

# Bosnia now = $\frac{\text{no future}}{\text{no past}}$

## Bosnia and Herzegovina in the spring of 2003

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Since the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) has been living in a state of permanent present, with no future and no past. The past, which could serve as the key reference in construction of its own B&H identity, was forcefully expelled from the public discourse in B&H by the logic of the so-called peace process (imposed by the so-called international community), claiming that any reference to the past inevitably leads to a new war. This kind of mechanistic reasoning starts from the (false) assumption that the outbreak of the 1992-1995 war was the result of perpetuation of 'ancient hatreds', of 'continuous repetition of the past in the Balkans', of 'revenge for WW II' and 'revenge for Kosovo', etc., rather than the result of efforts undertaken by international players and their Balkan cronies to impose the model of ethnically pure nation-states across the Balkans.<sup>1</sup> This kind of logic creates a fundamental practical problem—it eliminates any potentially constructive analysis of the past,<sup>2</sup> for the purpose of maintaining an absolutely unproductive *status quo*, whereby the (artificially constructed) present remains totally *conserved*, thus overshadowing any vision of the future. The logic of the so-called peace process, which imposes a *taboo* not only on any reference to the past but also on consideration of any legal, political, social, or economic changes, which could transform this (preset) present into a different future (with an equally false assumption that any change in the Dayton set-up of B&H society inevitably leads to a renewed conflict), thus *eliminates* the very idea of the future that might in any way be different from this set present. To consider this problem, one needs to identify certain political, social, and economic forces which articulate and realise their own interests through such a conservation of the present.

Besides the international bureaucracy—which tries to present itself as an advocate of the interests of the so-called international community<sup>3</sup> and, quite logically, finds justification for its own existence in the Dayton model of a divided B&H<sup>4</sup>—the political forces interested in conserving the present and eliminating the future are the very same ones which at the Lisbon Conference in 1991 accepted, either implicitly or explicitly, the idea of ethnically pure territories and the partition of B&H.

At the very root of the concept of ethnically pure territories and *ethnoterritorialisation*<sup>5</sup> lies the idea of an ethnic group's collective 'ownership'<sup>6</sup> over an entire territory and its resources.<sup>7</sup> Of course, practically, ownership and control are established by individual, physical entities (i.e. political forces) which legitimise their position of the *de facto* owners of territory and resources by presenting themselves as the sole, monopolistic representatives of 'national interests' (at the same time excluding all other potential contenders for this form of ownership).

In the case of B&H, all the political forces

which accepted the principle of ethnic partition (starting from the Lisbon Conference and ending with the Dayton Agreement) demonstrated at the same time their ambitions towards individual ownership over such ethnically constituted (i.e. brutally 'cleansed') territories and their resources. Given the actual effects of war, ethnic cleansing and (Washington and Dayton) peace agreements on the implementation of the concept of ethnoterritorialisation of B&H, a logical conclusion may be drawn that the realisation of these forces' ambitions was in effect strongly supported by these military and political processes. In practical terms this means that during this period ownership was redistributed: until 1992 the territory of B&H and its resources were *de jure* owned by the citizens of B&H<sup>8</sup>; they were then partitioned and *de jure* transferred into the ownership of ethnic collectivities, which led to the establishment to the *de facto* ownership over partitioned territories and resources by individual political forces which asserted themselves as the representatives of these ethnic collectivities. On one hand, this process led to the establishment of these political forces as *ethnonationalist owner-oligarchies*.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the process of ethnoterritorialisation and the subsequent transformation of ownership led to the dissolution of the B&H *demos* (i.e. the citizenry of B&H), thus replacing representative democracy with *oligarchic ethnocracy*. Throughout this process of ethnoterritorialisation, these political forces worked on the establishment of an exclusive oligarchic ethnocracy, i.e. an oligarchic ownership over ethnically constituted (partitioned and 'cleansed') territories and their resources. It is thus logical that they resist any attempt to reconstitute the B&H *demos* and civic democracy, as they naturally strive to conserve the system of oligarchic ethnocracy and their own ethnonationalistic oligarchic position. Accordingly, both in form and in essence, these political forces are conservative: publicly, their conservatism is formally manifested in their reference to the protection of 'national interests', 'faith', and 'tradition'; practically, it is an effort to conserve the existing system of ownership, which includes these publicly declared categories as the code for oligarchic ownership.

Naturally, oligarchic ownership as a system is a capitalist one; accordingly, transition towards capitalism is a condition *sine qua non* for the establishment of this type of ownership. However, this is a case of a specific form of *pre-modern proto-capitalism*, and these political forces are trying to promote it as the only possible form of capitalism. In this form of capitalism, the goal is to establish *monopolistic control* over resources and their distribution.<sup>10</sup> Hence, *monopoly over the distribution of existing resources* is the basic constituent principle of this form of production-distribution relationship, which theory defines as *rentier capitalism*. Production of new goods, their free-market distribution, competition, initiative, entrepreneurship,

### Notes

- 1 The idea of ethnic division of B&H and the creation of ethnically pure territories had been presented by the so-called international community at the Lisbon Conference in 1992 (and accepted as such by the future key instigators of the conflict), long before the actual armed conflict started. Much of the territorial acquisitions and ethnic cleansing in the period 1992-1995 was based on effecting the so-called Lisbon borders, as proposed by the so-called international community. Hence, the idea of ethnic division and ethnic boundaries drawn on the Lisbon map served as the generator of the future armed conflict rather than as a solution to an existing one.
- 2 In the case of B&H, the tradition of denying, erasing or ignoring the past as a potential source of B&H identity is somewhat older than the presence of the so-called international community in its territory: it dates back to the age of nationalistic projects in the Balkans (in the late 19th century). In that era (which was to continue during the existence of the first and second Yugoslavia) Serb and Croat nationalists acted systematically in order to delegitimise the right of B&H to its own identity, presenting it as 'the result of Ottoman conquest' or 'an artificial construct'. Given the failure of all the attempts of the time to establish a B&H national identity, this discourse of Serb-Croat nationalism dominated all others. The inarticulate attempts to establish continuity between the statehood of medieval Bosnia and its present constitutional status were mainly reduced to proving continuity of the existing religious groups (the concept of lineage between the old Bosnian Church and the present Muslim identity, and concepts which translated the presence of Orthodoxy and Catholicism in the Bosnian territory into the presence of respective Serbian and Croatian statehood), thus practically accepting the logic of Serb and Croat ethno-religious nationalism. The B&H identity was accordingly reduced to the identity of just one of the religious groups (Bosnian Muslims), which merely contributed to Serb and Croat nationalist attempts to break the B&H identity into a mechanical set of several incompatible religious identities. Throughout this process, the significance of medieval Bosnian statehood for the legitimisation of statehood of modern-day B&H and for its establishment as a nation-state, with a common B&H identity as the key constituting factor, was systematically ignored, and the *nationalised* present was automatically projected into religious past, with regular redesigning of the past in accordance with the needs of the present.
- 3 I will maintain the use of 'so-called' before the phrase 'international community' specifically because the interests of this bureaucracy are in almost all instances presented as 'interests of the international community'.
- 4 This bureaucracy was created as an *ad hoc* 'task force' with the primary task of supervising the

economic growth, industrial and social development, job creation, and all that theory links with the notion of *entrepreneurial capitalism* is thus the *antipode* to the system of monopolistic, distributive, rentier capitalism. In rentier capitalism's essence is the principle of distribution of existing resources (and the extraction of capital from them) rather than the principle of creation of new resources; the principle of monopolistic control rather than free-market competition; the principle of stagnation rather than new initiative, growth, and development; the principle of reduction of options rather than the principle of creation of new ones.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, it does not take an expert in economics to understand that in the long run this system has no real future.<sup>12</sup> This is exactly the point: rentier capitalism is the kind of system that strives to eliminate the very idea of future and the very idea of social and economic dynamism. In its essence is the concept of *static* conservation of the present, which means elimination of the idea of future as a principally *dynamic* one, as well as elimination of any related ideas of movement, initiative, change, growth or development. This framework has been imposed on the post-Dayton Bosnia. It denies *a priori* the possibility of any fundamental change and promotes only the conserved present, whereas any consideration of either past or future remains prohibited under the threat of a new war. It is thus easy to conclude that this environment is the least favourable for ideas of reform, initiative, competition, free market, development, or anything else related to the notion of entrepreneurial capitalism. However, domestic ethnonational oligarchies are not the only conservers of such environment—they are joined by the international bureaucracy in charge of 'partition-management': from the very onset, the process of ethnoterritorialisation, or rather the process of ethnic partition, implied the establishment of ethnonationalist oligarchic ownership over territory and resources; its management also implied control over its course and conservation of its principles as the only governing principles of the target B&H society.

This environment engendered an entire rentier *culture*, which identifies the ideal of individual prosperity with the idea of individual ownership over resources and the idea of their rentier-type exploitation. In that context, prosperity generated by expansion in production, sales, trade or initiative is not even seen as desirable: the ideal is the self-perpetuating capital generated by *inactivity*, rather than capital created by production or trade. A specific problem in B&H society is the wide presence of this ideal, even in the social strata most affected by the consequences of this type of socio-economic system: paradoxically, even in the widest social strata, the ideal of social and economic success is identified with the ideal of rentier inactivity. At the same time, anger and frustration over these strata's social position in relation to those forces that imposed their own control over the resources, denying access and charging rent for their usage, are, paradoxically, usually directed against examples of capitalist entrepreneurship (the so-called 'tycoons').

This double paradox escapes explanation based on any kind of *rational-choice* theory. Still, it can be explained by considering the aforementioned culture as part of the general culture in B&H, whose elements of specifically *modern*, civic values failed to assert domination over elements of *pre-modern*, non-capitalist and proto-

capitalist values. One cannot really argue that this culture is totally pre-modern and that it contains no elements of civic values. However, the presence of various non-modern elements, such as the *neo-feudalist* ideal of rentier exploitation of resources (and the subsequent respect for its agents), the *neo-tribalist* ideal of ethnic territories, or the *neo-medievalist* ideal of bringing religious and secular powers together, indicates that transition towards a modern, civic society in B&H has never been completed. While socialism did have ambitions towards modernity, insisting on rapid modernisation, it nevertheless proclaimed its struggle against typically civic values. This practically meant an inconsistent modernisation policy and selective promotion of civic values, while maintaining many of the pre-modern elements. B&H was thus relatively fertile ground for the revival of these non-modern, i.e. non-civic, values. Therefore, the elements of civic values—which include capitalist entrepreneurship, private initiative, and, above all, interest-driven association—do not have the kind of prominent status they normally enjoy in mature civic societies, constituted on the principle of the so-called *social contract*.<sup>13</sup>

From the point of view of transition towards a civic society, a particular problem in B&H is its underdeveloped culture of *interest-driven* association,<sup>14</sup> as opposed to the inflated culture of association driven by *assumed affinity*—either *space-based* (neighbourhood) or *kinship-based* (real: family; or imagined: ethnic, religious or regional). In the process of decomposition of B&H society from 1990 onwards, there has also been a shift of focus within the culture of assumed affinity-driven association, from relative domination of association driven by space-based affinity to an almost absolute domination of association driven by imagined kinship-based affinity. This shift coincides with physical decomposition of the population: in addition to ethnic cleansing and brutal expulsion, there is also intensified migration of rural populations to urban centres. This is leading to the strengthening of rural values in relation to urban ones—this process includes the strengthening of the principle of association driven by assumed affinity of imagined (and real) kinship, in relation to the principle of association driven by space-based assumed affinity. As it contains elements of individual choice along with elements of automatic, assumed affinity, the principle of association driven by space-based assumed affinity (neighbourhood) normally serves (and may have served) as a proto-model for the inception and development of the civic principle of association driven by rationally calculated, individual interests. It is therefore logical that, as the principle of association driven by assumed affinity of imagined kinship (ethnicity and religion) becomes stronger and strengthens the presence of other rural values, B&H society becomes further alienated from the desired civic model of interest-driven association.

In addition to the strengthening of non-modern *neo-feudalist*, *neo-tribalist*, and *neo-medievalist* elements, it is clear that the principles of entrepreneurial and industrial capitalism, principles of constitution of a civic nation, and principles of secularism, are far less present in B&H today than they were before 1990. Particularly devastating for civic values is the merger of these processes into a single flow of 'original accumulation' of (rentier) capital in the hands of three ethno-religious oligarchies—whose constituent principle is a perverse synthesis of inter-

process of partition of B&H. In that respect, creation of this structure started with the Brussels Conference chaired by Lord Carrington (part of which was the Lisbon Conference chaired by Jose Cutillero); it acquired its present form with the creation of OHR. Its activity could be best described as 'partition-management'.

- 5 I use this term to denote the entire process which started with drawing ethnic boundaries on maps and ended with their effectuation on the ground through the process of so-called ethnic cleansing (which includes killing, expulsion and pressure for the purpose of forceful relocation, all in order to establish ethnic territories).
- 6 The principle of 'ownership' of a particular group over the territory it inhabits and the resources located in it is the principle that all nation-states rest upon. Thus a nation may be defined as a collectivity (irrespective of whether it was constituted on the ethnic or the civic principle) united by the belief that it has a claim on the 'ownership' over the territory it inhabits and its resources; in this, the 'ownership' is realised by the establishment of state administration over such territory. Hence, a nation is a group which considers itself the collective 'owner' of territory and resources, which it attempts to control through a state apparatus. In order to effectuate such control, the nation must establish its own state and ensure its recognition by other nation-states. The establishment of a nation-state realises the principle of 'ownership' over territory and resources, i.e. the principle of national self-determination.
- 7 By resources I mean all the goods subject to imposition of ownership and monopolisation, and which are subject to non-productive, i.e. *rentier* exploitation. Therefore, resources may include various *objects used for extraction of capital*—land, service corporations (telecommunication, power supply, etc.), down to the actual population inhabiting a particular territory.
- 8 *De facto*, control over territory and resources was in the hands of bureaucracy constituted on the principle of affiliation with the ruling political (Communist) party. What defined B&H citizens as the *de facto* B&H nation was the *de jure* ownership over territory and resources, though not constitutionally defined as such. In the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, B&H citizens did not have the status of sole 'owners' of territory and resources; they shared this position with ethnic groups ('constituent peoples'). This ambiguity allowed for a later declaration of ethnic groups as the practical *de jure* owners of territory and resources acquired in the process of 'ethnoterritorialisation' (*de facto*, territories and resources were acquired by the political forces which adopted and implemented the process of ethnoterritorialisation).
- 9 As shown in practice, these forces are not limited to the three pronounced ethnonationalist parties (SDS, HDZ and SDA); they include all those who are attempting to assert themselves as, and those who are, *de facto* owners and controllers of ethnoterritorialised resources. In that sense, individuals such as Ivanic and Dodik, as well as Lagumdžija, contribute actively to the preservation of the system of oligarchic *rentier* ownership over ethnoterritorialised resources. Sporadic efforts of *Stranka za BiH* to revive industry and production, as well as the role of the state, and to strengthen entrepreneurship are an exception to this concept, significant though insufficient.
- 10 The actual transition of B&H society, where the model of rentier capitalism has been consistently implemented, also acquired a specific form: priority has been given to the so-called process of *restitution* as opposed to classic privatisation. This is a case of domination of the idea of distribution of existing resources over the idea of creating new, material and human, resources, aided by entrepreneurial privatisation. There is thus privatisation and distribution of existing property for the purpose of their rentier exploitation (restitution),

est-driven and assumed affinity-driven association, thus creating a unique principle of association founded on *assumed interest-driven affinity*.<sup>15</sup> Of course, these oligarchies are principally *interest-driven groups*, though constituted on the basis of assumed affinity. In them, the existence of absolute identity between the assumed ethno-religious affinity and the assumed oligarchic interests is equally assumed. And this very identity (assumed to exist between oligarchic interests and ethno-religious affinity) creates a conceptual framework which, in turn, assumes that any deviation from automatic following of oligarchic interests is seen as treason of the constituent principles of ethno-religious affinity. Or, to use the rhetoric commonly used in B&H, it is seen as 'betrayal of one's own kin' or 'betrayal of national interests'.

In a society where the possibility of individual choice and individual articulation of one's own interests is reduced to the lowest level, under threat of sanction for treason, and where this state of affairs is 'carved in stone' by factual elimination of any notion of (different) past and present, the individual is deprived of any free margin as well as of any possibility to change this position. The result of this is a sense of apathy and hopelessness, i.e. a sense of impossibility of any influence over one's own fate or the fate of the society the individual lives in. All this leads to totally passive individuals, and that, following the logic of relationship of the individual and the society he or she lives in, leads to a total paralysis of the society.<sup>16</sup> In a paralysed society, the individual and the society reach a point when the most basic survival instinct begins to weaken and when giving in to fate seems to be the only option available.<sup>17</sup> In the spring of 2003, eleven years after the beginning of the process of destruction of B&H society, this process seems to have produced the desired results.

Since this state of affairs acts as a mechanism for perpetuation of existing relations, maintained by systematic, *interest-driven* activity by both external (international bureaucracy) and internal factors (ethnonationalist rentier oligarchies), there is no possibility of changing the basic function of the mechanism without deconstructing it and, by that, without jeopardising these factors' vital interests. Since this mechanism also acts as a mechanism for protection of those vital interests, it is highly unlikely that these factors would voluntarily forego the mechanism and deconstruct it themselves. In this situation and given that these very factors have, in the meantime, marginalized all other potentially relevant social, economic and political forces, an effective change of the existing relations would only be possible through systematic, strategically *planned organisation* of the latter into a kind of interest-driven *network for mutual assistance and promotion of alternative models of socio-economic relations*; a less effective and less probable change would be through the latter's *spontaneous organisation*. As the former (including both internal and external factors) also function as an informal, interest-driven network for mutual assistance and promotion of the rentier-oligarchic model, an alternative model of socio-economic relations can only be promoted through analogous interest-driven organisation.<sup>18</sup> This, however, is a separate issue requiring special elaboration.

instead of privatisation for the purpose of launching entrepreneurial initiatives in order to create new value.

- 11 Reduction of accessible options is particularly important in the process of establishing monopolistic control over existing resources, as well as in the process of extraction of capital from the target groups (which practically includes the entire population of the country, with the exception of ethnonationalist oligarchies themselves). Job creation and new accessible options are thus in direct opposition to the principles of rentier capitalism and monopolistic control over existing resources (within which target groups of population function as yet another resource serving the purpose of extraction of capital), since they offer choices and access to different goods, and create an ambience conducive to business initiative and competition.
- 12 Of course, this does not mean that the ethnonationalist oligarchies are unaware of the long term non-viability of their project of ethnoterritorialisation and its disastrous consequences for the society and the country on the whole. Ethnonationalist oligarchies knowingly violate all the rules of 'good household management' (which is the original meaning of the word *oeconomia*) over territory and resources, counting on their short-lived yet more intense exploitation. This philosophy is best reflected in the (by now infamous) statement by one of the advocates of ethnoterritorialisation: 'What you've grabbed is yours to keep.'
- 13 Interest-driven association is the basis of the so-called social contract. Contractual association on the basis of well known and well articulated individual interests is the conceptual basis for civic society, just as much as the myth of the assumed, assigned common origin is the conceptual basis for an ethnic group. Starting from the definition of ethnic group as a collectivity united by a myth of common origin leading back to shared biological ancestors, civic society may be defined as a collectivity united by a myth that asserts that the given society was established by means of interest-driven association, i.e. social contract. In that sense, even *rational-choice theory* starts from an assumption that interest-driven association and rational calculation of interests are the only legitimate form of behaviour, which is, to an extent, true for civic society. Still, this theory is hardly applicable to behaviour in societies not dominated by civic values.
- 14 This problem is usually referred to as 'underdeveloped civil society'.
- 15 All the 'cosa nostra' organisations function on the same principle. In fact, the very principle of 'cosa nostra' is, in fact, the principle of assumed interest-driven affinity. Although it contains elements of rational calculation of interests, association based on *assumed interest-driven affinity* is the total denial of any principle of individual choice or individual articulation of interests. It can not serve as a basis for a civic type interest-driven association, not only as it is a matter of assumed affinity (as the case is with real or imagined kinship) but also because the principle of *assumed interest* leaves no room for individual choice, definition or articulation of interests. Members of the collectivity constituted on the principle of assumed interest, by definition, share the same interests, and their individual interests are understood to be nothing other than identical to the interests of the collectivity.
- 16 In a society like this, an illusion of dynamic movement is maintained by an artificial public debate between leading print media outlets (e.g. the permanent latent conflict between *Slobodna Bosna* and *Avaz*, *Slobodna Bosna* and *Dani*, etc.) which pretend to represent mutually opposed political forces (*Slobodna Bosna*-SDP, *Avaz*-SDA, *Dani*-Stranka za BiH, etc.). In reality, both the 'conflict' of political parties and the permanent 'war' of affiliated 'independent' media can hardly serve any other purpose but to maintain the said illusion and to further deepen the paralysis of the society, by creating artificial blocs through which confrontation of real individuals perma-

nently takes place (a Hobbesian concept of 'war of all against all'). Although these blocs may seem to be the first sign of association based on individually chosen and articulated political interests, the reality is that these interests are also automatically assumed by the very alignment with one of the blocs. Within the mechanism created by this artificial public debate, failure to belong to one of the blocs practically means an automatic affiliation with the other, 'opposed' bloc.

- 17 In his 'Sociology after Bosnia and Kosovo', Keith Doubt, an American sociologist, used the term 'sociocide' (i.e. the killing of a functioning society) to denote the process the B&H society has been exposed to since 1992. In light of the consequences of total paralysis of B&H society as described, and the *de facto* suspension of any functions of B&H society as a society, the killing of this particular society can be said to have been successful.
- 18 The promotion network of the rentier-oligarchic model functions on the principle of systematic *simulated permanent conflict* between its publicly visible branches (e.g. constant, simulated conflicts between ethnonationalist parties and the affiliated media; constant, simulated conflicts between them and the international bureaucracy, etc.—which, in fact, *structurally strengthen* the position of these elements *as seemingly opposed*). The simulation of conflict is *structurally preset*, and any individual deviation from the preset principle of simulation of permanent conflict leads to *weakening of the entire existing rentier-oligarchic model*. This deviation may be in the form of suspension of the simulated conflict and creation of a framework for true cooperation, as well as in the form of a real, authentic conflict. In both cases, the conflict simulation structure acts to block both options. At the same time, one of this model's protection mechanisms is based on the principle of *generation of a latent authentic conflict* among all other elements in society, thus further strengthening the principle upon which the actual structure rests, and at the same time weakening any other principles on which alternative socio-economic and political models could function. A network for promotion of alternative models (such as the individual-entrepreneurial or liberal-democratic model, or the state-industrial or social-democratic model) would have to be organised on the basis of totally different principles, such as the principle of free market and ideological-political competition, or the principle of coordinated, state-managed economic and political activity, etc. Moreover, alternative structures would have to contain separate mechanisms for prevention of conflicts (as conflict is the dominant structural principle of the existing rentier-oligarchic model) and for promotion of free-market competition, or of state-managed coordination.