



Elmar Ismayılzada

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7789-3956>

PhD student in Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University, Azerbaijan,  
ismaylazedelmar@gmail.com

### Atıf Künyesi | Citation Info

Ismayılzada, E. (2025). "Facing the Fractures": Exploring Challenges in Bosnia's Peacebuilding Journey. *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi*, 12 (1), 443-450.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15627552>

## "Facing the Fractures": Exploring Challenges in Bosnia's Peacebuilding Journey

### Abstract

*The article deals with the path of development and the challenges in modern terms of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995, peacebuilding activities was started in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the international community. Over the past period, peacebuilding has achieved limited success in the conflict. Ukrainian war in 2022 also affected the conflict of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The accusation of the West by Russia and China in the problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina raised doubts about the effectiveness of peacebuilding. From this point of view, this topic is relevant in current terms. Methodology: Analysis and synthesis methods were used in the preparation of the study. The study identified successes, failures and shortcomings of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The position of local actors, criticism and current challenges in the peacebuilding process were analyzed. Based on the current international situation, the study concludes that it is necessary to adapt peacebuilding to the challenges of the time, the importance of its long-term application in the Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict.*

**Keywords:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Peacebuilding, Conflict, International, Actor

## "Çatlaklarla Yüzleşmek": Bosna'nın Barış İnşası Yolculuğundaki Zorlukları Keşfetmek

### Öz

*Bu makale, Bosna Hersek'te barışın inşasının gelişim sürecini ve modern anlamda karşılaşılan zorlukları ele almaktadır. 1995'te Dayton Anlaşması'nın imzalanmasının ardından uluslararası toplum*



*tarafından Bosna Hersek'te barış inşası faaliyetleri başlatılmıştır. Geçen süre zarfında, barış inşası çatışmada sınırlı bir başarı elde etti. 2022'deki Ukrayna savaşı Bosna Hersek'teki çatışmayı da etkiledi. Rusya ve Çin'in Bosna Hersek sorununda Batı'yı suçlaması, barış inşasının etkinliği konusunda şüpheleri artırdı. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, bu konu güncel açıdan önemlidir. Metodoloji: Çalışmanın hazırlanmasında analiz ve sentez yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, Bosna Hersek'te barış inşasının başarılarını, başarısızlıklarını ve eksikliklerini tespit etmiştir. Barışın inşası sürecinde yerel aktörlerin konumu, eleştiriler ve mevcut zorluklar analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, mevcut uluslararası duruma dayanarak, barış inşasının zamanın zorluklarına uyarlanmasının gerekli olduğu ve Bosna Hersek çatışmasında uzun vadeli uygulanmasının önemi sonucuna varmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Bosna Hersek, Barış İnşası, Çatışma, Uluslararası, Aktör*

## **Introduction**

After the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international community began peacebuilding activities here. Peacebuilding was carried out by NATO, EU, OSCE, UN, OHR and other organizations in the political, economic, social, military and other fields. In carrying out this activity, negotiations and cooperation with local actors were held. Over the past period, NATO's withdrawal from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the passivity of US policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina have raised doubts about the effectiveness of the peace-building process. The impacts of the Ukrainian war, which started in 2022, soon began to be observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This drew attention to the assessment of peacebuilding activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The topic is relevant from this point of view.

In preparing the study, preference was given to data from the recent period. Sources indicate that the successes of the international community were in the creation of institutions (Kozljak, 2021) and failures were in the reform process (Fazlić, 2020). Some criticisms of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been directed at the activities of the High Representative (International Crisis Group, 2022). Mainly historical factors (Kapetanović & Illerhues, 2015) and complex political system were determined as peacebuilding difficulties (Jaeho & Sup, 2023). The study highlights the factors and challenges facing Bosnia and Herzegovina that are delaying this process, along with identifying the point to which their peacebuilding activities have reached. From this perspective, the study demonstrates a comprehensive approach to the question. The study has scientific significance in terms of highlighting the current state and forecasting the future of peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **1. Brief historical review of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

After the death of B. Tito in Yugoslavia, problems began to appear in the political, economic and other spheres. Unlike Slovenia and Croatia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the reaction to these events became passive (Bjarnason, 2001). Different positions of ethnic groups within Bosnia and Herzegovina on the breakup of Yugoslavia have led to the incitement of conflict. A practical reflection of this manifested itself in the declaration of independence (Harland, 2017). The Yugoslav government wanted to restore its power in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, it participated in the war on the side of the Serbs. The "search for security" resulting from these processes led to the outbreak of ethnic war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 (Demény, 2011). Groups supported by the parties of the conflict in the war changed occasionally. This indicated distrust between them. Ethnic groups were supported by "parent states." Bosnian Croats supported by Croatia, Serbs supported by Serbia throughout the war (Mearsheimer, Evera & Van, 1995). There were cases when contradictions reigned within the ethnic group (example of Fikret Abdić) (Bjarnason, 2001). The peace plans proposed by international actors (Carrington-Cutileiro Plan, Vance-Owen Plan, Owen-Stoltenberg Plan, Contact Group Plan) were rejected by the parties either because of superiority or an external power factor. A practical step towards peace during the war can be considered the achievement of an agreement between Bosnians and Croats in 1994 through US mediation (Mearsheimer, Evera & Van, 1995). In 1995, the aggravation of humanitarian problems in the conflict zone and the loss of control over the process revealed the importance of the intervention of the international community in the conflict for ending the war. As a result, international actors, using pressure tools, forced the parties of the war to sign The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina on December 14, 1995. This agreement did not satisfy the requirements of the parties and marked the beginning of a new system.

## **2. Peacebuilding activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995-2024).**

The peacebuilding acts in Bosnia include attempts to amend the Constitution, the Restoration and Recovery Program (Özoflu & Besgu, 2023). White Ribbon Day (Kazansky, Marijana Musladin & Ondrejmkova, 2021). Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Raluca, 2020). Within the framework of these activities and attempts, the international community was successful or unsuccessful.

Reforms carried out by the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the Constitutional Court, Indirect Taxation, High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council were successful. Security reforms have achieved the determined results (Kozljak, 2021). In the

political and legal terms, "April Package," "Butmir Package," and "Prud Agreement" reforms were unsuccessful. "Compact for Growth and Employment" ("Reform Agenda") reform was considered an indicator of the growing attention of the international community to the economic sphere (Fazlić, 2020). The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the War Crimes Chamber, created to carry out the reconciliation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have not made significant progress (Jaeho & Sup, 2023). Although the goal was achieved during the 2002 constitutional amendment, practical results were limited (Dedić, 2020). To assess peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is necessary to refer to a number of international indexes. The Fragile State Index, Political Stability Index and Global Peace Index are considered useful in this regard. According to the Fragile States Index 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks 77th among 179 countries. The report assesses Bosnia and Herzegovina as "elevated warning." Compared to last year, this figure was less. The Factionalized Elites section was higher than the others (The Fund for Peace. Fragile States Index Annual Report, 2023). According to the 2022 Political Stability Index, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked 131st out of 193 countries (Political stability - Country rankings, 2024). According to the Global Peace Index in 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked 61st out of 163 countries. In the index, this country is rated as "high" (Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Peace Index, 2023). Threats to peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina are both within and outside the country. Internal threats include the subversive position of the Bosnian Serbs and Croats. The secessionist position of the Republika Srpska and some of the Bosnian Croats affects the stability of the Dayton system negatively. Republika Srpska's steps to slow down the integration process to NATO is a clear example of prioritizing political interests (Larsen, 2020). Russia and China are indicated as external threats. By supporting Republika Srpska, Russia disputes the authority of Western states and slows down the peacebuilding process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The group of "Night Wolves" is considered one of the strongholds of Russia in this country (Cipan & Kirichenko, 2024). China stands out as a potential threat, in this context "concern about the spread of authoritarianism and economic and political dependence" is emphasized in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bagheri & Bagheri, 2020). The Dayton system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is subject to a number of criticisms. A weak and complex federal system, the formation of a "culture of dependence" on external forces (Dempsey, 2001) the dominance of "corporatism" in the political system are considered these criticisms (Memović & Trlin, 2022). In 2005, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe published an article criticizing interference of the High Representative to the system (International Crisis Group,

2022). The fact that political parties did not form a coalition during peace-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina indicates the shortcomings of the process (Pejanović, 2020). In historical terms, Bosnia and Herzegovina has never been a single voluntary political union throughout history, peoples tried to live in the same area as a result of the coercive policies of the imperialist forces (Kapetanović & Illerhues, 2015). There are various approaches among ethnic groups to the 1992-1995 war (Hronešová, 2022). 82% of the population in the Bosnian-Croat Federation, 66% of the population in the Republika Srpska welcome Bosnian citizenship (Ruge, 2020). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are different views between the Bosniak, Croatian and Serbian political elites on centralization. Bosniaks favor centralization. Serbs oppose the idea, arguing that centralization would disrupt Dayton's system. Croats cannot formulate a specific position on this issue (Atanasov et al., 2023). Croats express concern about the increasing political weight of Bosniaks in the state system (Kivimäki, Kramer & Pasch, 2012). Bosnian Serbs prefer more to independence instead of membership in the European Union (Bugajski, 2013). Most Bosniaks and Croats oppose it. According to public opinion, Serbs are more interested in dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bugajski, 2013). One of the reasons for the ineffective peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the distant attitude of the population to politics. The "war factor" played a role in the population's departure from politics and led nationalist politicians to enter the political arena. An effective civil society for peacebuilding has not been formed exactly (Milan, 2020). The relations of each ethnic group with foreign countries that it considers close to it can accelerate disintegration within the country (Kivimäki, Kramer & Pasch, 2012). Weak political participation of local actors led to the developing of "dependence syndrome" (Fischer, 2006). The issue of economic and social inequality should be a problematic issue in peacebuilding (Hadžić, 2021). The peacebuilding process faces a number of obstacles. A complex state system prevents the efficient implementation of reconciliation processes (Jaeho & Sup 2023). Economic, state and administrative problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina are leading to a slowdown in economic reforms (Kivimäki, Kramer & Pasch, 2012). As an obstacle to reconciliation, it can be put forward a position of the Republika Srpska on genocide (Stojarová, 2019). The use of vetoes by political parties to support their interests prevents to implement peacebuilding (Rezsa & Mirkovic, 2019/2020). It should also be noted the role of international reactions to factors that impede the peacebuilding. In this sense, the peculiarities of the US and European Union policy towards the Republika Srpska should be emphasized (Pepi, 2021). As a result, the international community has valid reasons to continue the peacebuilding practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It takes a lot of time and effort to

transition from negative peace to positive peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It depends on cooperation between international and local actors.

### Conclusion

Although peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1995 has played a role in stabilizing the country, it has not been able to provide all types of security effectively. Although a number of successful examples have emerged during the process, criticism is directed at international, regional and local actors. Successful US/NATO military security activities contradict the shortcomings of European Union/High Representative activities that continue in the civilian sphere. Failure to implement legal reforms minimizes the expectations of the international community from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Russian threat that emerged in Europe after the 2022 Ukrainian war is prompting the European Union to speed up the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership. The delay by Western states in closing the High Representative suggests that this organization is still necessary. Failures in key peacebuilding areas indicate that this process will still continue for a long time.

### References

- Atanasov, P., Sasajkovski, S., Lazarevski, P., Maljichi, D., & Zarevski, D. (2023). Can Volatile Societies Support Stable States?: Case Studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.
- Bagheri, A., & Bagheri, S. (2020). The balance of power in the Balkans. *Harvard International Review*, 30.
- Bjarnason, M. (2001). The War and War-Games in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. *The Main Events, Disagreements and Arguments, Resulting in, a "De Facto" Divided Country*. Reykjavik: Magnus Bjarnason.
- Bugajski, J. (2013). *Return of the Balkans: Challenges to European Integration and US Disengagement*. Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press.
- Country rankings (2024). [www.theglobaleconomy.com](http://www.theglobaleconomy.com). *Political stability - Country rankings*. [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/wb\\_political\\_stability/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/wb_political_stability/).
- Dedić, H. (2020). Dayton Peace Agreement and Political Reforms in the Context of the Transition of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Society. *International scientific journal European Perspectives*, 11(2 (20)), 41-58.
- Demény, G. (2011). *Factors of socio-economic uncertainty in the Bosnian War*. Microcon
- Dempsey, G. T. (2001). Bosnia: The Making Of A Potemkin State. *National Security and The Future*, 117-161.
- Farcas, R. (2020). Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Failure of Post-Conflict Reconciliation. *Astra Salvensis-revista de istorie si cultura*, 8(2020), 119-132

- Fazlić, F. (2020). Twenty five years of the Dayton Agreement. *SEER: Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 23(2), 165-186.
- Fischer, M. (2006). Bosnia's Challenge: Economic Reform, Political Transformation and War-to-Peace-Transition. *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina—Ten Years after Dayton*. Münster & London: Lit-Verlag, 441-470.
- Hadžić, F. (2021). Social And political (the Others) exclusions within the post-Yugoslav ethnonational institutionalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Birey ve Toplum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 11(1), 171-196.
- Harland, D. (2017). Never again: International intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *UK Government Stabilisation Unit*.
- Hronešová, B. J. (2022). Ethnopolitist denial and crime relativisation in Bosnian Republika Srpska. *East European Politics*, 38(1), 21-42.
- Jaeho, K., & Sup, K. C. (2023). A Self-determined Failure of the Ethnically Fractionalised?: A Comparative Review of Self-Deterministic Peacebuilding Governance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Myanmar. *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 30(2), 25-46.
- Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Peace Index 2023: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*. Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023.
- International Crisis Group. (2022). *Managing the Risks of Instability in the Western Balkans: Europe Report*. International Crisis Group.
- Kapetanović, A. (Ed.). (2015). *The Legacy of Peace: Bosnia and Herzegovina 20 years after the Dayton Peace Accords*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Kazansky, R., Musladin, M., & Ondrejmkova, I. (2021). Bosnia and Herzegovina: from war to negative peace. *Security Dimensions: International & National Studies*, 35, 50-64.
- Kirichenko, D., & Cipan, V. (2024). Russian Influence and Disinformation Operations in the Balkans. *Georgetown Security Studies Review* 11, 65-85.
- Kivimäki, T., Kramer, M., & Pasch, P. (2007). The Dynamics of Conflict in the. *European Journal of International Relations*, 16(2), 297-309.
- Kozljak, A. (2021). International community must fulfil uncompleted work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Skopje, North Macedonia*, 28, 28-36.
- Larsen, H. B. L. (2020). The Western Balkans between the EU, NATO, Russia and China. *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 263.
- Mearsheimer, J. J., & Van Evera, S. (1995). When peace means war. *New republic*, 18, 16-21.
- Memović, E. H., & Trlin, D. (2022). Political Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Principle of the Constituency of Peoples. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 22(1). 51-66.

Milan, C. (2020). Reshaping citizenship through collective action: Performative and prefigurative practices in the 2013–2014 cycle of contention in Bosnia & Herzegovina. In *Activist Citizenship in Southeast Europe* (pp. 10-25). Routledge.

Özoflu, M. A., & Besgul, B. (2023). A Critical Analysis of the Neoliberal State-Building in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Gap Between Aims and Achievements. *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 14(1), 131-150.

Pejanović, M. (2020). Dayton Peace Accords—A Turning Point in the Historical Sustainability of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *International scientific journal European Perspectives*, 11(2 (20)), 17-39.

Pepi, P. (2021). The Road to Independence: Historical Background, Legality, and Legitimacy of the Proposed Secession of the Bosnian Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Penn St. JL & Int'l Aff.*, 10, 249.

Ruge, M. (2020). *Hostage State: How to Free Bosnia from Dayton's Paralysing Grip*. ECFR,

Stojarová, V. (2019). Unifying the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina—mission completed?. *Vojenské rozhledy*, 28(3), 71-82.

The Fund for Peace. (2023). *Fragile States Index Annual Report 2023*. The Fund for Peace.