

EXPERIENCES OF POST-WAR RE-CONSTRUCTION OF THE STATE AND SOCIETY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Every war brings with it the difficulty of the present moment and problems that will burden the future with the current outbreak. The special burden of post-war reconstruction is visible in societies whose war conflicts also have the dimension of inter-ethnic conflict. The latter can become a permanent flywheel of new conflicts within society and a constant source of social division and potential instability of the state. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) presents the most glaring example of the aforementioned theses. The post-war reconstruction did not deal with social division between different national segments, but focused on the transitional process of creating a functional state. However, if the process of building a post-conflict statehood does not respect the differences between national communities, and if it does not simultaneously build a framework for the coexistence of the aforementioned, there are great chances that the situation of war conflicts will spill over into a political conflict with constant crises.

If we dare to forecast the potential post-war future of Ukraine and its reconstruction in terms of statehood, and compare it with the situation in BiH, then several important conclusions emerge. First of all, the very purpose of the Dayton BiH is essentially the restoration of modern statehood and its first historical democratic construction, which Ukraine already possesses. Regardless, a huge difference is that the post-war political and territorial structure of BiH was and still is a reflection of the overlapping consensus of key geopolitical actors of that time, including the USA and Russia. With the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) USA achieved the most important peace achievement in its modern history and confirmed *Pax Americana* in the middle of the nineties. On the other side, Russia has retained a political actor in the form of Republic of Srpska (RS) through which it has a permanent presence in the western Balkans.

In the comparison with Ukraine, the situation is completely different. First of all, one of the geopolitical actors is included into the conflict (Russia) and any sort of outcome simply cannot be the external consensus of two powers. I

will use two ideal type models to prove my thesis. In the first scenario Ukraine will free its territory and return the territorial sovereignty which implies excluding Russia from the Ukrainian soil and discrediting its geopolitical capacity and reputation for a long time. In the second scenario, Ukraine will be forced to stop the war and made peace arrangements with Russia through potential forms of territorial autonomy of some parts of the occupied territory and compromise different aspects of political guarantees. USA will be the key factor of geopolitical guarantee for that new arrangement. That situation will make Kyiv a permanently dissatisfied political subject and not even joining the EU, or even NATO, will be able to compensate for that dissatisfaction. In both scenarios, the ultimate premise form in BiH in which two powers remained satisfied with the existing power-sharing and the federal model of state will not be present.

Another big difference in the comparison can be derived from the above. Post-war order in BiH created an unstable state with the constant presence of the military and civilian international agencies, making it a permanent international (semi)protectorate. Not a single key political decision is possible without the influence of the international community, especially the OHR, and many decisions made by international actors have never been democratically confirmed in the BiH parliaments. This will not happen to Ukraine in both mentioned scenarios, because it will remain a sovereign state, without any need to integrate civilian institutions of international community as some sort of a guarantee for preventing a dissolution of a state. Only potential international presence can be achieved by joining the NATO alliance or in the compromise scenario with the peace missions of the European Union (EU).

The only threat to Ukraine will be the creation of federal/confederal relations which will be creating „Republic of Srpska“ within Ukraine. The experiences of BiH show that if there is no fundamental desire for common statehood, then federalism becomes a permanent grumbling and a constant threat for the disintegration of the state. Political actors in the „pro-Russian part“ of the state will become permanent provokers of the state stability. On the other hand, the experiences of BiH show that the long-term presence of the international community without a clear exit strategy creates incompetent and passive internal actors, and international entities become a constant compensation and bridge in maintaining state sovereignty. Any decision that can be influenced by "regional pro-Russian authorities" will require constant compromise, and any attempt by Kyiv to end and reduce autonomy will cause resistance. The mediation of the international community will be inevitable, but the experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown that without honest dialogue

and necessary compromises, without the mentoring of the international community, no sustainable model is possible. The long-term practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown that each national community creates its own frame of memory for war events. Usually these narratives are mutually exclusive, and create emotional attachment and bias in people. A great danger for the Ukrainian people is the inevitable creation of a public narrative about the war and the constant appeal to war narratives with the constant expectation of international aid. BiH has shown that such narratives contaminate society and create an electorate with high tolerance for corruption and institutional inefficiency. Identity gaps between national communities are further deepened, history is reinterpreted and walls of separation are raised.

Without sincere appreciation of all identities, the post-war multicultural society can fall into a long process of regression - this implies national minorities as well. This is especially important if the Ukrainians succeed in liberating the entire territory, their consideration for the Russian minority and their integration into the new social and state framework will be of decisive importance for the long-term development of Ukraine. The war leaves deep cuts and traumas, but without serious work on overcoming them, reconciliation is not possible, and the two nations are condemned to live permanently next to each other in perpetuated hostility and frozen conflict. At one point, the situation becomes unsustainable and the citizens become really bigoted, BiH unfortunately taught us all that.

When it comes to the impact of Russian aggression against Ukraine on the internal political situation in BiH, an extremely rare and unexpected thing happened. Mostar and Sarajevo, as toponyms of political power and the centre of the two constituent peoples of Croats and Bosniaks, have symbolically united in unreserved support for Ukraine in this war. Not only that, but the political elites of both nations, without exception, expressed their permanent commitment to membership not only in the EU but also in the NATO alliance as soon as possible.

It is extremely important that international actors recognize this momentum and take advantage of it in order to avoid a similar situation in 2010, when the opportunity and the political will of all three nations for BiH to become a member of the NATO alliance was missed. This missed opportunity and the passivity of the international community has shown how much one should not hesitate in specific historical moments, because in the future such failures can be irreversibly fatal. On the other hand, political actors in the RS show their support for Russia and find themselves in the unenviable situation of proving that they are a sincerer partner to Russia than the official Belgrade. This led to the constant collapse of the narrative about the

pro-European future and permanently cemented the rejection of any discussion about the potential membership in the NATO alliance. I repeat, these same politicians from the RS were ready for BiH to join NATO until 2010.

EU must not miss a moment like NATO did! My thesis is that momentarily EU has extremely small reform potential in BiH and huge geopolitical potential which is not aware of. EU cannot influence internal processes because European issues are not part of the political dynamics in BiH. Plus, we are facing at the moment a complete absence of the honest desire towards the enlargement of the Union. Brussels will become a real factor of political change with huge reform potential only in the advanced phase of negotiations. Only when the EU path becomes an internal issue, when EU questions become election issues, then we are on the trail of creating a plural, democratic, multinational state. Then there will be no declarative support or bluffing, citizens will punish any departure from EU policy because membership will be close. Such a situation will lead key actors to a situation of excellence where the EU will have strong levers of pressure, and domestic politicians must necessarily give in and approach a compromise.

EU can resolve long-term geopolitical confusion in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkans, especially BiH, is a battlefield on which the EU should build or give up its geopolitical subjectivity! Smart moves by the EU would be granting candidate status and open negotiations with all WB countries. This process should not be accelerated, but really serious, precise, long-term and sometimes really rough. BiH in that scenario should go through a difficult negotiation process (reforming) through which European issues would become internal and the EU official would create strong mechanism of reforms and influence. Otherwise we will remain tied to two autocratic regimes - Turkey and Russia. Political elites from Banja Luka will stay as a expositure of Russian influence in the WB, and *vice versa* political Sarajevo will remain Balkans expository for the Turkish imperial influence. BiH does not have any chance to remain a functional democratic state. In this situation, the EU remains an irrelevant geopolitical entity in whose backyard the two most dangerous imperial regimes on the very edge of the continent are nesting. The big question is whether Brussels can afford it. Allowing it, Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain a (semi)protectorate of the International Community and the expository of two imperial authoritarian regimes (Turkey and Russia).