a similar message and effect, "a way of behaving that in all relations focuses only on the interest of the individual and his closest environment, regardless of laws and professional standards." (Hadzic, 2021) The social pyramid of corruption consists of its massive broad base, everyday corruption whose actors are officials and citizens. (Hadzic, 2021)

Is it "natural" to decree the law in the Balkans that would obtain directive and ethics/morality to politics? The morality of politicians in the former Yugoslav countries as compelling and meaningful people has been downward for a long time. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, in Western Balkans countries, corruption is yet relatively high (i.e., Transparency International, 2020). Are the phrases morality/ethics and politics concurrently in this Region? Could it occur similar to other parliamentarians from the Western world? For example, The law on the Morality of Politicians, prepared in France, prohibits the employment of their closest circles and family ties. Ministers, M.P.s, and city councilors will not be able to employ their family members and other people they are in close contact with; otherwise, they face a three-year prison penalty and a fine of 45,000 euros (Center for Investigative Reporting, 2019). At the same time, within the Balkan "surrealism," there are 207 active political parties in B&H - a country of 3.5 million people. The party affiliation of the candidate or other affiliation with the ruling parties is almost, as a rule, an indispensable reference when selecting or recruiting in the entire public sector. (i.e. Akrapovic and Lucic, 2014)

The year 2021/2022 in B&H was profoundly divided and faced the most significant political crisis since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. It included war rhetorics, army appearances, total blockade of state institutions, and constant secessionism. After almost half a year of blockade of state institutions of B&H by Republika Srpska Entity (R.S.) authorities and countless attempts by

representatives of the international community and the European Union (E.U.) to find a solution; the end of the blockade of these institutions is still not in sight. However, this is another in a series of blockades of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H. It began on July 25, 2021, and is the result of the decision and conclusions on non-participation in the work of state institutions of government representatives from the Republika Srpska (R.S.). (Mavrak, 2021) Milorad Dodik, the Bosnian Serb member of the B&H three-person presidential body, is an ethnopolitical leader leading constant secessionism policies and corruption and has been on the USA black-list for an extended period. He incites nationalist sentiment, making a string of moves to secure more for the Serb-majority Republika Srpska (R.S.) entity within B&H. It is a campaign many have likened to a secession attempt. Bosnian Serbs took to the streets to celebrate the Day of Republika Srpska, a banned holiday marking the creation of a detached Serb parastate in 1992, a precursor to the ethnic cleansing that soon enveloped the country during the B&H War. (Hajdari, 2022)

The USA Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated Milorad Dodik and one entity under his control, Alternative Televizija d.o.o. (Alternative Television) Banja Luka, in response to Dodik's corrupt activities and continued threats to the stability and territorial integrity of B&H. "Dodik's destabilizing corrupt activities and attempts to dismantle the Dayton Peace Accords, motivated by his self-interest, threaten the stability of B&H and the entire region," said Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. "The USA will not hesitate to act against those who pursue corruption, destabilization, and division at the expense of their people and against those who enable and facilitate this behavior." (USA Department of Treasury, 2022) Furthermore, the USA Department of State is publicly designating former B&H High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC) President Milan Tegeltija (Bosnian Serb) and the President of the Movement for Democratic Action (PDA) and Parliamentary Assembly Representative Mirsad Kukic (Bosniak) due to their involvement in significant corruption. These designations render Tegeltija and Kukic ineligible for entry into the USA. Their actions undermined the rule of law, the public's faith in their government's democratic institutions and processes, and peace and prosperity for B&H's citizens. The designations of Kukic and Tegeltija are made under Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2021, stated the Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken. (USA Department of State, 2022)

However, more than two-thirds of the citizens of the Region of the former Yugoslavia-Western Balkans (Croatia, B&H, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Kosovo) recognize unemployment as the most prominent issue. Only 4.3 percent of newly created jobs were filled by people under 24, who often need up to two years to find their first job. One in four young people is not employed or covered by education or training. Almost half of the non-disabled women are not in

the labor market, while men are 25 percent. (Bregu, 2020) According to the latest data, Slovenia has the lowest unemployment rate in the Region (4.8%), and B&H has the second highest (18.4%), after North Macedonia (20.8 %) according to an analysis by the Anatolia agency. (AlJazeera, 2019)

In a commentary (March 2009), the US news agency warns that the unemployment rate in B&H is 43%, that it is one of the highest in Europe, and that, in addition, it has a tendency to grow. As experts warn, it means a further deterioration of the situation and a drastic drop in the growth rate this and next year, when the global recession is pressing our region with all its might. At the same time, the World Bank forecasts an actual decline in the gross domestic product in B&H (2016) by more than 70%. (Bajtal, 2016) Thus, a drastic collapse of an already too low standard of living is expected. All the hypocrisy of the issue of so-called "protection of vital national interest." draws as an unquestionable axiom of local ethnic-oligarchy, that is, critical protagonists of local ethnopolitics. We can name a few genuinely devastating life examples from B&H's everyday life. Agencies and media in B&H transmitted shocking news from Prijedor (a city in RS entity, B&H) about the suicide of the Puzigać couple (Nada, 1957; Dušan, 1952). In a short farewell letter, Dusan and Nada cite their unemployment and inability to repay debts as reasons for their suicide by poisoning. That is, as one of the agency's headlines and shocking news says: The family poisoned themselves due to poverty. (Bajtal, 2016) It denotes the unethical and hypocritical form of the idiom "protection of vital national interests" and its structurally nepotistic ethnopolitical functions. Therefore, the consequences of an ethnopolitical economy are evident in the living standards and dignity of B&H citizens.

The realist, state-centric paradigm of security that advocated the primacy of territorial integrity over that of the individual seemed increasingly counterproductive when states no longer faced the existential nuclear and non-nuclear threats. Accordingly, placing the emancipation and development of the individual within the community at the center of the security agenda is critical. Moreover, NGOs and civil society groups must be the most effective guarantor of this security. The multidisciplinary concept, "freedom from fear," "freedom from want," and "freedom from indignity," introduces human security notions, conflict, and development. No matter how human security is debatable and even controversial, the "freedom from want," "freedom from fear," and "freedom from indignity" concept has the ideas of inclusiveness and social justice. The position of constant ethnoreligious and institutionalized hybrid wars in B&H could be the paradigm of Balkan's "freedom from fear." However, the Balkan historical violence takes non-violent actions in the psychologically destructive form. It transfers from one ethnoreligious group to another. Balkan social stratification and economic hardship relate to "freedom from want" and numerous unfavorable and marginalization processes related to the international level (i.e., visa requirements for B&H citizens and their position on the international labor market) to "freedom from indignity." However, economic growth is not the only measure of development. We can see it globally in most developed countries (e.g., USA;

poverty, inequality, food security and nutrition, health, education, employment, gender, racism, infrastructure, and environmental preservation. However, equality, equity, environmental security, and human and civil rights are essential. The fundamental challenge of each country demanding a life of dignity is how they can enjoy freedom from fear and want without discrimination.

The paper presents a theoretical, analytical, and ethical examination of B&H (ethno)political economy, Constitutional "protection of vital national interests," and its effects on human security - socioeconomic conditions. The position of political/economic nepotism, systemic corruption, and patronage on political economy in Western Balkans with a significant emphasis on Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) and citizens' socioeconomics and human security are not in-depth researched. The phenomenon of vital national interest and a theoretical and practical question focused on a constitutionally conditioned political point of view, not on economic, human security, legislative, peace & conflict dynamics, and normative framework. The paper investigates the Constitutional framework (B&H and Entities) of ethnopolitical/ethnoreligious conflict of national interests, the rule of law, and its references to actual sociopolitics and economics. This paper argues that structurally manipulative and nepotistic ethnopolitical/ethnoreligious processes and the idiom "protection of vital national interests" demonstrate the institutionalization of post-war ethnoreligious conflict. It reduces the rule of law framework, the country's integrity, sociopolitical, economic, and critical human security progression. Moreover, examining these sociopolitical processes in the post-socialist Yugoslav countries aims to determine normative solutions - the example of B&H.

### **Significance of Research and Recommendations for Further Research**

The position of political/economic nepotism, systemic corruption, and patronage on political economy in Western Balkans with a significant emphasis on Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) and citizens' socioeconomics and human security are not in-depth researched.

1. The paper underlines future research that could lead to more insights into the importance of the ethical paradigm of political economy and public administration.
2. It underlines insights into ethnoreligiously guided societies and countries and their Institutions and Constitutions.
3. Therefore, it highlights the construction and refinement of the normative explications in ethnoreligiously divided societies.
4. It determines its consequences on a citizens' socioeconomics in post-conflict societies.

Analytical, critical, and explanatory elements add to comprehension and familiarize foreign readers in a good direction - rationally. The term "Vital national interests" is an authentic phenomenon contributing to B&H's position in E.U. integration and sociopolitical and peacebuilding advancement. The paper outlines the phenomena' normative roots, derivatives, and consequences.

## **Methodology, Processing, and Analysis**

The author engaged in several qualitative research methods and data collection, processing, and analysis methods in the chronological order of events. In addition to a theoretical examination, the author used inductive analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis, followed by an in-depth literature review. The literature review also includes the legislative examination of three Constitutions and one Statute. It enables the writing of conclusions and suggestions, emphasizing circumstances and possibilities facing Western Balkans- B&H. Analytical, critical, and explanatory elements add to comprehension and familiarize foreign readers in a good direction - rationally.

## **Unethical Political Economy and Ethnic Conflict in The Western Balkans - Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Under the guise of transition in the former Yugoslavia, the law on converting peoples, "social" property from socialism passed during and after the Balkan warfares and provided an opportunity to privatize the people's property. Meanwhile, states in the Region have become "entangled" or "seized" by private interests after controversial Yugoslav privatizations and the immense influence of illegally enriched individuals. (Teokarevic, 2019 ). Moreover, these societies demonstrate an asymptomatic absence of moral consciousness, which is logically accompanied by an increase in anemia, a lack of compassion, and an unprecedented influx of violence and mass conformism. Such a situation completely corresponds to the picture of the amorality of the civil society in its industrial phase. The same mismatch of objectives and norms for achieving them is at work. Today, "everyone desires the only benefit and only follows their interests "(Bajtal, 2011). As the Western Balkan countries seek E.U. membership, OCCRP's (The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2005) investigations in the Region prove that these countries have serious difficulties that need to be addressed. People correlated to criminals or even criminals hold political posts and are protected. For example, Montenegro has become a state where government representatives work alongside organized crime, while Serbia's leading politicians have been implicated in high-profile corruption scandals. In recent years, an intense decline in press freedom has obstructed journalists' work in the Balkans. The journalists connected by OCCRP have found themselves the matter of streak campaigns, threats, and lawsuits staged by the targets of their anti-corruption investigations. (Petrucic, 2018)

B&H is among the most corrupt countries in Europe, on the brink of chaos, Transparency International stated in 2022. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index and Transparency International (T.I.), B&H is among the two worst countries in Europe, and the catastrophic situation could worsen if the country's existing political blockades (the State institutions) escalate further.

(Hina, 2022) In such circumstances, the country's political economy is unfavorable for reforms. In B&H:

- political leaders and parties serve narrow interests,
- economic growth is stagnant, and the economy is overburdened with public debt; a complicated business environment makes a recovery and growth difficult,
- Informal networks foster a culture of political eligibility, privilege, and employment friendly line,
- State-owned enterprises mainly incur economic losses and generate political revenue from parties,
- the judiciary is gradually falling under the control of political parties,• the media and civil society are not free and live in fear,
- Unemployment and poverty are on the rise, and
- The captive state cannot implement even those reforms that the legislature has approved frame.

B&H needs to change the existing political economy to pave the way for progress. That will require it multiple efforts, be undertaken mainly by citizens but with the support of the E.U. Privatization, reform of economic law, internal democratization of political parties, a more independent judiciary, a stable civil society, and ending the practice of subsidizing the media by the authorities are necessary efforts, but none of them will be enough. (Blagovcanin and Divjak, 2015)

From managerial positions to auxiliary workers, almost all public sector positions are considered elective and partisan in B&H. The public administration competitions are a formality, often without any true significance, because various embezzlements become pointless and a farce for the public. Thus, the simple dignity of shallow transparency and correctness standards. The public/citizens do not have an exact image of the number and structure of political appointments and employment because some institutions and political parties oppose public requests for transparent and honest procedures and employment according to qualifications. However, all are declaratively committed to the principles of transparency. This issue is still exclusively a public secret because no research, analysis, or reports have precisely dealt with this issue, even though the enormous public administration is delicate. (Akrapovic and Lucic, 2014). There is no official estimate of how many traditional primary political positions (e.g., ministers, advisors) exist and how many secondary party positions and employment from the presidency to kindergarten (e.g., boards, agencies, institutes, funds, public companies, public institutions, education/schools). B&H parliamentarians have created an entire system of deception to defraud the state and secure thousands of euros. The Center for Investigative Reporting (2019) investigation showed that the B&H Federal Parliament's delegates collected more than 825 thousand K.M. (almost half a million euros) for "fake" tenancy contracts in two and a half years. Debts to the Federation's Pension and Disability Insurance Fund amount to over one billion K.M. (almost 550 million euros).

We can problematize and maintain that corruption and nepotism are a matter of morality. Just like the violence of the powerful against the powerless, neglect of the weak and minorities, the disabled. Cases of abuse of political position - the emergence of clientelism, the most dangerous of which is political, and any clientelism violate the principle of justice. It is particularly significant and damaging in post-conflict countries, particularly in B&H, the most devastated in 1990s wars and the country with the most complex Constitution and public administration globally.

By content and discourse analysis of the latest abuse of power criminal political affair (2020), in the "secret" audio, the religious words were spoken by political actors: "If God (Allah) gives"- 3 times, "Hairli"<sup>9</sup>- 3 times, "There will be Hair"<sup>10</sup>- 2 times, "God gives Nafaka"<sup>11</sup>, and harsh swearing language. In nine minutes, the political concept of a partocracy is presented, including internal party elections defrauding with an inclusive clerical paradigm. Moreover, one of the objectives is the illegitimate government employment of a graduate Islamic pedagogue<sup>12</sup>, one of the affair actor's wives. Asim Sarajlić, Bosniak SDA party deputy president, stated: "I am the SDA party general staff manager and "first" to Bakir Izetbegović. As soon as the government is established, God Willing, we will get into that story." (Cazin.net, 2020) Within defective democracy, the sociopolitical reality manifests the clerical and intoxicated ethnonational leaders' criminal power ordinariness of unethical and amoral materiality. However, many Bosniaks considered that the SDA party liberated the Bosniak people from stigmatization and political captivity<sup>13</sup> and returned historical national names, language, and state. Party's well-known post-war slogan was "In our country, in our religion/faith. "Based on the above, the current legal-political doctrine of the most authoritative Bosniak Party is significantly undemocratic, nepotistic, illegitimate, unethical, and amoral.

At the same time, if we focus on the ethnoreligious consequence of political elites rather than politically calculated, religion is a pseudo-religious type of personality at the party-ideological level. Normatively-theoretically, the religious type of personality would be, in nature, completely different. However, a mixture of animosity and manipulation colors the exploitative-type view. Benefit and power are the basic principles, value compass, of exploitative activity, which becomes a fundamental, unscrupulously active motive and an elusive praxis of the ethnopolitical oligarchy/government. As a

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<sup>9</sup> Arabic - Honest; good, valid; happy

<sup>10</sup> Arabic - Good, goodness; benefit, happiness; a good deed, a public building built by an individual as his gift to the community; endowment

<sup>11</sup> Arabic - Nafaka is everything a person uses, whether halal or haram, beautiful or ugly.

<sup>12</sup> Following the European Bologna Process, the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo, 2013/2014 established three cycles of studies. The first cycle of studies has three programs: Islamic theology, Islamic religious education, and religious pedagogy; Study programs for imams.

<sup>13</sup> Historical term "Bosniak" was banned, identifying them as Muslims. In communism, often due to the most mundane political function, they were forced to prove the party's loyalty by giving their children "international names" - Serbian or Croatian.

form of political communication, we can use the negative comment of one B&H parliamentarian who called his citizens (Voters) media-public "nothingness." "I do not allow every nothingness in the street to discuss my salary." People critically expressed the enormous increase in parliamentarians' income. At the same time, "the ordinary citizen" (G. Allport) barely makes ends meet. By analogy, "nothingness" is, therefore, human waste. In short, except in elections. Only in elections, "nothingness" is not "nothingness." If fascism is a socio-political phenomenon of arrogant and gross denial of all (subhumans) in some (Übermensch) name, this vitriol and public humiliation of disenfranchised B&H citizens is a kind of symbolic neo-fascism. (Bajtal, 2010)

Max Weber (1965), in the lecture "Politics as a Vocation," demonstrated what politics is and what it should represent two completely diametrical extremes of the same profession. Weber emphasizes in several places that one who commits to politics strives for power to serve other goals or the existence of power for its own sake. Thus, purely to enjoy it and the prestige that derives from it. This power is displayed by an awareness that people can be influenced and that the "nerve thread" of significant historical and future events is held in their hands. Politicians could be divided into two groups: politicians who live "for" politics and politicians who live "from" politics. The essential and crucial difference between these two types of politicians is that "from" politics live those who strive to create a permanent basis of income from it, while "for" politics live those who do not. In comparing these two kinds of politicians, it should be emphasized that only a politician who is economically independent of the income that politics can deliver can live "for politics." Weber likewise observes politics as it is through what party organizations have become. According to him, most affiliated companies are headed by the party "boss." Weber defines him as a capitalist businessman who became the "boss" of the Party by having possessed a similar company. "Boss" is a man from the shadows, without political principles and thoughts, focused only on achieving the objective of getting as many votes as possible. (Weber, 1965) Directed by Weber's views, we can extend a discourse about today's politics in the former Yugoslavia region. It denotes the ubiquitous living "from" a policy, solely considered and exploited as a lucrative and well-paid corporation/business. Thus, a source of additional income, particularly for tycoon politicians. Recruitment operates through party headquarters, and with each change of government, dozens of appointments in public administration services change. There are no ethical and moral principles of a politician serving the nation, community, and people. "On the Balkans scene, particularly in B&H, there is a struggle of interest-based, criminalized ethnic groups, which present themselves as political parties." (Bajtal, 2019)

The Balkan term "managed" is a kind of slang euphemism that, with that immoral cosmetic rhetoric, justifies that someone has grabbed something that does not belong to him by any logic of things (or morals). "Coping" means doing something against or against the law and never answering anyone or anywhere for it. It is the usual path to the rapid success of strongly ideologized and disordered



societies. However, in a legal and moral state, no one needs to "manage" because everyone has (or should have) an equal chance to put their knowledge, skills, and work habits in the service of their existence and to build their life success slowly walking within the bounds of morality. As a legitimate right to the critical dissatisfaction of a morally courageous individual, every individual rebellion, by the logic of the newly composed ethnic-axiology, is publicly labeled and broken by the degrading phrase of the so-called national and confessional betrayals. Thus extreme immorality and crime, thanks to their commonness in the morally certain behavioral standard of everyday life and the social capital scene. Moreover, the independent critical statements are associated with personal risks of being declared an internal enemy of the particular ethnoreligious community. (Bajtal, 2018) Then it is no longer a set of independent thinking but uninformed communities — collectives that do not allow themselves the internal dynamics of life, including healthy conflicts.

B&H as a country does not provide adequate socioeconomic development because of the status of the political economy. Moreover, the deduction between civic (individual) and ethnonational/ethnoreligious (collective) identity influences cooperation and healthy sociopolitical relations. Thus, B&H has a disputable political, socioeconomic, and civic future. It significantly depends on the international community and its institutions in B&H. Ethnoreligious identities are a politically significant resource for mobilization and essential for the stability and progression stalemate in the Western Balkans. Moreover, ethnic mobilization induces and spreads a sense of homogeneity and equality and a sense of security and power in the collective "We." The gap from democracy is motivated by the fear of competitive nationalist movements, and radical rhetoric leads political parties to succeed. The greater the fear and insecurity in society, the more people depend on the government and are less instructed to measure its objective results. If there is a conflict, strengthening "our" ethnic-confessional identity simultaneously strengthens the belief in the diversity of "others." The mutual consolidation of identity has a backlash against the importance of the conflict. That is why conflicts enter into traditional Balkans' collective myths by which identity is continually affirmed. The practice of constant mobilization, i.e., collectivist homogenization, takes the place of democratic legitimacy, providing political elites with a base of power outside democratic procedures. The risk of current policies is not just the involvement of citizens in the conflict but also the exclusion of the majority of citizens from the political arena and making decisions for the community. Public (social, national, state) interest must not be equated with officials; justice sets boundaries. Emphasizing ethnicity instead of dialogue and transforming a "utopian discourse" produces antagonisms and thus stagnates economic, political, and cultural development. It is an obstacle to E.U. integration. (Hadzic, 2021)

Western Balkan countries have an issue of deep divisions, which cause major political issues. National divided and contentious political affairs, i.e., disunited ethnopolitics, can challenge human

security, environmental security, crisis management, and adaptation policies related to the European Union (E.U.). Opposing and contending assemblages tend to assume an exclusionary "victor" or status quo procedure, particularly in B&H. These issues include the control of state power, regional geopolitics, cooperation, allocation of resources, and national identity. B&H is the most complex Balkan country; many state subjects are vigorously Constitutionally and ideologically contested, intrincating ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. The cessation of the threat is the end of the collective, and members return to a natural state that now corresponds to Rousseau's preoccupation with himself and indifference to other members of the same collective, which leaves the elites unlimited space to act in self-interest. (Hadzic, 2022)

During the Bosnian war, Serb parties (Serbian Democratic Party, Serbian Renewal Movement, and the Alliance of Reform Forces of Yugoslavia, and since 1991 the Serb Assembly in Bosnia and Herzegovina) opposed the separation of B&H from Yugoslavia. Later, their Assembly decided to separate the Serbs from Bosnia and make an alliance with Serbia. Some radical Croatian parties also decided to separate. However, after the war, the primary constitutional contradictions still exist today are related to the role of the two highest levels of government, the border between the two entities, and the possibility of dividing the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) into Bosniak and Croat entities. In general, ethnonationalism Croatian parties, such as the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and HDZ 1990, advocate the establishment of a third Croat entity, in addition to Bosnian and Serbian. In 2011, they renewed the non-institutional Croatian National Assembly, which opened up space for "concerns that in time there may be a risk of establishing parallel power structures." Some of our interlocutors from Croatia and several from the Bosniak ethnic group even expressed the belief that one of the keys to solving the problem in B&H is the solution of the "Croat issue." Bosniaks, in general, are not of that opinion. (Kiwimaki et al., 2012)

On the other hand, B&H Serbian parties tend to emphasize the position of the second level of government, and the competencies of the Republic of Srpska (R.S.) are essential to Serbian political parties. In early 2008, for example, Republika Srpska's (R.S.) leading party, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), called for B&H's transformation into an asymmetric federation (or confederation) and demanded the right to self-determination, including the right to secede for the entity. However, it is likely that despite insisting on the right to separate Serb parties, most Serbs see the existence of the B&H state as a relatively "comfortable" reality. (Topic, 2008) Instead of focusing their energy on changing the Dayton Peace Accords, they seek to expand the practical autonomy and powers of Republika Srpska (R.S.) within the constitutional limits of the Dayton Peace Accords. Many Serbian interlocutors, for example, assess the usefulness of NATO and the E.U. in terms of whether they are favorable to the powers of Republika Srpska. (Solaja, 2008)

Instead of open resistance, Serbian ethnonationalism, like the Republic of Serbia, ignores the existence of the state level of government and tries to build its political reality, neglecting the state of B&H. Bosniaks, in particular, see this as a threat to the continuation of "Greater Serbia" politics. Greater Serbia describes the Serbian nationalist and irredentist ideology of creating a Serb state which would incorporate all regions of traditional significance to Serbs, a South Slavic ethnic group, including regions outside modern-day Serbia that Serbs partly populate. It is indisputable that the Greater Serbia project caused the most violence, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and economic destruction of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, especially B&H. However, the wars in the 1990s caused the continuity of Greater Serbia policies. The current events in the Balkans demonstrate it. In the meantime, some political bargaining is taking place at lower levels of constitutional reform. The debate focuses on whether police and military forces belong to the highest or second level of administration, whether the highest level of administration has authority over the protection of ethnic minorities in the second level of administration, and to which level of government the various state-owned facilities belong. Constitutional disputes can provoke violence in two key ways. On the one hand, violence may be used in constitutional negotiations: threats can be made by those opponents in the dispute who are more dependent on a compromise solution, as this can improve the negotiating status of those parties. On the other hand, a significant international presence that supports the constitutional ideas of the Dayton Peace Agreement could aggravate the situation in which conflicting parties at the highest level (entities or leading ethnic parties) use violence or threats as a bargaining chip. Consequently, however, the leadership of Republika Srpska (R.S.) is threatening unilateral political decisions on the referendum and separation. If these threats materialized, imposing a new status on the entity could lead to violence. (Kiwimakii et al., 2012)

Furthermore, another risk is that violence is used at a lower level than undisciplined actors in articulating the interpretation of ethnic and national rights. Provocative rhetoric at the elite level could incite this form of violence. According to one modern novelist, the typical pattern is that it is more honorable to die for ancestors' glory than to live for grandchildren's future. (Velickovic, 2011) It was a typical attitude in the B&H war, and it is a pattern of violence in the so-called new wars. It is possible to imagine three alternative ways of such violence: one is related to demonstrating the power of individual units of government, the other is more indirect and related to loyalty to collective identity, and the third is related to ownership of the nation-state. The positions in one of the constitutional debates could be demonstrated through violent action. Republic of Srpska (RS), for example, has demonstrated entity autonomy by ignoring its obligations to the state by refusing to implement state norms and rhetoric that is inconsistent with the state's interpretation of political correctness. (Dahlman and O'Tuathail, 2005).

Another danger of demonstrative argumentation can occur if violence establishes a new reality of ethnic relations using discourses of loyalty and belonging. Violence is often a way of expressing belonging and loyalty to a group or articulating ethnic significance in politics. The perpetuation of violent acts in defense or retaliation for injustice done to an ethnic icon is very common in the context of so-called new wars. In a post-conflict context, the role of ethnic groups can be emphasized by moves that demonstrate the collective responsibility of all individuals of one ethnic group for crimes committed by individuals on behalf of that ethnic group. Similarly, the collective denial of the crimes of all individuals belonging to an ethnic group can be a provocative demonstration of the relevance of ethnic loyalty. They are blaming individuals from one ethnic group whose other individuals have committed crimes that would be perceived as unjust, given that crimes in "new wars" rarely have the support of the masses. Thus, demonstrative argumentation of collective guilt can provoke violence. (Kiwimaki et al., 2012)

The population's dissatisfaction caused by weak economic growth and shortcomings in the provision of public services is growing. Unemployment, corruption, and crime will not disappear due to a lack of governance reforms or a failure to address a paralyzing lack of clarity in the division of responsibilities between the entities and the state. If the status quo fails to ensure a more functional government, aggression could erupt due to economically based frustration. In addition, in addition to these problems, the criminal economy, fueled by inefficiencies in law enforcement, provides ample opportunities for conflict and non-profit-motivated conflicts and violence. These abstract problems can occasionally manifest themselves in cases where the main parties can be easily identified and mobilized for violence. If opportunities for beneficial violence cannot be blocked by legitimate and sufficient resources equipped with law enforcement, conflict scenarios could materialize. (Kiwimiaki et al., 2012) However, B&H is currently in the non-violent, psychological form of conflict, supported by the process of hybrid ethnopolitical and legislative conflicts.

The only practical task and the only ideological meaning of the existence of numerous ethnic institutions in B&H are keeping the people in mental slavery. Everything else is just the most common ideological-political phrase timed to accept and submit numerous forms of lack of freedom and imposed ethnic slavery, uncritically and without rebellion. The language of silence, initiation, and apologetics of ethnic ideologized practices produced "hate speech" and the hatred of any language that critically views their historical effects and the discourse of continuous daily-deceiving logic. So, it hypocritically describes those logics that make social critics traitors, while the greatest deceivers and real culprits of national misery are hypocritical as messiahs and ethnic saviors. (Bajtal, 2016)

### **Vital National Interest in The Name of People and the Ethnopolitical Kleptocracy**

The protection of the vital national interest of the constituent peoples is the so-called mechanism within the House of Peoples of the B&H Parliament that should ensure that no decision "of vital national interest" is taken against the interests of any constituent people. According to the official website of the Parliamentary Assembly of B&H in the House of Peoples<sup>14</sup>, the proposed decision can be declared destructive to the vital national interest of the Bosniak, Croat, or Serb people by a majority of votes from the Bosniak, Croat or Serb delegates. Such a proposed decision has to be approved by the House of Peoples by most Bosniak, Croat, and Serb delegates who are present and voting. In case the majority of Bosniak, Croat, or Serb delegates object to an invocation of the vital national interest, the Speaker of the House of Peoples will immediately convene a Joint Commission consisting of three delegates, each elected among Bosniak, Croat, and Serb delegates, in order to resolve the issue. If the Commission fails to resolve the issue within five days, the case will be transferred to the BiH Constitutional Court, which will review the procedural correctness of the matter under emergency procedure. However, if we examine Constitutions of B&H Entities and Statut of Brcko District (R.S., F.BiH., and BD.BiH.), the B&H Constitution does not define/explain what vital national interests are - State Constitutional Court interprets this term on a case-by-case basis. The Constitution only declares a vital national interest, but its content is not determined, unlike the Constitution of B&H entities, where the constitutional amendments determine what is meant by vital interests.

Considering that post-war B&H has one of the most complex constitutional structures, planning and financing in civil emergencies are characterized by a slightly different form of organization and management in this sector. The complexity of the B&H constitutional structures results in several equivalent laws that define the exact scope but relate to different government levels. B&H is a sovereign state with a decentralized political and administrative structure within the constitutional construction. The country consists of 142 municipalities. Seventy-nine municipalities are in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) and sixty-three in the Republika Srpska (R.S.) entities. The B&H health care system management is decentralized to the level of the two entities and the Brčko District (BDB&H). At the same time, the health of the B&H citizens is endangered by the consequences of the war and by socioeconomic occurrences, unemployment, economic migration, large numbers of displaced persons, lack of health insurance, and unhealthy lifestyles. (Hadzic, 2022)

All Western Balkan countries have significant problems with corruption. Although B&H as a state has long been taken over by corruption, it has been classified among captive states for an extended

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<sup>14</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of B&H in the House of Peoples, House of Peoples, Vital national interest, Protection of the vital national Interest, <https://www.parlament.ba/Content/Read/39?title=Vitalnacionalniinteres&lang=en>

period. "B&H is one of the countries in which corruption is rapidly deteriorating, its citizens exposed to life-threatening conditions" (Transparency International B&H, 2021). The Transparency International (T.I.) report (2022) warns of constant obstructions to reforms that lead to more transparent financing of political parties and fair elections in B&H. "The current political crisis, which deepens ethnic divisions and threatens the country's existence, fuels doubts about the interests and motives of key protagonists, diverting public attention from human rights abuses and blocking important anti-corruption reforms in B&H," the report said. It warns that there has been no progress in implementing key reforms, particularly the law on conflicts of interest, public procurement, party financing, and the protection of whistleblowers. In addition, much-needed judicial reform is lacking, while the judicial system is instrumentalized and a "prisoner" of government. In 2022 B&H is currently "on the brink of complete chaos" after the state's blockade, imposed by political structures from the Republika Srpska (R.S.), confirmed that B&H is governed extra-institutionally, i.e., through "ethnonationalism cartels." (Hina, 2022) The year 2021/2022 in B&H was profoundly divided and faced the most significant political crisis since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. It included war rhetorics, army appearances, total blockade of state institutions, and constant secessionism. It is a path to legal chaos and anarchy in the country because, with the current relationship of political forces, the B&H Parliament has no consent for such a step, so the state and entity systems will come into conflict with a completely different unpredictable outcome. A particular threat would be R.S.'s attempt to establish its army, which representatives of the international community see as a "red line" that cannot be crossed. (Mavrak, 2021)

Ubiquitous in the political system, corruption in the Western Balkans has become a widespread instrument for passing illegal laws, profit, and money laundering in institutions. Moreover, privatization was carried out with little respect for prescribed rules and regulations: this was often referred to as "wild west privatization." Considering that post-war B&H has one of the most complex constitutional structures, planning and financing in civil emergencies are characterized by a slightly different form of organization and management in this sector. The complexity of the constitutional structure of B&H results in the existence of several similar laws that define the same area but relate to different levels of government. B&H is a sovereign state with a decentralized political and administrative structure within the constitutional construction. B&H consists of 142 municipalities, of which 79 are in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) and 63 in the Republika Srpska (R.S.) entities. The management of the B&H health care system is decentralized to the level of the two entities and the Brčko District. At the same time, the health of the B&H citizens is endangered by the consequences of the war and by socioeconomic circumstances, unemployment, migration, large numbers of displaced persons, lack of health insurance, and unhealthy lifestyles. (Hadzic, 2022) All Western Balkan countries have significant issues with corruption. Although B&H as a state has long been taken over by corruption, it has been, for an extended period, classified among captive states

according to Transparency International. All Western Balkan countries have significant issues with corruption. According to Transparency International, B&H as a state has long been affected by corruption. Moreover, it has been classified among captive states for an extended period. "B&H is one of the countries in which corruption is rapidly worsening, its citizens exposed to life-threatening conditions" (Transparency International B&H, 2021).

The Constitution of the Federation of B&H (FB&H), i.e., its amendment XXXVII, clearly defined vital interests. According to this amendment, the vital national interests of the constituent peoples are defined as follows:

- exercising the right of the constituent peoples to be adequately represented in the legislative, executive, and judicial authorities;
- the identity of a constituent people;
- constitutional amendments;
- organization of public authorities;
- equal rights of constituent peoples in the decision-making process;
- education, religion, language, nurturing culture, traditions, and cultural heritage;
- territorial organization;
- public information system.

Increasing calls for protecting vital national interests in B&H, especially in the Federation of B&H (FB&H), have become the perfect blockade mechanism. It has led to the problematic functioning of the executive and legislative branches of government in the Federation of B&H and the complete paralysis of a critical institution, the FB&H Constitutional Court, which is the only one competent to resolve accumulated problems. At the session on March 21, 2013. the Bosniak People's Club in the House of Peoples of the Federation of B&H initiated a request to protect the vital national interest of Bosniaks, even due to the appointment of Shahbaz Dzihanovic as a judge of the FB&H Constitutional Court. Thus, for the fifth year in a row, the complete blockade of the activities of the Council for the Protection of Vital National Interests of the FB&H Constitutional Court continued because there are not enough judges to be able to make decisions (Terzic, 2013).

Using Clausewitz's speaking on politics and war to the current B&H moment, we get the paraphrase that today's ethnoreligiously segregated B&H education is peacetime war/conflict or hybrid war/conflict. In this way, education and necessary knowledge are sacrificed to ideology and politics. National-religious ideologizing educational programs carry out mental mutilation of children. Just like once ideologically directed learning of the Russian language. In this way, regardless of the public duration of the "destroyers" of communism, it structurally remains against the background of the aggressively attacked communist ideological-educational matrix of producing "people of a special

kind." Thus, the pragmatic instrumentalization of the educational system, despite the urgency of the growing need to introduce opposed educational logic and practice. Given the current ethnopolitical power of national parties insisting on three separate national education policies and curricula and the significant influence of religious organizations, I maintain that education reform is undesirable for ethnopolitical parties. It carries on the "vital national interest" framework, reducing the country's progress.

USA Department of State (2022) stated that in his official capacity as HJPC President, Milan Tegeltija (Bosnian Serb politician and President of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of B&H and judge) was involved in corrupt acts that included using his political influence and official power for his benefit. Specifically, there is credible information that Tegeltija used his position to solicit a benefit for interfering in a judicial process and manipulating judicial appointments and public employment. In his official capacity as a manager of the publicly owned Banovici mine and as a Parliamentary Assembly Representative, Kukic was involved in corrupt acts that used his political influence and official power- for personal benefit. Specifically, there is credible information that Kukic misappropriated public funds for personal benefit and interfered in hiring and appointment decisions to benefit himself politically. In addition to Tegeltija and Kukic, the Department of State is designating Tegeltija's spouse, Tijana Tegeltija, under Section 7031(c). This action also renders her ineligible for entry into the United States. Besides, the USA Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has imposed economic sanctions according to Executive Order (E.O.) 14033 on Milorad Dodik (Dodik), a member of the BiH Presidency, and the designation of a media outlet under his control, Alternative Televizija (ATV). As a result of today's action under E.O. 14033, all property and interests in property of those sanctioned within or come within the USA or in the possession or control of USA persons must be blocked and reported to OFAC. Together, these designations reaffirm the USA's commitment to the B&H sovereignty and territorial integrity, the rule of law and democratic institutions, and a better future for B&H's citizens. Other leaders and entities linked to corrupt or destabilizing actors may also be subject to future actions by the USA Government. We will continue to use appropriate authorities to promote accountability for actors across the region and globally. (USA Department of State, 2022)

As Francis Fukuyama rightly observes, all reforms are inherently political. Hence the solution lies in creating the political will for reform, not just strengthening the capacity of institutions. Priority should be given to mobilizing and articulating deep public distrust in government through the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes to avoid another wave of destructive protests



such as those in 2014.<sup>15</sup> Previous experience shows that calling on leaders to undertake reforms and take over responsibilities is not enough. Creating a genuine and articulated "internal demand" for reform represents the key to the country's sustainable progress towards European integration. Regarding European Union (E.U.) engagement, "the E.U.'s transformative power has effectively integrated the established state; it now faces the challenge of integrating disputed states." (Blagovcanin and Divjak, 2015)

The constant tension of the national interests in sociopolitical life and institutions distracts awareness from the genuine interests of the country. Namely, every modern nation-state represents both a community of citizens and a community of national/ethnic communities because creating various social organizations and associations enables individuals to exercise rights and freedoms more easily. The actual interest should be the progress of a peaceful and stable country. However, the interest of ethnonational groups is the B&H cultural tradition. Consequently, equal rights for all citizens, regardless of ethnoreligious background, in three homogeneous ethnic parts of B&H are a national interest to affirm and preserve. Therefore, the current sociopolitical and demographical panorama is contra-productive. Zeljko Komsic, a Croat body member of the three-partite B&H Presidency (denied by the most dominant B&H Croat political Party HDZ), states that in B&H, the protection of national interests means something wholly different and that the problem is further complicated. "Even the management of what is left of state resources is presented as a national interest. Of course, it can be the economic interest of a particular group, but it cannot be a national interest. Nevertheless, they are still operating successfully ", says Komšić. It is a skillful manipulation of political delusions. "Such attitudes are held by people prone to tragi-comedians in politics and even Machiavellianism, and this national feeling in people wants to be activated for their narrow political, economic interest." "We know that there is a deep-rooted sense of national belonging, but you will come to the ultimate motive of economic nature when you expose this story. We will fail if we do not decide on the logic that prevails in an ordinary, democratic, economic world. It does not matter what one's name is," Komsic concluded. (Soldo, 2015) Thus, the aim should be to place aside ethnoreligious identity and ethnopolitical constraints and position the national belonging and progress in the first place.

In "The Ruler," Machiavelli argues that the interests of the state take precedence over the interests of the individual. A political practice takes Machiavelli's conditionally given thesis "the end justifies the means" to the extreme and uses intrigue and manipulation to gain or retain power. Half a millennium passed since Machiavelli wrote, but it is "modern" even today. Moreover, because of the sovereign of

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<sup>15</sup> The series of demonstrations and riots in multiple cities in the Federation of B&H for social reasons aimed to overthrow the government in 2014. The riots were the most violent scenes B&H had seen since the war. Unfortunately, the equivalent level of commotion and activism did not occur in Republika Srpska (R.S.).

the democratic world, those who acted in the spirit of Machiavellianism, Machiavellian cunning, ruthlessly tried to cover up their selfish actions with moral and selfless principles and motives. Machiavellianism is intrigue, manipulation, and fabrication. However, it takes the form of a non-violent process.

In 2009, Media showed a shocking scene of crying 19-year-old Edis Hodžić, who, all in tears (and cramps of complete existential brokenness), sadly repeats: "I want the enough bread to eat." Unfortunately, the above examples are not the only ones of this kind, and there are hundreds of thousands of them. Furthermore, Josip Pejaković's<sup>16</sup> TV series "In the Name of the People," from show to show, in tone and image of undeniable truth, has shown unimaginable social misery throughout this country. Humiliated, disenfranchised, powerless, hungry, defrauded, and abandoned by the ethnic-messianic elite. They tell their sad life stories. However, there is a fierce struggle between B&H and the entity parliamentarians to keep all the economic crisis, for which they bear most of the blame, by retaining great privileges (recourses, hot meals, per diems, hotel and travel expenses) and enormous incomes prevailed on (already-to-the-ground) bent people's shoulders. What kind of "protection" then, and what "vital national interest"? Its proponents live in a high style while the people (the nation that elected them) have nothing to eat? They want the bread to eat, like the already mentioned married couple from Prijedor who killed themselves due to hunger, debts, and poverty. (Bajtal, 2016)

Human security issues such as socioeconomics of development and poverty, intra-state peace and conflict, and political-economic crime, among others, are critical in the contemporary world. However, the potential of deterrence mechanisms such as conflict resolution, economic development, diplomacy, peacebuilding, international law, and restorative and social justice demonstrates to be "unfinished and lasting" in the Western Balkans, particularly B&H. Concise yet comprehensive, "freedom from fear," "freedom from want," and "freedom from indignity" are ideal starting points for human security conceptualization. Human economic dignity is the capacity to contribute economically and live with respect and without humiliation. Hence, it is a prospective premise for the Western Balkans and countries such as B&H. Moreover, the former Yugoslavia countries have always had enormous economic potential, related prospects, and rich natural resources. However, conflicts and wars and inadequate and unethical post-war ethnopolitical leadership have declined stability, development, and socioeconomic progress.

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<sup>16</sup> B&H actor and writer born in Travnik, B&H. He was an antiwar activist at the start of the B&H war. In addition, he was a member of the Advisory Board of the left-wing magazine *Novi Plamen*. He also hosts a show on Bosnian television called "U ime Naroda" (In the people's name).

## **RESULTS AND CONCLUSION**

Ethnopolitical understanding of "purified" homogenous ethnoreligious spaces in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) presents an arrangement of "constituency of the people." However, it denies the B&H sovereignty, suppressing the "equality" of citizens in every part of the country. In a "constitutively" manner, the ethnopolitical/ethnoreligious arrangement is reduced to a struggle over territory. It directly territorializes and divides B&H into ethnoreligious areas. The narrative of protecting "vital national interests" is the ethnopolitical elites' manipulative instrumentalization and interest that has risen above the state and used for personal objectives. The ethnoreligious conflict of "vital national interest" undermines the country's economic system.

However, ethnicity and nation are historical-cultural and historical-political creations, inventions, or constructs. Ethnopolitical processes aim to obtain ethnic collective patriotism and loyalty, where language conflicts and educational segregation persists. Consequently, the actual sociopolitics demonstrate the institutionalization of post-war ethnoreligious conflict. It reduces the rule of law framework, the country's integrity, sociopolitical, economic, and critical human security progression. Because of the sovereignty of the democratic world, contemporary Machiavellians and political practice take Machiavelli's thesis "the end justifies the means." As a result, they often use intrigue and manipulation to gain or retain power. Thus, it has a character of more deceptive than violent behavior. Unfortunately, the Balkan (particularly B&H) demonstrates Maciavelism more profoundly than Machiavelli's authentic perspective. In the Western Balkans, ethnopolitical crime is a criminal enterprise in itself, and it has a broader impact on the Region's political economy. The war and post-war illegitimate privatization events and systemic political-economic corruption in the Region created the ideal sociopolitical and socioeconomic climate in these societies where systemic ethnopolitical kleptocracy occurred and prevailed. As a result, future scenarios' sociopolitical and socioeconomic developmental stages are questioned.

The labor market issues call for policy engagement. It disproportionately affects women and youth, which may decrease efforts to raise the Region's perennially low labor force participation rates. Ethical, political behavior and intention can consolidate institutions' capacity, regardless of ethnoreligious disparities and past. The development of civic awareness and plural civic space must articulate responsibility in government through the active participation of citizens in decision-making

processes, reducing the recorded and current irregularities/criminalities, and strengthening the rule of law in the public administration. Regional citizen cooperation, mutual trust, and peace climate are critical components of comprehensive impact and anti-corruption strategies and approaches. In addition, sharing experiences, good practices, and functional knowledge of social capital are required. Almost 30 years after the end of the war in B&H, there is an increased capacity for hybrid wars. Therefore, there must be continuing conditions to maintain cooperation between all three ethnopolitics through formal and mutual commitment until the preconditions for stability are met. Thus, the employment sector, especially for well-educated unemployed young people, improving social security and health services, monitored by the honest/ethical government and constructive public administration.

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