
Building a Common State Army Forces in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina: Assessing its Peace-Building Perspective

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Abstract: *When the war in Bosnia ended in December 1995 with the Dayton Agreement, the armed forces in the country were divided along the ethnic lines. However, in 2005 the country's politicians agreed on defence reforms that led to merging former rival armed forces into a unified army of BiH as a condition for Bosnia to join NATO. Thus, today unified BiH army is making small but significant contributions towards security maintenance both at national and global level. In order to explain efforts of Bosnian politicians to bring the country into the Euro-Atlantic structures and send their troops into multi-national missions we have used the security community theory coined by Karl Deutsch. Thus, NATO-related reforms have strengthened security and peace-building attempts among the former warring ethnic groups. Also, the country's participation in multi-national peace missions abroad has been a crucial commitment to the world security and peace. Thus, today as a NATO aspirant Bosnia has practically become a country that exports security.*

Keywords: *Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian Common Army, NATO, Euro-Atlantic integration, Peace-building, Security, Multi-national peace operations.*

Creating a unified state army

In the early 1990s the whole world was shocked as bloody conflicts broke up in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, first in Slovenia and Croatia and then in 1992 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter, Bosnia or BiH) in 1992-1995 the three ethnic groups in the country fought each other supported by predominantly ethnically-populated armed forces. Although a horrible three-year war came to end in December 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), the separate armed forces continued to exist functioning in their previous form gathering the young people from the ethnic groups respectively. In fact, DPA established the Constitution of BiH that supposes division of the country into two Entities: the Bosniak/Croat Federation of BiH (controlled by the Bosniaks and Croats), and the Republika Srpska that is governed by the Serbs (Soberg, 2008). In the same manner, military remained divided along the ethnic lines.

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That is, the Dayton Agreement states that the defence issue is not expressly noted as a function of the state (Perry, 2003). Thus, it created separate armed forces, Bosniak-Croat, Army of the Federation of BiH and the Bosnian Serb, Army of Republika Srpska. Thus, after Dayton separate armed forces operated in the country spreading their ethnic objectives from the previous war only now through different means. To put it simply, separate ethnic armies had further increased an existing process of ethno-nationalization and ethnic distrust playing a disintegrative role within the society rather than integrating war-torn communities through educative and training programs. That is, predominantly ethnic-populated armed forces had played a considerable political role in the process of indoctrination of their ethnic population within the country. The existence of mono-ethnic armed forces both prevented integration of ethnic groups inside the country and the country's integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations.

However, as the country was striving to carry out Euro-Atlantic reforms the idea of common state armed forces has slowly emerged. Thus, in September 2003 the representatives from all three ethnic groups have agreed to establish a state defence ministry and unified military command (Hawton, 2003). Further, in December 2004 strong pressure from the international community resulted in the formation of an independent commission for defence reform which called for a set-up of a single armed force at state level. In fact, a single army was a condition for Bosnia to join NATO. Thus, in 2005 the Bosnian politicians agreed to defence and security reforms that would eventually merge the formerly rival armed forces into an integrated and unified army. As a result, today unified BiH armed forces comprising soldiers from all ethnic groups is making small but remarkable contributions towards security and peace-building both at national and global level.

A security community theory

Therefore, in order to explain increasing efforts of transitioning countries from the western Balkans region and especially Bosnia and Herzegovina to enter the Euro-Atlantic structures and send their troops into multi-national missions we use the *security community theory*. The concept of security community was coined by Karl Deutsch and it has become popular in the international relations literature after the end of the Cold War as an increasing number of countries entered international organizations such as EU, NATO, and OSCE to preserve peace and security. The concept of the *security community* was designated "as a contribution to the study of possible ways in which men some day might abolish war." (Deutsch, 1957, 3). Moreover, Karl Deutsch pointed out that for a pluralistic security community, "the keeping of the peace among the participating units was the main political goal overshadowing all others" (Deutsch et al. 1957, 31). Thus, the idea of a security community focuses on peace-building as its central principle.

Furthermore, the concept of "security community" is understood as a "group of political units whose relations exhibit dependable expectations of peaceful change, based on the compatibility of the main values relevant to the prevailing political, economic and legal institutions and practice within the constituent units" (Deutsch, 1957, 5). That means that countries being part of a security community are united in their efforts due

to their common values and norms. In fact, a security community is by nature supposed to have “shared identities, values, and meanings” (Adler and Barnett, 1998b: 31). For instance, it is shared values, identities, and meanings that unite a number of countries from the Balkans region and hold them together in common efforts to preserve peace or abolish a possibility of war in the future. Therefore, collective identity establishes patterns of diffuse reciprocity manifested in the mutual responsiveness among the members of the community (Adler and Barnett 1998b, 30-33). Today, collective identity has been built among the western Balkan states in view of the Euro-Atlantic integration process.

NATO as a peace association

NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance which constitutes a system of collective defence, but its members also share and defend jointly their common values and norms. Thus, in the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty, the signatory states agree on the protection of their values, rather than just the preservation of national autonomy declaring that: “They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law.” (NATO: 1949). In addition, in 1994 the Partnership for Peace Framework Document was based on liberal values pointing out that:

“Protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms and human rights, and safeguarding of freedom, justice, and peace through democracy are shared values fundamental to the Partnership. In joining the Partnership, the member states of the North Atlantic Alliance and the other States subscribing to this Document recall that they are committed to the preservation of democratic societies, their freedom from coercion and intimidation, and the maintenance of the principles of international law.” (PfP, 1994: 1).

Thus, applicant countries from the western Balkans are supposed to make necessary reforms in line with the values and norms that the Alliance members already respect and promote. That is, after the Cold War NATO has paid special attention to the export of democratic norms to the transitioning countries. There was a bunch of literature about the NATO’s attempts to promote liberal-democratic norms towards Central and Eastern Europe (Schimmelfennig 1998/9; Williams & Neumann 2000). As Schimmelfennig points out: “States that share the fundamental values of an international community and adhere to its basic norms are regarded as legitimate members of the community and are entitled to join the community organizations. Consequently, we can expect NATO to admit all countries that share its collective identity and values and adhere to its constitutive norms. The faster a country adopts the community values and norms, the earlier it becomes a member” (2000: 8). Thus, these states are in one way constructing a common identity of secure, democratic and peaceful liberal model.

The NATO membership perspective

According to the DPA, the NATO had a responsibility to enforce compliance with the military aspects of the signed Agreement and it deployed an Implementation Force (IFOR) of nearly 60,000 troops to the country. Thus, the NATO-led troops have played a vital part in securing the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina since their arrival in December 1995 (ICG, 2001: 1). In December 1996 the IFOR was replaced with a smaller Stabilization Force (SFOR) with about 32,000 troops. As the country has become more peaceful and stable NATO's aim was to pass responsibility for security and internal order to domestic military forces. As a result, NATO outlined a number of benchmarks to measure progress toward a self-sustaining peace in Bosnia (Kim, 2006: 1). On 2 December 2004, NATO formally brought to end its Stabilization Force (SFOR) mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and handed over peace and stabilization duties to a European Union force (EUFOR).

Thus, NATO has been deeply involved in the post-war country's stabilization and peace-building and it is also committed to supporting Bosnians' aspirations to enter both EU and NATO. However, any country that aspires to NATO membership must meet two conditions, namely, an active participation in the Partnership for Peace Program (PfP) program and the MAP. On 29 November 2006, the alliance did invite Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro to join the NATO's PfP program (Majstorovic, 2007: 640). Also, NATO foreign ministers have agreed in April 2010 to launch a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Bosnia and Herzegovina - a penultimate step to joining the military alliance. Although the MAP is not a final promise of NATO membership and it does not commit the alliance to defend Bosnia against a military threat or affect its decision-making mechanisms it is a crucial assistance program through which NATO and its members provide guidance and support on specific political, economic, security, and legal reforms (Arbour and Clark, 2010).

NATO-related reforms and security

In other words, the Membership Action Plan (MAP) is of utmost importance for the process of reconciliation and peace-building attempts among the formerly warring ethnic populations. Furthermore, Bosnian authorities are making necessary reforms to become a NATO member in the near future. However, before it is granted NATO membership, the Bosnian government is expected to solve the vital question of defence property. Indeed, one of the outstanding issues, however, is defence property, which should be solved before the multi-ethnic state is accepted into the NATO fold (Pop, 2010). That is, the MAP that Bosnia was granted will formally begin only when the military infrastructure is registered as the property of the Bosnian state rather than the property of the Federation of BiH or the Republika Srpska. Still, NATO officials declared that: "Bosnia has made "significant progress on reform." The alliance welcomed Bosnia's decision to destroy surplus ammunition and arms ... Bosnia also succeeded in uniting its rival ethnic armies that fought each other during the 1992-95 war, no small task in a country that remains ethnically divided" (VoA, 2010).

The prospect of the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community has to a remarkable extent strengthened building lasting peace and a long-term democratic

perspective among the three ethnic groups. As Joseph E. stresses: “by putting membership “on the table” – with a US-backed target date – NATO will change the zero-sum dynamic that has thwarted well-intentioned efforts at reform and supply the crucial leverage to produce fundamental compromise” (2009: 2). Along with the collective defence, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and cooperation through the NATO Science for Peace and Security Program, the NATO membership will make the country more stable and functional. As John Kerry points out in his column, “the NATO membership has a proven record of promoting political progress across Eastern and Central Europe, and it could do the same for Bosnia-Herzegovina, too” (2009). Indeed, the reforms carried out en route to NATO membership has made Bosnia more stable and viable.

In addition, the establishment of unified armed forces of BiH has become an important step towards a strengthened and more unified country with stronger state government. This is also sending a positive message to NATO and EU members that they have a solid partner on the other side. As the former US Ambassador to BiH Douglas Meklhejni pointer out after the joint exercises of the Armed Forces and the US Army: “This is just another indicator which proves that this country is a strong and solid partner of NATO and of the EU member states” (Bjelajac: 2007). To put it simply, NATO-related defence reforms have to a large extent transferred responsibility to the central government. Indeed, should contradictions in state and entity law arise, the state law is the final word, made clear in Article 35: “The Parliamentary Assembly shall exercise democratic parliamentary control over the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina and all State-level defence institutions” (Article 35: 2003). All being said, with a stronger role of the state government in the area of defence matters Bosnia has resembled state as any Western democracy.

Common defence and army

As a result of the reforms made towards NATO integration, Bosnia today has really established a military structure that is controlled by civilian government as is the case in any democratic country. A new Law on Defence was adopted in December 2003 which reinforced the state defence structure. That is, its enactment and supporting legislative action at state and entity levels eventually enabled the formation of a single state-level defence establishment, with a clear chain of command emanating from the state down to the entities, reinforcing the supremacy of the state for defence matters (Perdan, 2008: 256). Furthermore, the Law on Defence made the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina responsible for the protection of country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Also, the Ministry of Defence of BiH was founded in 2004 as a central state body that is in charge of the unified Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, the country today has just one defence minister, one chief of staff, one chain of command and one army (Perdan, 2008: 257).

Indeed, the NATO-led defence reforms have produced remarkable results, helping Bosnia to create an integrated military that is a model for building effective state institutions and a credible partner for the NATO (Kerry, 2009). That is, Bosnia has established unified armed forces in which people from all three ethnic groups are working on joint missions and defence programs. In other words, for the first time in the post-war period the soldiers in the Bosnian army wear the same uniform with state insignia, they swear the same oath

and serve under the same country flag. In addition, by forming a single army the country has taken significant steps towards demilitarization so that the conflict that broke out in the 1990s never repeats. As Cerkez-Robinson from the USA Today points out: "Now, the three former antagonists – a Muslim Bosniak, a Roman Catholic Croat and a Christian Orthodox Serb – are training together as they prepare for voluntary duty in other crisis areas around the world" (2008).

Domestic effects of NATO reforms

The NATO membership is perceived among the region's countries as a good way to become a part of democratic and open western communities. That is, in the region NATO membership is viewed as a major strategic choice that would bring national leaderships and their respective societies closer to Euro-Atlantic integration (EKEM, 2010: 4). Although all the countries from the western Balkans are in one way or another integrating themselves into NATO structures each of them is at a different state on the road towards the Alliance. Thus, Albania and Croatia entered NATO in 2009 and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be the next state in the region to join if it meets the remaining criteria. The remaining countries from the Balkan region have made significant progress but are still far from the NATO membership because of their internal problems. That is why the membership of the Balkan countries to this organization will directly contribute to the enforcement of democracy, peace, stability, market economy and the rule of law in the region (IDM, 2008: 7).

Furthermore, formation and successful maintenance of unified armed forces in Bosnia is to a considerable extent strengthening the idea of a multi-national country as a possible political model. That is, the unified Bosnian army made up of soldiers from all three ethnic groups working and training together is a proof that a multi-national and multi-cultural country is possible and feasible when there is enough political will to achieve necessary consensus. As the head of the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Bosnia, General William Ward declared, "I think it sends a great message... that there is a commitment, a desire to move forward and get beyond the very destructive and terrible times that were experienced here during the war" (Hawton, 2003). This is the best message that a peaceful and multi-national Bosnia is a possible project. As the first commander of the Joint Command of Bosnian armed forces General Atif Dudakovic said, "The days of Ustasas, Mujahidins, Chetniks, Partisans, and the JNA have passed. This is now the new era. It is the era of unified armed forces of BiH" (Huseinovic, 2008).

Regional cooperation as a prerequisite

Most importantly, looking from a long-term perspective the integration of the region's countries into Euro-Atlantic organizations will result in a peaceful, stable and secure environment. In the aftermath of bloodshed from the early 1990s this is a historic opportunity for the regional leaders to establish more permanent peace and good neighbourly relations among themselves. Thus, in 2011 western Balkans indeed look like a more peaceful and secure place than it was in 1990s. This is to a large extent due to the regional states' Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations and common efforts committed on

this road. As president Bush emphasized at the Summit: "Today Balkan, is a region which is growing in tolerance and peace. These changes are a result of NATO determined actions and courageous choices of Balkan leaders, who have been working for leaving behind the violence and past divisions" (IDM, 2008: 11). Indeed, today it is almost impossible to think about the possibility of open war between the countries from the region.

In addition, the NATO and EU integration prospects have become crucial for strong and dynamic regional cooperation among the western Balkans countries. In other words, these countries and their governments have come to realize that only by increasing regional and international cooperation (political, social, economic and security) can their strategic objective of joining the two poles of the Euro-Atlantic community be attained (Couloumbis & Ramaj, 2007: 17). The rationale behind the requirement for Western Balkan regional cooperation as a prerequisite for both involvement in NATO and the European Union is straightforward (Seroka, 2008). Thus, the regional governments have implemented reforms such as closer cooperation with neighbours and multi-dimensional cooperation. Through its elaborated structures and effective missions, NATO has become a key player in shaping cooperative security in the post-Cold War Europe (Sanader, 2005). It would not be exaggerated to say that without Euro-Atlantic perspective the region would be one big powder barrel of Europe.

A large numbers of senior officers in the Western Balkan militaries have been trained in NATO and PfP facilities, and defence strategies have been adapted to integrate with NATO and ESDP strategic plans (Seroka, 2008). For instance, the Adriatic Charter has been an effective instrument that proved the practical usefulness of the regional cooperation of some of the Western Balkan states. The Adriatic Charter is an association formed and signed in May 2003 by Albania, Croatia, the Republic of Macedonia and USA to help their NATO efforts. BiH and Montenegro joined it in December 2008. As Grdesic points out referring to western Balkans cooperation: "The Charter has opened up many political, military, security and economic possibilities. Meetings, talks and contacts of the political elites of the three countries have enabled prejudices to be overcome and the trust built" (2004: 120). Thus, if this trend of peaceful coexistence and increasing cooperation is sustained, the Kantian peace proposition will have been successfully confirmed (Couloumbis & Ramaj, 2007).

Joint Bosnian forces in multi-national missions

In addition, NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme that Bosnia joined in December 2006 includes the practical cooperation with the applicants for alliance membership. Thus, Serbs, Croats and Muslims who completed training last month for the first army unit bringing together Bosnia's warring factions of 10 years ago left for the Middle East yesterday to join U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq (Dervisbegovic, 2005). To be precise, Bosnia and Herzegovina deployed in June 2005 a contingent of 36 troops specialized in mine-removal activities to the Diwaniyah area in southern Iraq. A Bosnian unit has a duty to deal with unexploded ordinance and ammunition (Hawton, 2005). The unit is Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit and was subordinated to a US Marine Engineer unit in the Fallujah area. The Bosnian contingent are set to rotate to Iraq for a period of six-months each. Additionally, in August 2008 a 49-man infantry unit was deployed to Baghdad to guard the US Military Camp Victory (Reuters, 2008).

Furthermore, in 2009 Bosnia sent its troops to Afghanistan to join the NATO-led mission. In light of this, a small contingent of Bosnian soldiers has been deployed to Helmand Province to serve as part of the Danish Contingent in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) providing security for their base in Gereshk (Plante: 2011). The country sent in total 10 officers to serve with the ISAF. Although its number is modest, a deployment of the Bosnian troops to Afghanistan is one of the major steps forward in the country's road to become a NATO member in the future. In addition, participation in a multi-national mission in Afghanistan is vital to contribute to a certain extent to international security and peace-building in the world. As NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer emphasized that "NATO's success in the peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operation in Afghanistan is the alliance's number one priority" (Hendrickson and Smith, 2006: 302).

Significance of multi-national peace missions

From its foundation in 1949 until the early 1990s, the central purpose of NATO was to provide collective defence to its members. The end of the Cold War left NATO with some sort of identity crisis: what was it, should it continue as an alliance, and if so to what purpose and under which circumstances? (Michta, 2001: 1). Following newly emerged conflicts in the world NATO has launched a number of the *peace support operations*. That is, NATO has formulated a doctrine on PSOs: "PSOs [...] involve military forces, diplomatic and humanitarian agencies [...] and may include Peace Enforcement and Peacekeeping as well as Conflict Prevention, Peacemaking, Peace Building and Humanitarian Relief" (NATO, 2001: xi). According to NATO, PSOs may also include peace enforcement missions that "aim to re-establish peace" (Non-article, 2005). So far, NATO has launched PSOs in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Afghanistan and, in a support role, Iraq. Multinational operations hold many benefits over unilateral action (Dijkstra, 2010: 1). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Bosnia has been taking part in a number of peace missions.

An active participation in multi-national missions abroad has been of crucial importance as the country thus fulfilled its main obligations on the road towards integration into NATO. After hard work on NATO-related reform process Bosnia has practically become a country that exports security. In other words, the Bosnian government has to a significant extent improved the image of the country that once was highly dependent on foreign security intervention into one that has developed armed forces which have a capacity and common will to contribute to international security. As Thomas Moffatt, U.S. European Command security assistance officer in Sarajevo points out:

"It is still a place that needs assistance from the international community for stability and reconstruction ... But, I think they are moving from a position as a security consumer to security provider. It demonstrates to the international community that Bosnia and Herzegovina can step up and help in some way" (Emert, 2005).

Also it is of crucial importance for a young democratic country such as Bosnia to be approaching NATO as the world's most successful organization dealing with world security. In this light, participation to missions abroad under the umbrella of NATO or the European Union in order to contribute to stability and peace in the world has been one

of the most important prerequisites for NATO membership aspirants. Thus, deploying its troops in missions abroad, Bosnia is slowly entering the family of peaceful and democratic countries which, as a rule of the game, do not wage war against each other. In fact, keeping democratic peace among them has become one of the most remarkable achievements of the Alliance. To put it simply, the key of NATO's success lays in common values shared by its members such as democracy, freedom, rule of law, free market economy etc. (IDM, 2008: 7). Thus, integrating into NATO through multi-national missions abroad Bosnia strengthens peace in the world and peace at home.

Conclusions

During the war in Bosnia in 1992-1995 the three ethnic groups in the country fought each other with predominantly ethnically-populated armed forces. Although the war came to an end in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Agreement, the armies in the country were divided along the ethnic lines creating separate armed forces, Bosniak-Croat, Army of the Federation of BiH and the Bosnian Serb, Army of Republika Srpska. Thus, such predominantly ethnic-populated armed forces had played considerable political role in the process of indoctrination of their ethnic population. However, as the country was striving to carry out Euro-Atlantic reforms the idea of unified armed forces has gradually become a subject matter of discussions. Also, a single state army was a condition for Bosnia to join NATO. Thus, in 2005 the Bosnian politicians agreed to merge the former rival armies into a unified army. As a result, today unified BiH Army comprising soldiers from all ethnic groups is making small but remarkable contributions towards security and peace-building both at national and global level.

Additionally, the prospect of the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community has to a significant extent brought security, stability and peace to the warring ethnic groups. Similarly, the maintenance of unified armed forces of BiH has become an important step towards a strengthened and more unified country with stronger and functional state government. Equally important, the integration of the region's countries into Euro-Atlantic organizations will result in a peaceful, stable and secure environment providing to the regional leaders a historic opportunity to establish more permanent peace and good neighborly relations among themselves. Furthermore, after establishing unified armed forces, Bosnia has deployed its troops in a number of multi-national peace operations. Taking part in multi-national missions abroad has been of crucial importance as the country thus fulfilled its main obligations on the road towards integration into NATO. Most importantly, after hard work on the NATO-related reform process Bosnia has practically become a country that exports security. This is indeed an important message for the world peace.

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