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Department of Russian and East European Studies

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**Bosnian National Identity in Discourse: Competing  
Narratives in Contemporary Bosnian Politics**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Year of the defence: 2025

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on  
10.12.2024.

Vuk Jević

## References

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## **Abstract**

This research analyzes competing discursive conceptualizations of the Bosnian national identity by utilizing the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) developed by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl. Since the focus of the thesis is discourse produced by the Bosnian political elites, the rhetoric of 3 key political actors - Milorad Dodik, Bakir Izetbegović, and Dragan Čović will be examined. While the research examines discourse-internal linguistic strategies, it also situates the discourse in a broader socio-political context in order to achieve the 2 main goals of the research: discovering the ways in which discourse surrounding national identity is produced, and what the underlying motivations of political actors are. The discursive topic of national identity will be examined in relation to other subtopics, mainly the topics of secession and centralization, in order to achieve the aims of the thesis. As hypothesized, it is found that political actors produce discourse in order to create/reify in-group identities, mobilize voters, demobilize the opposition and maintain the status quo. Additionally, it was found that institutional arrangements of the Bosnian political system enable nationalist discourse to thrive – a problem which demands thorough work on institutional reform in the country.

## **Abstrakt**

Tento výzkum analyzuje konkurenční diskurzivní konceptualizace bosenské národní identity s využitím diskurzivně-historického přístupu (DHA), který vyvinuli Ruth Wodak a Martin Reisigl. Vzhledem k tomu, že těžištěm práce je diskurz produkováný bosenskými politickými elitami, bude zkoumána rétorika 3 klíčových politických aktérů - Milorada Dodika, Bakira Izetbegoviće a Dragana Čoviće. Zatímco výzkum zkoumá diskurzivně-vnitřní lingvistické strategie, zároveň zasazuje diskurz do širšího společensko-politického kontextu, aby bylo dosaženo 2 hlavních cílů výzkumu: odhalit způsoby, jakými se diskurz obklopující národní identitu vytváří, a co je základem motivace politických aktérů. Diskurzivní téma národní identity bude zkoumáno ve vztahu k dalším dílčím tématům, zejména tématům secese a centralizace, aby bylo dosaženo cílů práce. Jak se předpokládá, bylo zjištěno, že političtí aktéři produkují diskurz, aby vytvořili/reifikovali identitu ve skupině, mobilizovali voliče, demobilizovali opozici a udrželi status quo. Navíc bylo zjištěno, že institucionální uspořádání bosenského politického systému umožňuje vzkvétat nacionalistickému diskurzu – problém, který vyžaduje důkladnou práci na institucionální

reformě v zemi.

## **Keywords**

Bosnia and Herzegovina, national identity, Discourse-Historical Approach

## **Klíčová slova**

Bosna a Hercegovina, národní identita, diskurzivně-historický přístup

## **Název práce**

Bosenská národní identita v diskurzu: konkurenční narativy v současné bosenské politice

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# Contents

Introduction .....	9
1.1 Literature Review .....	10
1.2 Research Questions and Hypothesis.....	11
2. Methodology and Theory .....	11
2.1 Discourse-Historical Approach .....	11
2.2 National identity .....	14
2.3 Limitations of the research .....	21
2.4 Thesis Scope .....	22
2.5 Sources .....	23
3. Discursive conceptualization of the Bosnian national identity .....	23
3.1 Historical and political background.....	23
a) The complexity of the Bosnian political system.....	23
b) Political parties and significant political actors.....	24
3.2 Discourse immanent critique .....	28
3.3 Socio-diagnostic critique .....	38
3.4 Prospective critique .....	41
Conclusion.....	43
Summary.....	44
References .....	44

## **Abbreviations**

AILA – American Immigration Lawyers Association

BiH (B&H) – Bosnia and Herzegovina

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

DHA – Discourse-Historical Approach

DPA – Dayton Peace Agreement

EU – European Union

FBiH – Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

HDZ BiH – Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine

IC – International Community

OHR – Office of the High Representative

PIC – Peace Implementation Council

RS – Republika Srpska

SDA – Stranka demokratske akcije

SNSD – Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata

UN – United Nations

## **Introduction**

The main goal of this thesis is to analyze the ways in which the modern Bosnian national identity is discursively conceptualized by the political elites, and what the underlying goals of perpetrating such discourse are. In order to achieve this goal, research will be conducted qualitatively, using the methodological framework of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), while simultaneously being informed by Siniša Malešević's and Rogers Brubaker's notions of national identity. Since the thesis follows sound methodological footsteps of the DHA, Bosnia's modern history will be expounded upon in order to provide context for the ongoing socio-political moment.

For the purpose of providing a fuller account of the ways in which the national identity is constructed in the Bosnian political space, the presidents of the 3 main political parties (SNSD - Milorad Dodik, SDA - Bakir Izetbegović, HDZ BiH - Dragan Čović) which respectively "represent" each one of the 3 constituent peoples (Serbs, Bosniaks, Croats) will be examined. The primary focus of the analysis will be placed on the interviews, speeches and political statements of the leaders of these parties.

Following the main steps of the DHA, this thesis consists of a discourse-internal critique - analyzing intra-discursive features, as well as a socio-diagnostic critique - placing the discourse in a broader socio-political context. The last step of this research is prospective, and partially speculative, offering a deeper institutional analysis, as well as a critique of the role of the International Community in Bosnian politics. While the Bosnian War and the immediate post-Dayton political space sparked a huge academic interest in the country (concerning studies of organized violence, ethnicity, state-formation etc.), it seems that the recent developments and transformations of the discourse regarding the Bosnian national identity have not been as appealing to academics. Since the current predicament is highly intricate and contingent, more efforts are needed to detangle new socio-political realities. It is important to shine light upon the political (mis)practices that have been contributing to the state of crisis the country is in right now.

The first chapter of this research consists of a brief introduction, an overview of the used literature, as well as the main research questions and hypotheses. The second chapter deals with the methodology used throughout the research, or rather the Discourse-Historical

Approach, while covering the theoretical outlook which will be used to clear up any analytical inconsistencies. Certain limitations which have been uncovered throughout the preliminary round of research will be discussed in this chapter as well. The third chapter includes a short overview of the modern history of the country, as well as its political actors, leading into the application of the relevant methodology to the discourse surrounding the Bosnian national identity. The conclusion of this thesis discusses the relevant research findings.

## **1.1 Literature Review**

Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl offer an extensive overview of the Discourse-Historical Approach, a methodological framework they developed in order to analyze the discursive construction of national identity. Wodak's and Reisigl's works used in this thesis include: "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)" (2017), "The Discursive Construction of National Identities", co-authored by de Cillia (1999), as well as other supplementary articles. Even though their methodological work is the backbone of this thesis, the theoretical basis that they use in their work holds equal value. That being said, Siniša Malešević and Rogers Brubaker provide accounts of national identity that are used to address any analytical inconsistencies which may arise. In Malešević's "The chimera of national identity" (2011), "Identity as Ideology: Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism" (2006) and Brubaker's "Ethnicity Without Groups" (2004), the ambiguous nature of national identity in academic work is addressed, and alternative views which hold more methodological value are offered (such as Malešević's separation of national identity into ideology and micro-solidarity). Although specific analyses of contemporary Bosnian political rhetoric are sparse, Gerard Toal's "'Republika Srpska will have a referendum': the rhetorical politics of Milorad Dodik" (2013), as well as Jasmin Hasić's "'Deviating' Party Leadership Strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Comparison of Milorad Dodik and Dragan Čović" (2020) comprehensively analyse the discursive practices of these two politicians, offering an overview of potential motivations behind their actions. John Hulseley's "Party Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (2016), as well as his essay "Explaining the Success of Nationalist Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina", co-authored by Asim Mujkić (2010), provide important insights into the politics of post-Dayton Bosnia. These works explain the institutional nature of ethnic division and persistence of nationalism in the country.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Hypothesis**

The aim of this thesis is to answer these primary research questions:

- How do the Bosnian political elites discursively conceptualize the Bosnian national identity?
- What are the motivations behind various discursive conceptualizations of the Bosnian national identity?

While the first research question seems to be more open-ended, the main hypothesis that consolidates these two questions is:

- Bosnian political elites use various discursive tactics to construct an image of the Bosnian national identity in order to create and reify in-group identities, to mobilize voters, demobilize opposition, and ultimately sustain the status quo.

## **2. Methodology and Theory**

### **2.1 Discourse-Historical Approach**

Since the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) will be used as the foundational analytical framework for this work, it is important to discuss certain methodological implications that come with the framework itself. Originally developed by the Viennese School of Discourse Analysis (specifically Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl), the DHA is meant to provide the analyst with a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach which can be used to examine context-specific situations. Wodak and Reisigl identify their theoretical position with the broader tradition of critical theory, categorizing the DHA as a subtype of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). While critical theory consists of many different strands of sociological, political and philosophical thought, and as a tradition cannot be strictly defined, the main goals of the DHA do broadly correspond to those of CDA, and critical theory in general. These goals are specifically defined by the authors:

- 1) “‘Text or discourse immanent critique’ aims at discovering inconsistencies, (self-) contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourseinternal, for example, logico-semantic, cohesive, syntactic, performative, presuppositional,

implicational, argumentation, fallacious and interactional (e.g. turntaking) structures” (Wodak, 2015, p. 3). As such, this ‘first tenet’ of the DHA focuses on discourse itself, without taking into account its broader social ramifications.

- 2) “‘Sociodiagnostic critique’ is concerned with the demystifying exposure of the – manifest or latent – persuasive, propagandist, populist, ‘manipulative’ character of discursive practices” (Wodak, 2015, p. 3). Now the analysis leaves the intra-discursive frame, interpreting the position of discourse within a broader socio-political context, and deducing its function. Although the DHA does not provide the analyst with a set of ethical values as guidelines for a successful socio-diagnostic critique, there are certain standards that critical theorists tend to adhere to. While reflecting upon Habermas’ discourse ethics, Eckersley (2009) states that: “[a]s to normative ethics, critical theory’s overriding ethical goal is to promote emancipation, or to remove constraints on human autonomy, by means of ever more inclusive and less distorted dialogue” (p. 347). Reisigl and Wodak (2001) generally resonate with this view, making their political position entirely explicit: “an engaged social critique is nurtured ethically by a sense of justice based on the normative and universalist conviction of the unrestricted validity of human rights and by the awareness of suffering, which both take sides against social discrimination, repression, domination, exclusion and exploitation and for emancipation, self-determination and social recognition (in the Habermasian sense of ‘difference-sensible inclusion’)” (p. 34).
- 3) “Prospective critique”, seen by the authors as a form of social action, aims to give a genuine course of action - a set of recommendations which address issues identified by the previous steps of analysis. This ‘last tenet’ of the DHA is done in accordance with the afore-mentioned ethical values, with the goal of identifying, and politically confronting inequalities and under-representations which limit participation in the public sphere. In order to conduct a successful prospective critique, the analyst needs to be wary of the past, as well as of the present discursive moment in order to propose a course of action for the future. This is where the *historical* character of the DHA shines, in what Wodak and Reisigl categorize as “retrospective critique” - a critique of the status quo, and the way the past is constructed in the present, which helps the analyst realize the complexities of the current socio-political moment.

These three goals will be used as a general outline of this research. This work will additionally be guided by the DHA's three-dimensionality, and to do so it is needed to:

1. Identify the main topics/subtopics in a given discourse;
2. Analyze discursive strategies;
3. Examine “linguistic means (as types) and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realizations (as tokens)” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 93).

However, in order to engage in a meaningful three-dimensional analysis, it is important to differentiate between concepts that are crucial for the DHA: discourse, text, genre and field of action. Wodak and Reisigl (2017) define discourse as: “a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action” (p. 89). These practices are “socially constituted and socially constitutive” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 89), meaning that they are both affected by social circumstances, while simultaneously building those circumstances. However, the Viennese School of Discourse Analysis does not see language in Foucauldian terms, labeling it as an impersonal force which is divorced from human agency, but they see it rather as a tool which can be used in a plethora of ways. This is why DHA analysts conduct a thorough examination of argumentativity - a tool which actors use to display their construction of discourse as valid. Reproduction of discourse is impossible without its use, and deconstructing arguments leads towards the deconstruction of discourse itself. Among others, the main discursive strategies that will be observed in the given sources, and consequently criticized are *nomination* (differentiation between objects in a discourse), *predication* (assignment of values to those objects), *argumentation* (attempts at validating a discourse), *perspectivization* (situation of the subject) and *intensification* (adapting the intensity of discursive topics).

Furthermore, all discourse is inter-linked, maintaining relations with other discursive topics, i.e. a discursive topic cannot exist in a vacuum, and is always linked to a “macro-topic” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017). If discourse is seen as a cluster of semiotic practices, texts are then a part of that cluster, or rather results of semiotic practices, which are temporally and physically separated from the situation in which they originated. These texts then fit into a

certain genre - “a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity” (Fairclough, 1995, as cited in Wodak, Reisigl, 2017, p. 90).

A field of action is a space which loosely delimits discourse, determined by its function/use. Wodak and Reisigl (2001) distinguish several fields of action: “the functions of legislation, self-presentation, manufacturing of public opinion, developing party-internal consent, advertising and vote-getting, governing as well as executing and controlling as well as expressing (oppositional) dissent” (p. 36). These fields are not strictly separated, and discourses can freely move between them. One of the main aims of the DHA is to examine how different texts and discourse interact with each other, and how these relationships affect underlying aims and motivations. These characteristics of the DHA are labeled as *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity*.

What makes the DHA so applicable is that it offers enough space for the analyst to work within the confines of their own analytical lens, with a high degree of freedom in terms of interdisciplinarity, while still keeping a level of rigidity which is necessary for thorough critical work, enabling the analyst to not slip into their own subjectivity.

## **2.2 National identity**

Since the goal of this research is to inquire into the ways in which the Bosnian national identity is discursively conceptualized, the views which will be expounded upon will stand in opposition to primordialist and perennialist (essentialist) definitions of national identity. In other words, views which portray national attachments as atavistic, long-lasting and inherent to human nature have already been thoroughly invalidated by a plethora of social scientists (see Eller & Coughlan, 1993; Chandra, 2006; Brubaker, 2004, for more details), and as such will not be relevant for this research. However, even though there are little to no primordialists found in modern-day academia (Coakley, 2018), primordialist narratives still occupy a large space in media and culture, and their presence will be examined in the context of Bosnian politics.

In their analysis of national identity, De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak rely on several scholars, including Benedict Anderson, Pierre Bourdieu, Paul Ricoeur, Denis-Constant Martin, Stuart Hall and Leszek Kolakowski. However, the main assumptions they draw are the following:

1. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson (1983), a nation is considered to be an “imagined community” (de Cillia, Reisigl, Wodak, 1999, p. 153). As such, this community is limited and sovereign, constructed through shared symbols, language and media. Since national communities are extremely large in comparison to face-to-face communities, they can only operate within the minds of the citizens.
2. National identities are “conceived as specific forms of social identities – [they] are discursively, by means of language and other semiotic systems, produced, reproduced, transformed and destructed” (de Cillia, Reisigl, Wodak, 1999, p. 153). This is carried out from the top-down (by the elites and media), spread through bureaucratic systems, but also influenced from the bottom-up.
3. Borrowing from Bordieu (1990), Wodak and Reisigl consider national identity to be a form of *habitus* - “a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes, (a) of related emotional attitudes intersubjectively shared within a specific group of persons; (b) as well as of similar behavioural dispositions; (c) all of which are internalized through ‘national’ socialization” (de Cillia et al., 1999, p. 153).
4. The construction of national identities is based on the “construction of difference/distinctiveness and uniqueness” (de Cillia et al., 1999, p. 153). This means that heterogeneous social realities are homogenized in order to achieve a unitary identity, while differences between the in-group and out-groups are identified and exaggerated, in order to reify and solidify the in-group identity.
5. Finally, “national identities are not completely consistent, stable and immutable. They are, to the contrary, to be understood as dynamic, fragile, 'vulnerable' and often incoherent” (de Cillia et al., 1999, p. 154). There is not a single, unitary national identity, and as such every analysis of specific national identities should be context-dependent, in line with the principles of the DHA.

At times it seems that, instead of distancing themselves from colloquial definitions of national identity (which are more often than not perennial), these definitions only reify that which they try to negate. While claiming that national identities are “conceived as specific forms of social identity”, and that they are a sort of a *habitus* (a complex network of various

perception schemes, emotional attitudes and behavioral dispositions), an underlying implication is made - that national identity exists as a facet of social reality, an objective phenomenon which can be analytically dissected. Just by claiming that national identities are not inborn, but constructed, still implies their objective existence within the social realm, reifying them as something solid and rigid. After providing a relatively strong definition of national identity, relying on a number of thinkers, Wodak and Reisigl undermine the foundations of their own theoretical framework by stressing its vulnerable nature. If national identities are not “consistent, stable and immutable”, does it even make sense to approach them analytically, or even to apply other thinkers’ theories to real-life examples? How does one reconcile this apparent “dynamic, fragile, incoherent” nature of national identity, while still trying to use it as a sound analytical concept, distancing it from its essentialist, colloquial use?

Both Brubaker and Malešević criticize the extent to which coarse constructivism has devalued the concept of national identity by defining it as something porous, unstable, ever-changing, *liquid*, and as such the term lost its analytical value. On one hand, these definitions of national identity do not prove to be analytically useful, since they provide a conceptualization so vague that it almost makes no sense to determine the boundaries of national identity, completely doing away with the concept itself. On the other hand, it is often the thinkers who support such a notion, and stand in opposition to the hard-line essentialist views of identity, that end up reifying them. As Brubaker (2004) explains, this conflation is not caused by “intellectual sloppiness”, but rather by:

the dual orientation of many academic identitarians as both *analysts* and *protagonists* of identity politics. It reflects the tension between the constructivist language that is required by academic correctness and the foundationalist or essentialist message that may be required if appeals to “identity” are to be found in practice. Nor is the solution to be found in a more consistent constructivism: for it is not clear why that which is routinely characterized as “multiple, fragmented and fluid: should be conceptualized as “identity” at all. (p. 33)

Hence, Brubaker provides a vocabulary which seems to be more analytically useful. That which is perceived as national identity is rather an exercise of *identification* and *categorization*, a continuous process of identifying oneself (or others) in relational and

categorical ways. By deeming national identity as a process of identification, its rigid nature is not immediately assumed, and it is not considered as an objective feature of social reality, a uniform thing actors subscribe to (willingly or unwillingly). As Brubaker (2004) claims: “Identification...invites specification of agents that do the identifying...[it] does not require a specifiable “identifier”; it can be pervasive ...without being accomplished by discrete, specified persons or institutions. Identification can be carried ...anonymously by discourses or public narratives” (p. 43). As such, identification which is conducted discursively by the political elites will be one of the subjects of this analysis, corresponding to Wodak and Reisigl’s discursive strategy of nomination (2017). Brubaker argues that political elites use discourse to influence how people perceive themselves, both on an individual level and on a wider, group-level. This potential change in perception is conducted with the goal of identifying and categorizing various *others*, homogenizing and establishing in-group solidarity, and ultimately directing collective action, which is not necessarily done by the imposition of wholly-constructed identities, but rather by categorization, which is imposed through bureaucratic means.

Furthermore, “self-understanding” and “social location” are viable replacements that accurately describe non-instrumental action, or rather any action stimulated by one’s understanding of *self*, as well as one’s position within a broader group. Although these features may be apparent when talking about identity, their use is important for analytical clearness:

Like the term "identification," "self-understanding" lacks the reifying connotations of "identity." Yet it is not restricted to situations of flux and instability. Self-understandings may be variable across time and across persons, but they may be stable. Semantically, "identity" implies sameness across time or persons; hence the awkwardness of continuing to speak of "identity" while repudiating the implication of sameness. "Self-understanding," by contrast, has no privileged semantic connection with sameness or difference. (Brubaker, 2004, p. 45)

Finally, “commonality, connectedness and groupness” (Brubaker, 2004, p. 46) aim at explaining the affective ties towards national identity, with “commonality” describing perceived in-group similarities, “connectedness” as perceived relational ties between in-group members, and “groupness” as a feeling of attachment towards a bigger group entity.

However, it is important to note that these are not some atavistic tendencies that people have, but rather features that are formed through “public narratives [and] discursive frames” (Brubaker, 2004, p. 47). Hence, the goal of political elites would be to portray and categorize commonalities between the in-group members, their connectedness and belongingness to a group. It is interesting to note that, even though most members of a nation will not meet each other throughout their lifetimes, it is enough to stress commonality without building a picture of connectedness, in order to invoke strong feelings of groupness, as well as enmity towards other groups.

Although it might seem as if Brubaker proposes too many substitutions for the concept of national identity, such a framework provides a sounder analytical alternative, and clears up any contradictions which may arise in constructivist thought. Malešević (2006) shares the same sentiment, arguing that *nationess* is best observed “as a set of contingencies, discursive frames, political projects or organisational routines. Just as ethnicity is not a group but a form of social relationship, similarly nationess is a dynamic set of historically framed processes” (p. 27). Furthermore, Malešević (2011) states that “‘national identity’ is a residual concept often utilised by social actors to make objective material order consistent with their subjective experience of that order” (p. 273), and as such, it would make more sense to determine why this happens, as opposed to reveal the objective nature of national identities. However, besides proving the futility of national identity as an analytical concept, these definitions do not explain the fact that people feel genuine connection towards their nation, that they perceive their national identity as something sacred, and that sometimes individuals die for their nation. To explain these phenomena, Malešević uses the concepts of *ideology* and *solidarity*, or rather, how small-scale solidarities become transposed onto larger ideological projects.

From a plethora of sociological and psychological research (see Dunbar, 1998; Zajonc, 1968; Johnson, 2019, for more details), it is apparent that group attachments arise ‘naturally’ on a smaller scale - whether that is on the level of a family, work-place, or even on the level of a tribe, as well as in relation to culture and ideology relevant for that community. In other words, genuine solidarity comes in the form of micro-solidarity, which is only to be nurtured through face-to-face connections. This kind of solidarity has the potential to explain non-instrumental action, or rather the “affective” nature of social action and behaviour. However, there are no genuine explanations to be found that would paint national attachments as

something intrinsic and natural as kinship bonds. And since conceptualizations of national identity do not provide one with an answer to this question either, but only reify that which is already present in discourse, Malešević (2011) provides another alternative: “what really is worth exploring is not ‘national identity’ but the ideology of nationalism, and unlike ‘national identities’ nationalism has clear empirical referents. It is an ideological doctrine and practice whose presence, intensity and prevalence can be corroborated empirically” (p. 286). Through the process of ideologization, which involves discourse perpetration, media, educational and various institutional practices, national narratives are normalized, becoming a part of the ideological framework people use to navigate reality. Hence, that which is scattered, heterogenous and not delineated in people’s minds becomes an essence, homogenized and conceptualized in national terms. These heterogeneous social realities do not stem from an in-group essence, but rather emerge out of social interaction. In other words, they are not objects of ethnicity and nationality, even though they are used and perceived as such. It is rather that there is no objective national identity from which cultural and ethnic identifiers and characteristics stem from, but rather national identities are politicized segments of actual cultural differences, whether that is language, customs, values, etc. However, it is not as easy to exploit attachments on a smaller scale and extrapolate them onto a national level:

ideologisation of solidarity requires long-term work: it relies on the existing atoms of genuine micro-solidarity that is generated on the local level. When successful, ideologisation operates as a giant fishing net that catches highly diverse and heterogeneous forms of micro-solidarity generated by a variety of small-scale social networks, and in this process articulates its catch as a singular, homogeneous ‘national identity’. (Malešević, 2011, p. 287)

Hence, in order to achieve this goal of extrapolating kinship attachments, various ideological motifs are instrumentalized across different nationalisms, such as the myth of common history, common origin and ancestry, shared pains and experiences, shared enemies, etc. These myths are not manufactured overnight, and they are not the only tactic employed to achieve the image of a strong national identity. Micro-solidarities are enveloped and transposed on a daily basis, through media narratives, educational and institutional practices, through categories in which citizens are put in and social action which enforces and reifies beliefs of national identity. Rather than reflecting the nature of a group of people to strongly

identify with their nation, strong “national identities” actually represent the extent to which a nation succeeds in ideologically infiltrating those small-scale attachments and projecting them onto a larger level.

Although the main aim of this research is not to determine the true nature of national identity, it is important to reflect upon and examine the inconsistencies in the theoretical framework used by Wodak and Reisigl, and to properly address them. So rather than mainly examining the true nature of national identity, the present theoretical framework will be used as a broad guideline, while the discourse regarding national identity will be the focal point of the analysis. In other words, that what political actors say about the Bosnian national identity (explicit references to ‘being Bosnian’) and how they define it is the main interest of this research. Through their conceptualizations, it will be shown that there is no unitary Bosnian national identity that one can subscribe to. Multiplicities of this identity exist depending on the different actors who construct them (both top-down and bottom-up), as well as individual perceptions of those identities. It is precisely the fact that national identity is not an objective dimension of social realities that allows one to observe different ways in which national identity is discursively constructed by the political elites. However, it is not argued in this work that national identity is purely constructed narratively, in a top-down manner. It is rather that a particular narrative surrounding national identity is constructed in this manner, which paints it as something solid, ever-lasting, with strong inherent bonds. Analytically, it is more helpful to consider propositions made by Brubaker and Malešević. One should not operate between the two poles of constructivism and primordialism (essentialism), but rather realize that the concept of national identity itself does not hold much analytical value, since it is often the use of the concept itself that ends up reifying its essentialist use in discourse. That is why it is important to dismantle the concept into categories which are analytically useful, and not observe it as something objective which is narratively constructed, but rather a *narrative construct*. This does not mean that national identities are a spook, and that the feelings of people being closely tied to their nations are invalid, it is rather to critique the use of the concept analytically, which in turn provides one with a more useful framework for approaching this issue.

Hence, a new set of basic assumption regarding the nature of national identity are as following:

1. Both nationalism and identity (as ideologies) are contingent products of modernity, and do not possess any atavistic or primordial qualities. It is rather futile to try to analyse these phenomena outside of the modern socio-political setting.
2. National identity is not a sound analytical concept, and it is better supplemented with other analytical categories in order to evade refying its colloquial use.
3. Perceived national identity arises through exercise and perception, rather than an essence. Its creation involves both actors who perpetuate its production and those who identify with it through acts of identification and categorization, self-understanding and social location, as well as perceptions of commonality, connectedness and groupness.
4. The image of a strong national identity is produced through discourse and narratives, influenced heavily by “specific ideological and organisational scaffoldings that frame, integrate and ultimately control human feelings of attachment” (Malešević, 2017, p. 8). As such, it is better to observe it as nationalist actors instrumentalizing micro-solidarity, than a separate facet of social reality.

### **2.3 Limitations of the research**

While examining available literature regarding the DHA, one comes across a plethora of guidelines formulated by Wodak and Reisigl. Although this is completely understandable, only those guidelines which are crucial for this thesis have been chosen, while excluding others, such as the ten principles of the DHA or “the DHA in eight steps” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017). These steps will still be methodologically relevant, and respected, but they are not going to be expounded upon since their core is already covered in the DHA’s 3 main goals, as well as its three-dimensionality.

Another limitation would be reducing the discourse of the Bosnian national identity to the discourse perpetrated by the elites. This means that this analysis would mostly adhere to the instrumentalist school of thought, linking identity formation to a dominantly top-down approach. By focusing on the ways in which national identity is constructed by the elites, other factors that account for its formation are not being neglected (such as grass-roots movements, and their role in discourse-creation), but elite-influence is rather taken as the

main impact on the identity-building process. However, an analysis tasked with analyzing the whole array of political discourse(s) would include interviewing other interest groups, dissident voices, opinion polls etc. Furthermore, this research may be limited by the lack of literature on the given topic. Although working on a novel topic is stimulating, the inability to rely on others' work may be damaging to the research results. Lastly, Wodak and Resigl (2001) provide a convincing account of limitations of any critical research regarding elite manipulation:

Apropos 'detection' and 'manipulation': from the metaphorical concepts of 'exposure/uncovering/unmasking' and 'manipulation' there arise at least two epistemic problems that one must self-critically (!) take into account. In a certain sense, the notion 'unmasking' contains the overtones of a know-it-all or know-it-better attitude on the part of the analysts, which can be highly problematic if the concepts of 'truth', 'deception' and 'reality' thus implied remain unquestioned...Apart from that, the meaning of the expression risks incapacitating the recipients (hearers or readers) as autonomous, self-aware and self-reflective psycho-physical organisms. Both these problems can be minimised by circumspection and the greatest possible accuracy on our part as critical analysts. That means that we have to look at the data carefully, to apply our analytical tools prudently and to reconstruct the context of the discursive events meticulously, in order to provide transparent and intersubjectively comprehensible interpretations and analyses. (p. 33)

## **2.4 Thesis Scope**

The scope of the thesis has already been briefly touched upon - the analysis will be limited to the discourse perpetuated by the political elites, more specifically those elites who are the president of the 3 leading political parties. However, it is important to address the time frame of the study, which will be limited to the Bosnian politics of the 21st century, more specifically focusing on the period from 2006 onwards. This period is marked by a pronounced shift to the right, and will be discussed in the upcoming sections. Historical events of the 1990s will be mentioned in order to contextualize certain discourse topics/subtopics, however they will not be thoroughly analyzed, since there is already a plethora of academic work that will be used as supporting literature.

## **2.5 Sources**

This thesis both relies on primary sources, such as interviews, political statements and speeches, and on secondary sources which provide a sound methodological and theoretical framework, such as research papers, articles, books and other academic work. Additionally, secondary sources which examine discourse(s) in Bosnian politics will be used, but since there is not much academic work covering the topic, most of the analysis in this thesis will rely on applying afore-mentioned frameworks onto primary sources. These sources have been compiled from news websites and video recordings of relevant political figures. It is ensured that the material is obtained from valid news sites, and that it objectively represents the full context of discursive instances, in other words, that the presented material is not misleading. Furthermore, the affiliation of certain news outlets/media to the respective political parties will be reflected upon in order to examine the underlying motivations of relevant actors. Secondary literature has been selected in accordance to the academic rigour and credibility of the authors, which is backed by the fact that most work used is highly cited, stemming from notable institutions, methodologically thorough and highly applicable.

## **3. Discursive conceptualization of the Bosnian national identity**

### **3.1 Historical and political background**

#### **a) The complexity of the Bosnian political system**

The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) has left Bosnia with a political system which is too complex for a country of 3 million residents. The country itself consists of 2 entities: Republika Srpska (RS) and Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine (FBiH - which itself consists of 10 cantons), as well as an autonomous district of Brčko. On the state-level, Bosnia does not have a single president, but rather a presidency consisting of three members who represent one of the three constituent peoples. Alongside the presidency, the executive branch of the government is made out of the Council of Ministers, with the Chairman of the Council being the PM of the country. The legislative branch of the Bosnian government is made up of the bicameral Parliamentary Assembly consisting of the House of Peoples and the House of Representatives, while the judicial branch consists of the Constitutional Court and the State Court. On top of that, the Office of the High Representative (OHR), who is appointed by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), has the highest constitutional power, and is tasked

with overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. Even though this system may resemble a standard European liberal democracy (except for the OHR), its complexity stems from the fact that each one of the entities and cantons has their own governments. Republika Srpska is highly autonomous, with its own president and a cabinet of ministers, a national assembly, and its own system of courts. A similar system can be found in the FBiH, except for the fact that the parliament is bicameral, and that each one of its 10 cantons has its own set of ministries, assemblies and courts. As such, the country has 14 governments, 3 presidents (excluding the presidents of RS and FBiH), 120 ministers, over 600 representatives and 3000 councilors. With its multiple layers of government, and competencies which oftentimes overlap, it is clear that the political system of BiH can only lead to a plethora of inefficiencies. The oversized public administration, with its disproportionately high salaries (6-8 times higher than the average national salary) (Fokus, 2023) is also severely damaging to the country's budget, resulting in public spending making up 45% of the GDP, while 60% of the national budget is spent on salaries in the public sector and other compensations (TRT Balkan BHSC, 2023). Coupled with high rates of corruption, nepotism and organized crime, the Bosnian system of governments resembles more so a kafkaesque nightmare than a functional political system. Instead of becoming more centralized over time, not being influenced by ethnic separation and moving towards EU integration, Bosnia has only become more ethnically estranged, which has been reified and induced by such a fragmented system. Considering the overwhelming amount of administrative positions, it makes a lot of sense that politicians often rotate mandates between different institutions, acquiring hefty salaries and significant connections. It is important to grasp the size of the system in order to understand the motivations of political actors, and the reasons why they might construct certain discursive frames in order to maintain their positions.

### **b) Political parties and significant political actors**

The 3 main political parties that will be analyzed in this thesis are the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ BiH). Since the electorate in Bosnia is firmly separated among ethnic and civic lines (both constitutionally and socially), these 3 parties have been chosen as the state-level dominant actors which control narratives and have a strong impact on discourse creation. Furthermore, these parties are not threatened

by the prospects of party coalition, due to high political fragmentation (Hulseley, 2016) and a low linkage between district party systems (Bochsler, 2010). These features of the system are both constitutionally and discursively enforced, due to the separation of the electorate among ethnic lines, and due to narratives which cement identity politics as the main voting motive. As such, with only 3 ethnicities, and a strong focus on identity politics, there is not a lot of variation between the inter-ethnic parties, since they run on similar ideological programmes (hence, those which impact discourse the most will be analyzed). In particular, leaders of these 3 parties will be the main subjects of this analysis. As Hasić (2020) notes:

Legally, party leadership and public posts leaders occupy do not have to be separated, which has enabled strong party leaders to carry out top public positions without having to renounce their party positions. As a result, elections in BiH have become increasingly leader-centered. While voter support is still based on the electoral appeal of parties, average voters are progressively focused on individuals representing the party and not so much on the essence of party programs or ideologies. (p. 18)

Firstly formed in 1996, as the Party of Independent Social Democrats, established by Milorad Dodik and other independent members of the National Assembly, SNSD was one of the leading opposition parties in the post-war Republika Srpska. The party garnered massive support from the International Community, since it was seen as a democratizing force, a voice of reason that was supposed to counter xenophobic and separatist narratives perpetrated by the ruling SDS. In her address to the Bosnian press, Madeleine Albright characterized Dodik as someone with “wisdom and skill”, calling him a “worthy partner” (U.S. Department of State, 2001). As such, Dodik was seen as a beacon of hope, both by the citizens traumatized by the war, and by international forces which sought territorial stability. After uniting with 2 other political parties, the Party of Independent Social Democrats became the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats in 2002, establishing itself as an even stronger regional player. After the 2006 general elections, Dodik solidified his own position by becoming the prime minister of RS, and the position of SNSD as the strongest Serb party by winning more than half of the seats in the National Assembly of RS. However, after the elections, Dodik decided to change his image and his positions on numerous political issues - once a moderate politician decided to take a populist, nationalist and an anti-NATO stance, while alluding to a possible secession from BiH. Clearly right-wing when it comes to local politics, Dodik takes an interesting pro-EU stance while interacting with Western actors,

which prompts a deeper analysis into the ways in which he constructs discourse, and reveals his true motivations and ideological (dis)beliefs. Currently, SNSD holds the majority in the National Assembly of RS, with Milorad Dodik serving as the president (a position he has held since the party's inception), Željka Cvijanović serving as the Serb member of the Presidency, along with the control of 47 (out of 64) municipalities.

Unlike SNSD, HDZ BiH has been politically active during the Bosnian war, and is one of the members of the coalition government of 1990. As a product of the appearance of nationalist ideologies in the region, the party immediately claimed the Croatian electorate in BiH. It is important to note that HDZ BiH emerged as a branch of HDZ, the Croatian ruling party responsible for its country's independence, and as such was ideologically and politically aligned with its "mother party". However, following the DPA, the once strong relationship between the parties started to weaken, forcing HDZ BiH to focus on its own position within Bosnia, as well as the identity of Bosnian Croats, and to abandon any nationalist aspirations they had in the 1990s. Any explicit call to secession was thwarted after 2001, when the president of the party, Ante Jelavić, declared the formation of a Bosnian Croat 'self-government' (Hasić, 2020, p. 21). Jelavić was promptly dismissed from his positions by the OHR, changing the party structure, as well as its ideological positions. This does not mean that the members of the party stopped hinting at such aspirations, or perpetrating discourse which could be seen as nationalist - the discourse became more moderate, while still hinting at the establishment of a majority-Croat administrative region in the country. The current president of HDZ BiH (who has assumed this position 2005), Dragan Čović, much like Dodik, shuffles between a plethora of narratives in order to manage relations with multiple players - the Bosnian Croat electorate, other ethnic leaders within the country and the IC. These narratives mostly focus on the unfavorable position of Croats in Bosnia, labeling the country as dysfunctional, and evoking war-time symbols in order to mobilize support, while simultaneously building an image of Bosnian Croat identity, that is equally ethnic and religious. Although every single one of these parties are secular, they heavily benefit from their collaboration with religious institutions, and repeatedly portray national identities as tied with religious identities. It is even stated in the HDZ BiH party program that their program is based on "Christian-democratic norms" (HDZ BiH, 2023). As it will be explored in the latter part of this thesis, Čović finds a seemingly unlikely partner in his political aspirations - Milorad Dodik. His true motivations and ideological inclinations

are understood better when his criminal history is taken into account - the Bosnian Court indicted Čović 3 times for various abuses of power. Even though he was sentenced to 5 years in prison, Čović ended up being acquitted.

Much like HDZ BiH, SDA (Party of Democratic Action) was one of the members of the Bosnian coalition government of 1990, and is greatly responsible for the push for Bosnian independence, as well as the creation of the contemporary Bosniak identity. It has continued being the main representative of the Bosniak people in the post-Dayton era, building narratives and creating discourse surrounding foreign allies, domestic enemies and the status of Bosniaks in the country. Although secular (especially after the appointment of Sulejman Tihić in 2001), the party is still closely tied to religious institutions and figures, carrying on the pan-Islamist legacy created by SDA's founder, Alija Izetbegović. In line with their religious affiliation, the party is conservative, nationalist, promoting traditional values and exhibiting populist tendencies. Unlike HDZ BiH and SNSD, SDA is pushing for a strong, centralized Bosnia. Since the majority of the population is Bosniak (50.11%) (Federalni zavod za statistiku, 2016), representing a majority within a country can only provide a higher level of control and power - only if that country is centralized. Hence, narratives which portray Republika Srpska as a product of ethnic cleansing and genocide only aid the goal of national unification. The program of the party states that it is “[d]etermined to stand against secessionist intentions of retrograde politics and intensified attacks on the constitutional and legal order of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (SDA, 2023). Dominating most elections since 1996, SDA has established itself as the largest party in the Federation of BiH, and as the “true voice of the Bosniak people”. The discursive construction of the Bosnian national identity differs from that of other ethnic parties’, since Bosniaks, unlike Serbs and Croats, seem to identify with the Bosnian national designation, and hence are the only ethnic group which uses ethnic and national categories interchangeably. However, in a similar fashion to SNSD and HDZ, SDA is heavily leader centered, with the president of the party, Bakir Izetbegović, having a significant role in shaping the party's image, and dictating its success in elections. As the son of the founder of the party, who has assumed a sort of a sacred role in the contemporary Bosniak mythos, it comes to no surprise that Bakir Izetbegović managed to emerge as such a captivating persona. After becoming politically involved during the Bosnian war at the behest of his father, Izetbegović has continued climbing through the ranks of the party. However, it was a surprise that Bakir did not succeed his father in the leadership

of the party, but rather had to wait until the death of Sulejman Tihić to become the president of SDA in 2014. In the meantime, he has assumed numerous administrative positions, from the House of the Representatives to the Presidency of B&H. Izetbegović has managed to consolidate his position in the party by battling internal opposition and ensuring a strong inner circle. Much like Dodik and Čović, Izetbegović employs narratives which delegitimize Croats and Serbs locally, while trying to portray a picture of national tolerance internationally. However, it is important to note that his approach to international politics is a bit different, forming strong bonds with Turkey and the rest of the Muslim world (which again, plays into his portrayal of the Bosnian national identity). Involved in a plethora of scandals involving corruption and nepotism, the undercover motivations of Izetbegović will be explored in the socio-diagnostic section of the thesis.

### **3.2 Discourse immanent critique**

While giving speeches regarding national identity, politicians usually categorize in respect to an external other in order to promote national homogeneity, and to project a picture of commonality and connectedness vis-a-vis another group. This is done through the instrumentalization of identity politics, which is, according to Seyla Behnabib (1996), “always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference” (p. 3). In such cases, national categories which are discursively conceptualized tend to surpass any other identities, whether that be racial, religious or ethnic identity. During the Naturalization Ceremony speech, Obama stated that: “what makes somebody American isn’t just their bloodlines, ...not just an accident of birth. It’s a fidelity to our founding principles, a faith in the idea that anyone, anywhere, can write the next great chapter in this American story” (AILA, 2013). Similar sentiments can be found in other presidential speeches. Although the USA is unique in its national project of diversity, and populist narratives have become increasingly prominent in the last 2 decades, national identities are usually presented as hegemonic in discourse. However, considering the consociational nature of BiH, and the variety of elite voices, discursive conceptualizations vastly differ based on the actor who is perpetrating narratives regarding national identity. The following discursive instances will be analyzed in accordance with the main principles of the DHA. Since the nature of national identity has already been expounded upon, a certain set of parameters is needed to be set which will function as a working definition of the Bosnian national identity. In order not to conflate the relevant discourse with other discourses and labels regarding the Bosnian identity (such as

the geographic label of Bosnia, as the northern part of the country), the term ‘Bosnian national identity’ will refer to an all-encompassing identity, which includes all members of the nation, regardless of their ethnicity, and surpasses all other identities. In the context of the specific discourse which will be examined, speech instances referring to ‘being Bosnian’, ‘the Bosnian national identity’, and all its accompanying markers (such as culture, heritage etc.) will be examined.

Before tackling the discourse produced by Milorad Dodik, it is important to differentiate between his discursive conceptualizations of the Bosnian national identity based on the setting in which the narratives are produced - whether he is directly (or indirectly) addressing the targeted electorate (Serbs), giving interviews to the internal other (Bosniak and Croatian outlets), or addressing the external other (such as EU officials and foreign press). All 3 settings will be examined in order to provide a fuller analysis.

Dodik often uses strategies of nomination in order to draw and enforce lines of ethnic division, disabling the construction of a unified national Bosnian identity. While giving a speech during the Day of Serbian Unity, Freedom and National Flag in Belgrade, Dodik stated the following:

I must tell you a secret, let it stay between us. We don't love it when you call us Bosnians here. We are not Bosnian, we are Serbs. I am a Serb. I am a Serb, Orthodox, I speak Serbian, I write cyrillic, I celebrate Djurdjevdan, and nothing identifies me with that word - Bosnian. Neither in the sense of my homeland, nor in the sense of my character. That is why I would like to ask all of you to just simply call us Serbs, because that's what we are. We are not Bosnian Serbs, just like they [Serbs in Croatia] in Croatia are not Croatian Serbs, but simply Serbs. (Ministarstvo odbrane i Vojska Srbije, 2021)

Although Dodik is addressing Serbs in his speech, he still uses strategies of nomination in order to differentiate between several groups. At first, he draws the line between “we” (referring to Bosnian Serbs) and “you” (referring to Serbian Serbs). It might seem paradoxical that he takes this approach - after all, Dodik often perpetuates narratives of ethnic unity. However, he is aware of the differences in popular perception and stereotypes between the countries, and makes an appeal to be accepted and perceived as one with the

broader Serbian nation. Strategies of nomination do not end there - an external other is also used in the address:

Often, as a politician, I wonder, why do we provoke others who are always somehow angry with us, and always have to object to something, and I can't find [an answer to] that... we have our republic, but our homeland is Serbia. Our country is not Bosnia and Herzegovina, our country is Serbia. (Ministarstvo odbrane i Vojska Srbije, 2021)

Although there are no explicit references as to who these others may be, the categorization is still implicit - "others" implies any enemy, whether that is local (Bosniak, Croat), or foreign (typically Western), portraying them as hostile. This speech is obviously emotionally charged - an appeal to pathos as a feature of strategies of predication is used to assign values to various groups. While the in-group is portrayed as freedom-loving people who "spent centuries fighting for [their] identity", others are characterized as subservient, relying on "Serbs to gift them freedom" (Ministarstvo odbrane i Vojska Srbije, 2021) - while simultaneously denying Serbs the identity that they have been historically fighting for. Dodik then branches out into other topics in order to utilize strategies of argumentation, and as a part of the DHA's three dimensionality, it is important to identify these discursive subtopics which help build the main discursive topic of national identity. Topics of victimhood and secessionism appear in the speech in order to employ the general topos of comparison:

The strategy of defence of the Republic of Serbia states that it is ready, and that it must, and that it takes upon the duty to protect Serbs, wherever they are. How is that different from others?... I had the opportunity to meet other great presidents. They say the same thing. (Ministarstvo odbrane i Vojska Srbije, 2021)

Dodik then continues by saying that this century will be "the century of our unification, of our unity", unlike the last century, in which "Serbs...suffered so greatly, losing half of the population in 2 wars that took our important ancestors" (Ministarstvo odbrane i Vojska Srbije, 2021). The topos of comparison is found in his secessionist rhetoric as well: "... I think Republika Srpska is a state... it is a territory, it has its own people, it has its own executive powers, and as such qualifies as a state. Just because it does not have a seat in the UN, I believe we will overcome that one day" (Ministarstvo odbrane i Vojska Srbije, 2021). Dodik then goes on to anecdotally refer to his educational background - an exam he took on

the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, and how “we fulfill all of the criteria” of the convention (Ministarstvo odbrane i Vojska Srbije, 2021). In this speech instance, besides relying on the topos of comparison, Dodik appeals to authority, both of the International Community (as the arbiter of what makes a state legitimate), and comically, to the University of Belgrade, and his education in political science. Depending on the situation, he either appeals to authority and uses this topos in order to provide legitimacy to the discourse he produces, or criticizes the same authority, in order to delegitimize competing discourses. By appealing to pathos, and drawing comparisons between other “great” leaders and himself, Dodik tries to validate his discourse surrounding national identity through other discursive subtopics. Furthermore, using strategies of perspectivization, he positions himself within the broader group of Serbs, portraying himself as one of the whole, assuming the role of the representative of the Serbian people, voicing their “homogenous” opinion on a complex matter of identity. These discursive strategies do not only need to be connected to the methodology developed by Wodak and Reisigl, but they can also be analyzed through the lens of Brubaker’s and Malešević’s concepts of national identity. By stressing the importance of collective suffering and shared troubles, Dodik produces an image of commonality, connectedness and groupness within a broader group of people, enforcing the homogenizing effects of identity-creation. Furthermore, strategies of nomination and predication resemble that of Brubaker’s categorization, which when implemented effectively steers a certain kind of self-understanding, situating the subject socially. Using emotionally charged language, referring to the audience as “brothers and sisters”, mentioning “important ancestors” and collective suffering Dodik clearly employs strategies of exploiting micro-solidarities, projecting them onto a broader national, and even secessionist project. Hence, it is evident that, while constructing discourse aimed at mobilizing the Serbian electorate, Dodik completely dismisses a unitary Bosnian identity, and focuses on reifying the ethnic identity, while placing it inside of a broader, Serbian national identity. Hence, he replaces the hegemonic national with the hegemonic ethnic, in (alleged) hopes of a future national project. This identity is built narratively, and portrayed as something stemming from factors which can be classified as either internal (intrinsic) or external (reactive). These intrinsic factors stem from internal features of the Bosnian Serbs, whether that is their common history, their birthright to the territory they inhabit, religious affiliation or language and culture which legitimize them - not only as a homogenous group, but as true native of the land. Reactive factors are usually reserved for the *other* - in most

instances other constituent peoples of BiH or “the West”. In such discursive instances, Dodik portrays the Serbian identity as something shaped by external pressures - as something which was both formed under pressure (from the outside) and as something stemming from inborn, intrinsic characteristics of the Serbian people.

As the last of the discursive strategies discussed within the DHA’s framework, Dodik uses various strategies of intensification in order to adapt the intensity of the discourse on national identity (and its subtopics), depending on the targeted audience and the setting of the speech utterances. While using similar strategies of nomination, predication, perspectivization, Dodik chooses to de-intensify representations of internal others as ‘subservient people’ while addressing media/audiences which are not directly related to the Serb electorate. However, he still maintains an accusing tone, and plays into the same narratives he uses to build the (Bosnian) Serb identity. While being interviewed by N1, an anti-regime news channel, Dodik used similar rhetoric regarding national identity - When asked why he minds being called Bosnian, Dodik answered: “I am not Bosnian and will never be Bosnian and nobody can force me to [be Bosnian]. Why would I accept that identity? My homeland is Republika Srpska, and my fatherland Serbia” (N1 BiH, 2019).

Although still referring to Serbian suffering, common myths and heritage, Dodik is not as brash as he is during his speeches thematically, but he does present a performance of incivility and disrespect. Often cursing out reporters and using profanities, Dodik presents himself as authentic and genuine, a voice of the people instead of a starchy politician. This intentionality is also seen in a slight change in his strategies of nomination. Dodik often refers to Bosniak interviewers using the pronoun ‘you’, in its second-person plural form, categorizing the interviewer with the rest of the Bosniak people. This strategy helps villainize the interviewer, delegitimizing any difficult questions with the act of accusing, both the interviewer and ‘their people’, of injustices done against the Serbs - hence sending a subtle, but potent signal to the ‘home audience’.

However, as noted before, in order to complement his discourse on national identity, Dodik uses other discursive topics. If the argumentative basis for the main discursive topic is formed on other discursive subtopics, such as the topic of secession, then those discursive instances need to be constant, in order for a coherent picture of a strong national identity to be projected. However, by changing narratives, Dodik undermines the basis of legitimacy

he built for the discourse surrounding the Bosnian national identity. While being interviewed by a Bosniak political commentator, Senad Hadžifejzović, Dodik was asked about his secessionist plans; what was locally a strong secessionist narrative, a show of power and populist might, now suddenly turned into a more moderate narrative:

There are some statements here in the Federation... someone said, while talking to Deutsche Welle, that if there is a secession, there will be war within an hour. Nobody is declaring a secession... We are not seceding from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Republika Srpska entered this with the Federation, and created Bosnia and Herzegovina... We do not plan on seceding. (FACE HD TV, 2024)

However, throughout the rest of the interview, Dodik made several references to secession, using more ambiguous language, replacing the word secession (*otcijepljenje*) with other words, which do not evoke acts of aggression, such as “decoupling” or “partition” (“*razdruživanje*”, “*razilaženje*”) (FACE HD TV, 2024). At one point, Dodik specifically corrected Hadžifejzović, saying that “[this is] not a secession, but a split”. By using such language, Dodik shifts the intention of seceding from RS to FBiH, portraying it as a joint desire, and not as something exclusive to “his people” (FACE HD TV, 2024). He then uses argumentative strategies of deflection and scapegoating in order to portray the Bosniak people as the ones responsible for the instability in BiH: “The ones who do not respect the Dayton Peace Agreement is the Bosniak political structure, the structure of Bosnian Muslims which never agreed to the Dayton Agreement” (FACE HD TV, 2024). It is more than clear that, when all discursive instances are accounted for, Dodik comes across as incoherent and dissonant. Unfortunately for his political cause, Bosnian media space is not perfectly demarcated, and it is oftentimes that these instances transcend local media spaces, causing unwanted effects and making this narrative game harder to play. As Toal (2013) notes: “The media echo-chamber and competing political demands often produce discourse that is dissonant, confusing, and, on its face, contradictory” (p. 172). This dissonance is even more pronounced when interviews with foreign outlets are taken into account. Although Dodik does not often make any comments regarding the Bosnian national identity while speaking to international news outlets, he does cover certain discursive topics which undermine his argumentative basis. On one hand, Dodik uses “the West” as the foreign *other*, a reactive factor in the formation of the Serbian identity, painting it as something which is hostile towards “his people”. On the other hand, while talking to foreign media, as well as EU

officials, Dodik stresses the importance of working on European integration and overcoming obstacles which would lead BiH into the EU.

Unlike Dodik, Izetbegović takes a different, and most certainly unique approach to the Bosnian national identity. He does not negate it, but does not either see it as something which surpasses ethnic identities - he rather considers it to be an essential aspect of multifaceted identities in the country: “We think that being Bosniak and being Bosnian cannot be in collision or opposition. Those are basically almost two aspects of the same thing, Bosniaks are Bosnians of Islamic faith” (Maglajlija, 2019). The same sentiment is voiced in other speeches:

We must not reduce ourselves in any way. We are Muslims, and Bosniaks, and Bosnians, and Europeans. Ours are the Bosnian kings, that’s our bone. Our ancestors who lie beneath *stećci*<sup>1</sup>, our mosques, churches and synagogues, ours are both Tito’s partisans and Alija’s golden lilies. (Radio Sarajevo, 2022)

A projected picture of commonality and connectedness can be found again, coupled with language that exploits those affectionate ties found at the micro-level. However, appealing to this idea of a common Bosnian civil society based on a shared national identity should not be taken at face value. Although semantically hinting at unity, multiculturalism and tolerance, discursive strategies which Izetbegović uses resemble that of Dodik’s, and often assume the same function of reifying in-group ethnic identities at the expense of the other. Much like Dodik does to the Bosniak press, Izetbegović refers to the Serbian press as “you people” and “you” in its plural form (RTRS vijesti, 2020), intensifying this strategy of nomination with an accusing tone. Furthermore, assigning values through strategies of predication, Izetbegović often portrays other ethnic groups negatively, such as implicitly calling Bosnian Serbs “bad people” (FTV, 2021), or painting Croats as privileged (tportal, 2023). Often evoking war-time symbols, and referring to Bosniak suffering during the war, Izetbegović does not discursively implement many strategies which would have effects of reconciliation and national unity.

Discursive subtopics, such as topics of victimhood, religion, and most importantly centralization can also be found in his speeches. It is important to note that Izetbegović refers

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<sup>1</sup> medieval Bosnian tombstones

to the Bosnian national identity most often while trying to convey arguments in favor of centralizing the country. Although the focal point of this research is the conceptualization of the Bosnian national identity, and other subtopics are examined in the context of this broader discourse, undercover motivations of perpetuating narratives regarding the national identity are clearly based in other major political interests and desires.

Differences of performativity between Dodik and Izetbegović are notable - although resembling a typical populist speaker, Izetbegović does not use profane language; he comes off as less aggressive, trying to portray himself as the more reasonable, moderate political leader in the country. When it comes to addressing foreign press, both Dodik and Izetbegović employ similar strategies of deintensification. While giving an interview to the Saudi TV station Al Arabiya, Izetbegović reflected on the history of the Bosnian national identity: “400 years ago, 500 years ago, 700 years ago, nobody in Bosnia was called a Serb or a Croat, there were Orthodox and Catholic Christians, but we were all Bosnians (Bošnjani)” (TV Al Arabiya, 2023). Although correct in his assessment that there were no national designations in Bosnia prior to the 19th century (Biondich, 2011), it would be incorrect to claim that the people inhabiting the area of medieval Bosnia were either externally perceived, or self-perceived as “Bosnians”. Izetbegović then goes on to claim that: “Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs are our genetic brothers, we are basically one people” (TV Al Arabiya, 2023). It is clear that strategies of nomination used in local addresses take on another, more moderate dimension while giving interviews to foreign media - the line between “them” (Serbs and Croats) and “us/we” starts to blur. However, the intent to delegitimize internal ethnic identities by suggesting the “true origin” of Bosnian Serbs and Croats is still connected to primordial narratives perpetrated locally; as such, it is not only that the Bosnian national identity surpasses local ethnic identities, but it is also the ‘true’, ‘undercover’ identity of these ethnic groups. Much like Dodik, Izetbegović uses the discursive subtopic of victimhood in order to employ strategies of predication: “[the Westerners] want to stabilize relations in the Balkans by favoring the strong, at the expense of the smaller and weaker people...like Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Kosovars... we need the International Community, while the Serbs want them to go away” (TV Al Arabiya, 2023). However, Dodik and Izetbegović perpetuate the same narratives of EU integration, suddenly portraying the previously villainized “West” as something which BiH should strive towards. It is evident that Izetbegović is very cognizant of his audience. In the same interview with Al

Arabiya, he often used the terms Bosniak and Muslim interchangeably, while hinting at symbols of common suffering. Furthermore, throughout his strategies of nomination, and constant grouping of Bosniaks with Albanian and Kosovari Muslims, Izetbegović implicitly places the religious identity above others, again for the purpose of appealing to the audience at hand. While using strategies of perspectivization to place himself within the broader group of Bosniaks, a strategy common for all populist speakers, he also distances himself from his occupation, portraying himself as a common citizen. While talking about “selfishness of politicians who damage [inter-ethnic] relations” Izetbegović stated that: “Politicians still use emotions which are still present from the war, [with] desires to accomplish war goals” (TV Al Arabiya, 2023). However, while addressing the local press, Izetbegović usually voices a different sentiment, at times even hinting at war by saying that “it will be needed to defend peace again...defending will be even easier today than it was 30 years ago” (Radio Sarajevo, 2022). Although there is a lesser chance of foreign and local discursive spaces colliding, such contradictions again challenge the argumentative structure on which lies the discourse on the Bosnian national identity.

Unlike Dodik and Izetbegović, Dragan Čović approaches the issue of the Bosnian national identity more tactically, while still conveying a similar sentiment. Starting from the kind of performativity Čović exhibits, he does not try to portray himself as a demagogue, does not use the same kind of emotionally charged language, and does not use profanities in any context. His references to the Bosnian national identity are sparse, but still implicit, characterized by a very careful parsing through discursive topics of identities in BiH. Furthermore, considering Čović’s consistently moderate presentation, he rarely ever shows discursive variation depending on the setting of discourse production. While addressing the audience during the conference “Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina - bearers of European values”, Čović stated that: “Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina have a completely developed identity with all of its features in a cultural, linguistic and national sense, which is without a doubt based on European values” (HDZ BiH, 2017). This emphasis on a separate Croatian national identity as a part of BiH, but still separate from an overarching Bosnian national identity can be found in his writing for the local Bosnian Croat media: “The Croatian national identity, our language and cultural heritage are woven into Bosnia and Herzegovina, into every pore of its existence” (Čović, 2023). However, when challenged by the Bosniak media

on the question of centralization, Čović uses strategies of argumentation, implicitly appealing to authority, or rather those state-building principles established by the DPA:

In a deeply divided society among national, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic dimensions, only the principles of federalism and the consociational model, as well as legitimate representation of 3 constitutive national segments alongside full recognition of civil rights can be the guarantee of stability that we miss all these years. (Karalić, 2021)

But when asked about a consolidated Bosnian national identity, a unitary civic society, Čović stated that “[the civic] story is a nicely packed spin which fundamentally entails the rule of the most numerous people in the Federation [referring to Bosniaks]” (Karalić, 2021). Although employing both internal (intrinsic) and external (reactive) methods of reifying and constructing the Croatian ethnic identity, Čović rarely ever uses similar strategies of predication to Dodik and Izetbegović, refraining from using explicit derogatory language in relation to the Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks. However, he still relies on discursive subtopics of wartime suffering in order to highlight the intrinsic features of the in-group identity, constantly evoking symbols of Herceg-Bosna, a temporary Croatian quasi-state formed during the Bosnian war, all while showing explicit support for convicted war criminals. Mainly, narratives regarding the Bosnian national identity are paired with two discursive subtopics - the topic of election reform and secession. As a replacement for explicit strategies of nomination and othering, these topics are used as a reactive method of building in-group solidarity, or rather, the discourse of national identity is used to propel these two topics. As early as 2011, Čović hinted at the creation of a separate Croatian entity, saying that it will “sooner or later, be reality”, continuing:

When will it [reality] be, it is all the same, but the sooner we get rid of that burden, we will be able to normally think, with the belief that the more numerous people, just because they are more numerous, cannot destroy the other. (Jurič, 2021)

The connection between the topic of identity and secession are also oftentimes explicit, best shown by one of the HDZ BiH election slogans - “No identity without an entity” (Jurič, 2021). However, when challenged by the Bosniak press, Čović deintensifies the discourse, defending himself by saying that “I am not advocating [for a third entity]”, additionally

stating that “if I wanted it [a third entity], I would’ve had it” (FACE HD TV, 2015). The strategies of nomination and predication that are used to portray the Bosniak people as a threat to the Bosnian Croats can be found in his discourse on election reform. Currently, Bosniaks in FBiH are allowed to vote for the Croatian member of the Presidency, as well as the Croatian members of the House of Peoples - a disadvantageous feature for Čović, who has had to deal with his political opposition acquiring a significant amount of the Bosniak vote.

Besides using strategies of deintensification depending on the setting of discourse production, narratives perpetuated by Čović are not as incoherent as his Bosniak and Serbian counterparts’. This is apparent especially when it comes to delineating between internal and external *others* - while Dodik and Izetbegović appear critical of “the West” while addressing the local media, and supportive of it when addressing foreign press, Čović manages to maintain a consistent pro-EU stance. However, even this stance is used to solidify the Croatian ethnic identity within FBiH - as shown in the “Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina - bearers of European values” conference. By portraying the identity of Bosnian Croats as something in line with European values, there is a sort of an implicit connection drawn with the rest of the Croatian people, who are already in the EU, and a distance created from other ethnic groups, who are supposed bearers of Russian and Turkish values.

### **3.3 Socio-diagnostic critique**

The discursive instances analyzed in the previous section should not be taken at face value, or interpreted as genuine expression of ideological belief. It is important to situate the discourse on the Bosnian national identity within a broader socio-political context in order to determine motivations and causes of its production. In his analysis of Dodik’s rhetoric, Toal (2013) finds that: “Rhetorical gamesmanship and performativity work by mobilizing affective passions, by creating and activating positive primary feelings toward one candidate and position, and negative feelings toward opponents” (p. 185). By evoking wartime symbols, referring to primordial elements of ethnic identities, as well as using various strategies of othering, all 3 actors exactly establish the goals of actuating these feelings. With their use of emotionally charged language and symbols, they clearly exploit those affectionate ties which have been established in previous nationalist discourse of the 1990s - while still producing new identifiers, and reshaping old ones. As such, nationalist

discourses from these two eras constantly inform each other, with the older being instrumental in the production of the current. Although the main subject of this research is the discursive topic of the Bosnian national identity, with other discursive topics being examined as its subtopics (or rather topics that build the main topic), a better understanding of its nature can be achieved if the roles of the topics are reversed. In other words, it is more useful to see discourse regarding the national identity as something which is used in order to provide legitimacy for topics of secession and centralization.

It is important to observe this rhetorical game as something in which all 3 actors intentionally participate, since without the other, their own discourses cannot be portrayed as reactive. Furthermore, other civic and non-nationalist actors are often forced into shifting their politics to the right as a direct consequence of the success of nationalist narratives. As the first prominent politician to intensify the discourse on secession of RS, Dodik assumed the role of the “protector” of Serbs, winning over the majority of the electorate. What then naturally followed is the radicalization of other parties in RS and their consequent demobilization. Throughout the years of building this discursive topic, Dodik, as well as Izetbegović and Čović, managed to successfully test the boundaries of language and settings in which they were allowed to express secessionist desires without facing serious political repercussions. Although some argue that “Dodik has long term goals (i.e. secession from BiH and unification with Serbia)” (Beglerović, 2020), a view which is quite present in analyses and portrayals of Bosnian politics, a different type of argument will be presented here. By carefully calculating between the audiences which he is addressing, and the potential outcomes of discourse production, Dodik managed to consolidate his power to the extent that there are little to no prospects of opposition that can threaten him within the entity. As Toal (2013) notes:

Becoming a prominent politician in BiH requires mastering very different speaking situations – Brussels and Washington, D.C., Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Belgrade – and satisfying very different audiences, a task that can be very challenging if one wants, as Dodik does, to retain authenticity and popularity with base voters. (p. 172)

However, even though hinting at potential secession, referenda and other means of political blackmail, Dodik has repeatedly shown no desire to take legitimate and serious action towards realizing this goal, especially when challenged by foreign officials. In 2011, Dodik

even suspended his plan on holding a referendum after meeting with the High Representative (OHR) and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The fact that the production of discourse regarding secession ramped up before the 2006 and the 2010 elections (Toal, 2013) clearly indicates that its main purpose was (and still is) voter mobilization. The same can be said for Izetbegović and Čović, who continuously intensify and deintensify discourse surrounding centralization and secession, while keeping their political actions within the confines of the Dayton Accords. Constantly switching their stance from breaking apart/centralizing BiH, to respecting the sanctity of the DPA and distancing themselves from their previous stances, it is clear that there is no actual project or desire to change the status quo. While their political positions are maintained, and the status quo preserved, there is no need for breaking the country apart. As long as the risk of being relieved of their duties by the OHR outweighs the potential success in changing the arrangement of BiH, none of these actors would embark on such projects. Instead, portraying themselves as the protectors of “their” respective people, reifying ingroup identities and demobilizing their opposition are the main goals which are achieved by discourse production. This is especially clear in Čović’s case, who employed both discourses on the Bosnian national identity and the Bosnian Croat ethnic identity in order to battle his opposition. In his analysis of party leadership strategies in BiH, Hasić (2020) notes that:

As a member of the Presidency, he [Čović] continued to undermine Komšić and other civic-oriented political campaigns in BiH and insisted on the importance of ethnic representation. He continued to build on the narrative of the need to instigate constitutional changes that would allow Croats to have their own entity. (p. 33)

If the undercover intentions of these political actors are not clear by now, the case of Dodik’s and Čović’s friendship serves as a perfect example of their political performativity and rhetorical gamesmanship. Even though the discourse surrounding the Serbian and Croatian ethnic identities is based on mutual slander, there seems to be a kind of mutual-understanding and solidarity present in other discursive subtopics. By showing public support for one another through various speeches and interviews, Čović and Dodik try to validate their own discourse on secession. This is especially true for Čović, since without another actor advocating for the country to break up, his own discourse, which propelled him to the Presidency of BiH, would seem illegitimate. By playing this game both Dodik and Čović do

not aim to encourage genuine secessionist action, but rather consolidate their position and maintain the status quo.

Reducing discourse production to mere self-interest of power-hungry political elites would neglect the system they have built in order to propel themselves to the top of Bosnian politics. Building huge patronage networks, Dodik, Čović and Izetbegović, as well as their party affiliates managed to spread corruption and nepotism into every major facet of the economy. These networks are characterized by a system of reciprocal favours, through which inner-party coherence is achieved, as well as general loyalty within the electorate. Whether that is appointment to certain positions in return for loyalty, or tender corruption allowing party-affiliated companies to win contracts, there is a plethora of strategies that ensure that these patronage networks run all the way down to the single voter, who is bound to vote by loyalty. The involvement of all 3 politicians in this mafia-like structure is especially evident in numerous scandals, including Dodik's business empire controversies, Čović's criminal history, and Izetbegović's nepotism, which has undermined institutional integrity of FBiH.

### **3.4 Prospective critique**

Although writing such a short prospective critique would be a disservice to the amount of work that needs to be written on potential institutional reform and discursive change, there are two realistic courses of action that are going to be presented.

First of them is already institutionally implemented, but not enforced. Violating the Criminal Code of BiH through his discriminatory discourse on the Bosnian national identity, as well as the Dayton Peace agreement through commemorating the Republika Srpska Day, introducing national symbols and enforcing laws which aim to discredit the OHR, Dodik should have either been imprisoned or relieved of his duties by the OHR long ago. Currently, Dodik is being tried for violating Annex 10, Article 4 of the DPA, by which he is obliged to cooperate with the OHR. Unfortunately, the judicial system of BiH is already deeply corrupt, as evident in the numerous trials of the political elites and their affiliates, and the only way of enforcing the rule of law is through the use of OHR's Bonn (veto) powers. Such a move would not only alleviate the people of RS of a highly corrupt political structure, but also send a message to other political elites, forcing them to moderate their discourse. As it was seen in the discourse-immanent portion of the analysis, it is not only Dodik who engages in

discourse which violates the Criminal Code, but so do Čović and Izetbegović. However, The High Representative has amended the Criminal Code of BiH in the past in order to account for genocide denial and discriminatory rhetoric. More such actions which aim to regulate discourse in BiH are needed, only if they end up being enforced. However, since the OHR seems fairly inert, the PIC should be held accountable for their disinterest in resolving the pressing issues in the country. It is essential for the public to demand greater engagement to ensure that the PIC fulfills its responsibilities.

The second course of action is proposed by Mujkić and Hulseley (2010) in their analysis of the behaviour of Bosnian voters. According to them, the average Bosnian voter faces a problem which resembles that of the prisoner's dilemma. If a person votes for a non-nationalist civic party, there is always a risk that the other ethnic groups are going to elect nationalist parties and politicians, which would then act against the interest of the remaining ethnic groups. In such a scenario, voters almost always end up voting for nationalist parties in order to evade this risk. However, there is a potential solution:

The most direct way to challenge nationalist parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be to make changes in the electoral system, most likely a preferential voting scheme, which would strengthen parties who appeal to voters from multiple national groups while punishing nationalist parties that could only appeal to their group of voters. (Mujkić & Hulseley, 2010, p. 157)

By incorporating such reforms, parties and their presidents would be forced to change their discursive approaches to the Bosnian national identity and stress the importance of a unified, civic society, in order to appeal to a wider, multi-ethnic electorate. However, presenting the Bosnian voter as a perfectly rational agent would also be misleading. There is, without a doubt, a percentage of voters who reason in such a way, but a significant amount of the electorate is either affiliated to the patronage networks or influenced by fear-inducing discourses. The starting point of institutional change in BiH should be simple enforcement of pre-existing laws, ensured by a functional judicial system which can be regulated through the Bonn powers of the OHR.

## Conclusion

Various primary and secondary sources have been used in order to explore the ways in which the Bosnian political elites conceptualize the national identity discursively. By utilizing the DHA, complemented with Brubaker's and Malešević's theoretical outlooks, the goals of this research have been reached. All three levels of critique are included in the analysis, while respecting DHA's three-dimensionality by identifying the main topics and subtopics, analyzing discursive strategies and examining linguistic means and realizations.

As hypothesized, it was found that all three actors - Milorad Dodik, Bakir Izetbegović, and Dragan Čović - construct narratives on the Bosnian national identity in order to create and reify group (ethnic) identities, mobilize the electorate and demobilize political opposition. Additionally, it was found that this is done through various discursive strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization and intensification. While Dodik and Čović constructed narratives at the expense of a common national identity in order to build ethnic identities, Izetbegović took on a more peculiar approach to the discourse, affirming the national identity while simultaneously building a strong image of the Bosniak ethnic identity. While Dodik and Izetbegović were more brash in their strategies of nomination and predication, as well as in their projected performativity, Čović was more moderate in this respect. However, all three actors tend to intensify their discursive points when addressing local audiences, while moderating and deintensifying those same points while addressing international audiences. Similar subtopics were found in all 3 competing discourses, with the topic of centralization/secession being often paired with the topic of the national identity. Besides the main assumptions of the hypothesis, it was found that the main discourse was instrumentalized in order to provide validity for narratives regarding the discursive subtopic of centralization/secession, concluding that centralizing political aspirations indicate an acceptance of a common identity, while secessionist aspirations indicate a rejection of that same identity. It was also uncovered that these separatist intentions are not genuine, but rather serve as a means to an end, and are used in order to preserve the status quo and maintain political positions.

Due to the absence of academic literature on the topic of Bosnian political rhetoric, a deeper dive is needed into the contingent nature of the region, into the nature of nationalist appeal, and the arrangement of Bosnian institutions. The DPA ensures ethnic division in the country

- the constitution itself was not formulated to accommodate genuine needs of the Bosnian people, but rather to appease the elites. Hence, in a country which is separated along ethnic lines, there is no possibility of a strong common identity without inter-ethnic institutions. Further analyses into the role and motivations of the PIC and the rest of the International Community are needed in order to provide a more formidable prospective critique.

## Summary

This research examines various narratives regarding the Bosnian national identity perpetrated by the political elites of the country. Firstly, relevant questions and assumptions are posed, placing the focus on how national identity appears in discourse, and what the motivations of its production are. Secondly, relevant methodology is examined, with its 3 main tenets (discourse-immanent critique, socio-diagnostic critique and prospective critique) serving as the structure of the rest of the thesis. However, the DHA's theoretical implications appear to be problematic in its reification of essentialist views, and as such are consequently augmented by introducing two alternative ways of conceptualizing national identity. Thirdly, the background of contemporary Bosnian politics is expounded upon in order to provide context for the upcoming analysis, which consists of previously mentioned tenets. The discourse-immanent portion of the analysis is concerned with discursive strategies used by Dodik, Čović and Izetbegović, while the socio-diagnostic critique gives context to the discourse production. The prospective part of the analysis proposes two potential courses of action with the aim of addressing previously mentioned issues. Finally, it is concluded that political elites utilize similar strategies (with varying goals) in order to promote other discursive topics, create and reify in-group identities, mobilize the electorate and demobilize political opposition.

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