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Mirko Pejanović
STATEHOOD OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA IN
XX AND XXI CENTURY

University Press, Sarajevo, 2021, 325 pages,
ISBN 978-9958-673-82-5

In 2021, the Balkan region commemorated the 30th anniversary of dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). This year, Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH) has marked three decades since the historical 1992 referendum, where the majority of its population expressed support intension to become a sovereign and independent state. Following the declaration of independence, on 6 April 1992, and wide recognition by the international community, BiH soon became member of the United Nations.

Thirty years later, Pejanović highlights the failures of BiH to transition from socialism, to restore the consequences of the war, and implement structural reforms in social-economic sphere.

The author of this book, Mirko Pejanović, is professor of political sciences, a Vice President of the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Academy of Sciences and Arts, and director of its Research Centre on Development of the Local and Regional Self-Government.



Moreover, between 1992 and 1996, Pejanović was a member of the BiH Presidency, which adopted the fundamental document for the work of the Presidency during the wartime conditions, including its goals for the future of BiH. Furthermore, he is the founder, and was the President, of the Serbian City Council, which

fought against the ethnical hatred.

In his book, *Statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina in XX. and XXI. Century*, Pejanović gives an elaborate and structured overview of the formation and development of BiH, and analyses the process of state's accession to the EU. Eight chapters chronologically demonstrate the transition from a unit within the former SFRY into an independent, internationally recognised sovereign state. The milestones which shaped the state's modern history from the beginnings of the 1990s, start with the dissolution of the SFRY, the transition into a state with a 'multi-party' political system, followed by the referendum about its independence, the armed conflict, Dayton Peace Agreement and the post-Dayton agreement period to this day.

The first chapter opens with a brief historical overview of the political systems of BiH. After the Second World War, with the formation of the SFRY, BiH finally gained a form of a federal unit. The creation of statehood and the governance structure of BiH have been at the core of the sessions of the State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ZAVNO-BiH), where eventually was formed the first national government of BiH.

Before the break-up of the SFRY, the society of BiH lived in harmony, despite its diversity. However, with the dissolution of the SFRY, the single-party political system got

replaced by a plural political system. This change of political system in 1990, led to emergence of some political parties that were mainly founded on the elements of ethnicity: Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), Party of Democratic Action (SDA), and Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ BiH). The political pluralism in BiH transformed into ethnical pluralism with the political identities blended into nationalistic, so the author.

The first multi-party elections took place in November 1990 and resulted in the win of the SDA, followed by the SDS and HDZ BiH respectively. Instead of signing a coalition agreement, they struggled to see eye-to-eye, even on the fundamental question of statehood.

The SDS was not willing to support the sovereignty of BiH and wanted the entire, or at least the Republika Srpska territory, to stay an administrative unit within the remaining territory of Yugoslavia, essentially, part of Serbia. The HDZ BiH was in favour of BiH becoming a sovereign, independent and internationally recognised state, and the SDA was promoting the idea of the transformation of Yugoslavia into a confederation. At heart, the latter two parties, together with the five opposition parties, advocated for BiH to become an independent, sovereign state.

In February/March 1992, the decision was entrusted to the people, who, at the referendum, expressed

their strong support for the independent and sovereign state. A month later, BiH became recognised as such by the EU, USA and many other states. This provoked the rage of the SDS and an unimaginable aggressive response, which escalated from the ideological conflict between the political parties into an armed conflict that spilled over the state's borders and flamed into a horrific battlefield.

The post war, 1996, Constitution divided (and at the same time united) the state of BiH into two entities, Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska. However, the ethnical political parties still received a strong support in 1996 and 1998 elections and with political conflicts far from being settled, despite the signed peace agreement. The winning parties struggled to reach consensus about any crucial issues of the state's social and political development and the adoption of many decisions and laws was left to the United Nations High Commissioner.

Nonetheless, the 2000 parliamentary elections brought along some major turns. The three ethnical parties, for the first time, found their places in the opposition. In the same year, BiH established the state border control service, and became a member state to the Council of Europe. Nonetheless, in the next parliamentary elections in 2002, the ethnical political parties took the lead again and the coalition agreement was again a subject of dispute. The pertaining issue was still present after the parlia-

mentary elections in 2006 and 2010. In 2008, BiH signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, but the conflicts between the coalition parties caused the delays in the implementation of reforms and consequently slowed down the EU integration process.

Another milestone in the political development of BiH was the 2009 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the case of *Sejdić and Finci vs BiH*. The Court found the violation of the eligibility of members of ethnical minorities to vote and to be elected. The execution of the judgment has taken over a decade and added to the delay in the EU integration process.

In Chapter IV, Pejanović focuses on the element of the state's multi-ethnic society, with a close look at the unique multi-cultural structure of the capital city Sarajevo and its defensive role. During the war, defence of BiH was, in parallel, taking place by military means and with a search for a peace agreement that would stop the war. The main defence strategy was enshrined in the political programme *Platform for the functioning of the Republic of BiH Presidency during the war period*.

The post-war state composition was created by Washington and Dayton agreements, dividing the state on ethnical grounds into two entities: Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska. According to Pejanović, such division made the state dysfunctio-

nal and created a need for constitutional amendments, which would eliminate the domination of the ethnic elements. Nevertheless, Dayton Peace Agreement has been an important milestone in the BiH's modern history. It ended the war and set the path for the re-construction of BiH and its institutions. Its enforcement was entrusted to the institutions established by the international community.

The main later issues in the political development of BiH are addressed in the sixth chapter of the book. Since 1998, with the establishment of the Consultative Task Force, which facilitated the beginnings of the political dialogue between BiH and the EU, the future has been centred around the state's accession to the EU. In the seventh chapter, Pejanović presents obstacles that have been in the way of the integration process. By 2008, under the authority of the UN High Commissioner, BiH managed to implement many reforms. On 15 February 2016, BiH finally submitted the application for accession to the EU. However, the state institutions have been unsuccessful in taking the necessary steps for the fulfilment of the requirements for the membership eligibility, which were set out in the 2019 opinion issued by the EU Commission.

The book rounds off with Pejanović's views referring to the current social and political reality in BiH, expressed in his several interviews. Pejanović reiterates the necessity of

the fast-track integration of BiH into the EU and at the same time stresses the persistent phenomenon of the government instability.

The author of the book has probably not imagined that this work will see the light of day in such dark times, when Europe witnesses war at its gates. In 2017, the international community has put the closure to the horrific Balkan wars with the official closure of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and handing over the small remainder of the cases to the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. The criminal cases for the war crimes that occurred on the territory of the former SFRY have mainly concluded, but the evidentiary material and the convictions of the military leaders have become a reminder of how quickly an ideological conflict can trigger an aggression and transform into war.

The book *Statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina in XX and XXI Century* represents a commemoration of the anniversary of the state's independence and an encouragement for the necessary steps towards becoming a developed EU country. At the same time, the illustration of the political events provides an important context to the post-war generations, whose future had been likely affected by them, and a reminder for the European (and global) community of the importance of the dialogue and agreement-seeking in multi-ethnic and -cultural societies.