

Strengthening European
integration through the
analysis of conflict discourses
Revisiting the Past, Anticipating the Future

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Policy Recommendations for Bosnia-Herzegovina

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List of abbreviations & acronyms

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
DPA	Dayton Peace Agreement
EC	European Community/Communities
EU	European Union
OHR	Office of High Representative
RS	Republic of Srpska (<i>Republika Srpska</i>)
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
U.S.	United States

Table of Contents

1 Introduction	5
2 Methodology	7
3 Background: The EU’s approach to the troubled past of BiH	8
4 Policy recommendations for Bosnia-Herzegovina	11
4.1 History	12
4.2 Media	15
4.3 Politics	17
4.4 Arts and culture	18
5 Conclusion	20
6 References	22

1 Introduction

The history of the Balkan Peninsula was, like many other regions around the world, marked with violence and the vying for control over the territories between people and political powers of the time (Allcock 2000; Bose 2002). The turmoil was underpinned by the spread of different religions in these territories (e.g. spread of Islam with the Ottoman Empire) and the intra-religious schisms (e.g. the 11th century schism between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches). The 20th century brought fundamental political changes to the Balkans that echo to date: the demise of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century, followed by the Balkan Wars (1912-13), the two World Wars and the Yugoslav era (1945-1992), the latter also ending in wars (Bougarel 1996; Calic 1995). Inability to resolve many “ethnic questions” until today put an immense strain on people living in this area – including the present Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH).

With the already existing legacy of divides, the country's most recent armed conflict, the Bosnian war 1992-1995, only deepened the ethnic, religious and national splits in BiH, which are still present nowadays. This is not surprising, as the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), which in 1995 effectively ended armed violence – but brought no reconciliation –, carved the ethnic divisions of the country in stone and legalized them. Namely, the Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats “got” the Federation of BiH (51% of territory), whereas the Bosnian Serbs got the Republic of Srpska, spanning over 49% of the territory (Carmicachel 2002; Bieber 2010). By maintaining at least three different streams of ethno-nationalistic rhetoric, underpinned by portraying ‘the Other’ as an enemy, the political elites of each nation have been firmly holding the power in both entities since the end of the war. With the dissatisfaction over politicians growing among people, the poverty and the overall lack of progress, it does not come as a surprise that inter-ethnic tensions have not eased. Many share a belief that the main three nations living in BiH have been forced to share one country; that BiH should remain in one piece is also a belief shared by the international community, including the European Union (EU). While the separate narratives and the different visions of the future of BiH had been the point of disagreements for decades, the politicized state of the country nowadays seems to protrude into every aspect of society (Bojičić-Dželilović 2015; Bieber 2010).

The **main aim** of this document is *to propose policy recommendations for BiH – a roadmap for addressing some of the current challenges arising from the troubled past in the country*. This document is one of the final deliverables of the EU-funded project RePAST, which explores the issues related to the troubled history in eight European countries¹ in several domains of inquiry (history; media; politics; arts & culture). These recommendations stem from the earlier research conducted in the selected eight countries within all research domains of the project (see Section 2 for details). The RePAST project approaches the troubled past(s) of countries in an interdisciplinary way; it relies on the theoretical background and methodological approaches from several academic disciplines (history, journalism studies, political science, communication studies, cultural studies, computer

¹ Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Poland, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; see www.repast.eu for more information.

science). Such an approach is needed in order to disentangle this complex and intertwined conundrum of issues that span over many domains of social life in the societies with troubled past.

Since the beginning of the project in May 2018 until now, a number of people from ‘all walks of life’ have been interviewed. Many of them personally witnessed the war or, when it comes to younger generations, hold strong beliefs about the war, based on what they have been told about the war or have read about it. What is more, people living in the aftermath of armed violence have been constantly, on a daily basis, “reminded” of the war and the present ethnic tensions – unsurprisingly given the fact that the DPA (1995) set the “ethno-political functioning” of modern BiH. Thus, it is not surprising to see how the consequences of the war are being carried on through generations of people, strongly affecting everyone's lives both on individual and collective bases. Furthermore, because the country seems to be unable to break off from the ethnic and nationalistic narratives, many aspects of peoples' lives in BiH had remained similar, if not even the same for the past 25 years (dire in most of the cases). Consequently, without systemic reforms and adjustments, it is useless to expect that BiH could move forward. However, it is hard to expect any significant shifts because the major political players benefit from such situation, and are, thus, eager to perpetuate the conflict. These are the assumptions that the authors of this document had in mind, when writing these policy recommendations.

In this document, we follow **a methodological approach** that has been agreed-upon by the RePAST consortium in March 2020, in line with the Grant Agreement of the project.² This means that this document relies on a similar methodology also applied in other country-specific policy recommendations; it is also structured in the same way as the other recommendations. To come up with these particular recommendations – and not the other – we do not rely only on the feedback received by policy-makers and stakeholders on our draft version of this document (see Section 2), but we also contextualize the recommendations within some other existing initiatives being undertaken in BiH by other non-governmental and governmental organizations.³ Doing so, we try to complement and support the on-going endeavours related to the troubled past, which are in BiH, like in many other post-conflict societies, not scarce. Last, but not least, these recommendations take into consideration also the earlier and current approach(es) of the EU towards BiH when it comes to its troubled past (see Section 3 in this document).

The structure of the document is as follows: In Section 2, we explain the methodological approach, in particular, how we engaged the policy makers and stakeholders in BiH and those at the EU level and how their voices are reflected in these recommendations.⁴ In Section 3, we address the EU's approach to BiH and its troubled past, especially in the post-war period. By setting the context through the first three sections, we then come to Section 4, which outlines several policy

² For details, see Section 3 on methodology and the document ‘Instructions for WP6.6 - Policy Recommendations’, which has been submitted to the EU Participants Portal jointly with eight sets of country-specific policy recommendations.

³ Nansen Dialogue, Forum ZFD, Trial International, UNDP, USAID, the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

⁴ According to the Grant Agreement, it was necessary to gain insights directly from these experts, so as to make the recommendations more realistic and feasible.

recommendations for each of the domains explored in the RePAST project. Section 5 offers the concluding thoughts.

2 Methodology

The methodology underpinning these policy recommendations is based on a two-step strategy in order to secure the quality based on the previous RePAST research and to receive inputs from relevant stakeholders and policy-makers, who have a good sense what is feasible and eventually implementable in terms of recommendations for BiH. Other consortium partners, who prepared the policy recommendations for other seven countries investigated in the RePAST project, followed the same methodological approach.

The *first step* was writing the draft version of policy recommendations. This step, based on the previous research on BiH in the RePAST project (WP2 – History; WP3 Media; WP4 Arts & Culture; WP5 – Politics) was completed in early May 2020. The *second step* followed in mid-May; the draft recommendations were sent to the selected national policy makers and stakeholders in BiH, as well as to the EU policy makers and stakeholders that work on the issues related to BiH. We sent 50 emails to Bosnian-Herzegovinian and the EU policy-makers and stakeholders and asked for comments of our draft recommendations. The interlocutors were chosen in a way that certain selection criteria were applied; we wanted to make sure that the input was received from three groups: *a) policy-makers/representatives of the most important Bosnian-Herzegovinian parties; b) representatives of the BiH state and BiH NGOs; c) EU policy-makers and stake-holders.*

The response rate was very low, perhaps also due to the challenging situation with Covid-19 in BiH. However, we managed to receive comments of our draft recommendations by more policy makers and stakeholders than it had been envisaged with the instructions for this task (set by University of Ljubljana, in accordance with the Grant Agreement). Instead of six, we acquired responses from eight policy-makers and stakeholders. The instruction that the comments shall be received from both national Bosnian-Herzegovinian and at least two EU policy makers was also respected. With six interlocutors, we also conducted interviews,⁵ as required with the instructions for this task (the asterisk * is added to the names of those, who, in addition to the commenting of draft recommendations, also consented to the interview):

I. Policy-makers and representatives of Bosnian-Herzegovinian political parties⁶

- *Marija Iličić*, a member of HDZ BiH – the most influential Bosnian Croat political party – in the Parliament of the Federation of BiH

⁵ Due to the situation with Covid-19, the authors of this report were not able to travel to BiH and conduct the interviews in person. Therefore, it was necessary to rely on doing interviews (Zoom and Skype). However, the interview with Dr. Klemen Grošelj was done in person, because he was in the same country as the interviewers at the time of the interview.

⁶ We attempted to obtain the interview and/or written inputs also from The Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije*, SDA) which is the Bosniak-dominated political party. Unfortunately, they did not respond to our requests.

- *Saša Magazinović (*)*, a member of the Joint Committee on European Integration in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and the leader of the BiH Social Democratic Party's representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH
- *Snježana Novaković – Bursać (*)*, a member of the Joint Committee on European Integration in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and a member of SNSD – the most influential Bosnian Serb political party.

II. Representatives of the BiH state and BiH non-governmental organizations

- *Velma Šarić (*)*, the president of a local NGO Post-Conflict Research Center
- *Ante Vujnović (*)*, the director of the Office for the protection of monuments, BiH Ministry of culture and sports

III. EU stakeholders and policy-makers

- *Dr. Klemen Grošelj (*)*, a member of the Foreign Committee in the European Parliament and the president of the EP-BiH Friendship Group
- *Prof Dr Christian Preda (*)*, a former Standing Rapporteur for BiH in the European Parliament
- *Representatives of European Union External Action Service, Sarajevo Office.*

After receiving the feedback from these interlocutors, we revised the draft recommendations. In November 2020, the revised version was sent out for internal peer-review, which was done by two experts at University of Agder (Kenneth Andresen, Abit Hoxha). After receiving their comments in December 2020, we did the last revision of policy recommendations and prepared them for the submission to the EU Participants Portal.

3 Background: The EU's approach to the troubled past of BiH

The approach of the EU to the troubled past of BiH has changed significantly in the last three decades, from modest attempts to help the country and its people in the early 1990s to a more elaborated and costly efforts after the end of the war. The EU's approach can be divided into three broader phases: i) the period between 1992–1995; ii) the period between 1995–2008; iii) the period from 2008 until today.

First phase: The War in BiH (1992-1995)

The first identified phase was marked with the declaration of BiH's independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, followed by the war, which ended in late 1995. Various endogenous and exogenous actors were expecting that the EC/EU would (re)act in the war, but its efforts to create a common policy towards the war-torn BiH was hampered by "the intergovernmental nature" of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which in practice meant the lack of any substantial common policy towards BiH (Dover, 2005).

This contributed to the fact that beyond the financial and humanitarian response, which was given to BiH by the EC/ EU during the war, the ability to successfully halt armed violence could not be

pursued by this international organization. The limited role of the EU during the Bosnian war could also be observed when the DPA was signed in 1995, as the EU's representative was 'just' a co-chairman along with the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Russian Federation. This left many, including the interviewees in our project, with the perception of the U.S. as the main actor who "brought" peace to BiH, and with the EU as an actor who only observed the war as a bystander. However, the DPA, signed in the U.S. in 1995, laid down the conditions for international involvement in BiH, including the platform for the EU's post-war efforts in years to come.

Second phase: The increased role of the EU in BiH in the post-war period (1995-2008)

The second identified phase brought significant changes for the role of the EU in BiH and could be regarded as perhaps the most active period for the EU. The EU became, alongside with the Office of the High Representative (OHR),⁷ the main external actor in BiH and replaced the U.S. in that regard. Furthermore, this is the period when BiH started negotiating for the signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) after the Thessaloniki Declaration in 2003, when BiH received an unequivocal affirmation of its EU future. The EU's post-conflict efforts, which should be understood through the initiatives striving for the successful implementation of the Dayton Agreement while at the same time pursuing "the Euro-Atlantic integration" of BiH, can be divided into three broader set of activities : 1) constitutional reforms; 2) police reform; 3) bringing war-crime indictees to the courts (Arvanitopoulos and Tzifakis, 2008; Rangelov and Theros, 2009; Perry, 2015; Juncos, 2017; Zdeb, 2017).

When talking about the constitutional reforms, the role of the EU was two-fold. Firstly, by advocating for the reforms in order to strengthen the central government, the EU pursued the *institutional and administrative dimension* in order to reduce the visibility of the division into political entities along ethnic lines. Secondly, by advocating for the military and intelligence reforms, the EU pursued the *security dimension* in order to achieve sustainable peace (Padurariu, 2014; Kudlenko, 2017; Juncos, 2017).

One can argue that the police reform was the main priority of the EU, as the European Commission considered the reform as one of the last remaining obstacles for launching the negotiations over the SAA (European Parliament, 2005). This reform was not only important for building the institutional capacities of the central government, but was also pursued due to the fact that the police was an important instrument of ethnic cleansing during the war (ibid). The limited outcome of the reform could be ascribed to the unpreparedness of the Republika Srpska (RS) – one of the two entities in BiH – to integrate its police structures with those of the Federation of BiH and District Brčko into one centralised police force. It is also important to note that at that time, all the EU's 'second pillar' instruments of both CFSP and European Security and Defence Policy were employed in BiH, namely:

⁷ The DPA established the OHR to oversee its implementation. Furthermore, the OHR received wide-ranging powers to impose decisions («Bonn powers») in cases where the authorities are unable to agree, or where political and economic interests are considered to be at stake. It is important to mention that OHR had dismissed a total of 119 officials, issued 757 decisions and imposed 286 law until 2005 (Majstorović and Vučković, 2016).

EU Special Representative, EU Monitoring Mission, EU Police Mission and the EU peacekeeping force EUFOR (Kronenberger and Wouters, 2004; Dover, 2005; Juncos, 2013).

Finally, the most important EU efforts in addressing the troubled past of BiH postulate in its efforts to bring those accused of war crimes to justice after 1995. It took nine years (until 2005) for RS to start handing over war-crime indictees to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). However, the most wanted indictees, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, remained at large for a long period of heavy international presence in BiH (between 2008 and 2011, respectively). This demonstrates the limited capabilities of international actors to become important players in BiH issues. The most positive development in the field of war crimes was perhaps the restructuring of BiH's judicial system when the War Crimes Chamber of the State Court and the Special Department for War Crimes in the Bosnian Prosecutor's Office were opened (Meernik and Barron 2018). In the same year, the European Parliament also adopted its first Declaration on Srebrenica, which was meant to serve as a pillar of reconciliation, but rather further entrenched the positions of ethno-political parties (Milošević and Touquet 2018).⁸

Third phase: From the signature of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (2008) until today

The third period, identified for the purpose of disentangling the EU's approach to the troubled past of BiH, begins in 2008 with the signature of the SAA between the EU and BiH, which can be regarded as one of the most important steps in the process of BiH's challenging integration into the EU. However, regardless of this success for BiH, the period between 2008 and 2016, when BiH finally submitted its EU membership application, can be understood as 'a period of regression'.

The EU's efforts, which strived towards the reforms to create 'a more functional state', were met with resistance by the political authorities in RS. The EU approach was risky as it created the narrative of 'cutting back the Bosnian Serbs and Croats while empowering Bosniaks' (Noutcheva, 2012); however, it should be added that it is difficult to say how the EU could have approached this problem more efficiently. Opting for constitutional reforms – an example of this could be the Prud and Butmir Processes⁹ (Zdeb, 2017) – opened the 'Pandora's box' of a power-sharing system that no one was fully satisfied with but political elites refrained from contesting it (Biermann, 2014). In line with that, neither "the stick" of the Bonn powers, nor "the carrot" of prospective EU accession could have driven the implementation of top-down reforms that did not have support by the ethno-political elites (Muehlmann, 2008). An important indicator of that was the secessionist rhetoric of Bosnian Serb Milorad Dodik, then the Prime Minister of the RS, who had made several statements that RS

⁸ The European Parliament adopted three different declarations on Srebrenica from 2015 until 2015 (Milošević and Touquet 2018).

⁹ Prud and Butmir Processes were two informal attempts to create an agreement on the institutional reforms in order to implement key changes and put an end to the dysfunctional power-sharing institutional arrangement that was installed by the DPA (Zdeb, 2017).

would declare independence from BiH (Mušinović, 2015)¹⁰, but the EU was not able to do anything significant in this regard, except deploring such rhetoric.

The EU's endeavours did not end here as the EU has argued on many occasions that the SAA would not enter into force unless the Dayton constitution was revised according to a European Court of Human Rights Sejdić-Finci¹¹ ruling in 2009, which called for electoral reform of the tripartite Presidency of BiH and the House of Peoples as they were reserved only for ethnic Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats (Biermann, 2014, p. 502). However, coercion by imposition by the EU was scaled down and the EU's footprint in BiH significantly decreased; for example, the size of EUFOR troops was downsized from 7000 troops in 2004 to 2000 troops in 2010, followed by the termination of the EU Police Mission in BiH in 2012 (Palm, 2017). Here, it is also important to note the EU's shift from security and socio-political to economic initiatives, as the only visible EU efforts during this period were: a) visa liberalisation in 2008/2010¹²; b) the introduction of EU's Economic Reform Programme and Competitiveness and Growth Programme 2014/2015.¹³ Finally, this "period of regression", which was marked with Milorad Dodik's resistance towards the EU, reached its peak in 2016 when RS held an unconstitutional referendum on the National Day of RS. This action violated the DPA and unsurprisingly caused strong reactions by the EU officials (Rettman, 2017). The last four years were not marked with anything specific when it comes to the attempts of the EU with regard to overcoming troubled past in BiH.

4 Policy recommendations for Bosnia-Herzegovina

Before proposing the specific policy recommendations for BiH, let us briefly repeat the most important aspects of the conflict that the authors of this document had in mind, when considering which recommendations should be proposed.

The historic legacy of the conflict(s) and their often diametrically different interpretation(s) among the peoples of BiH precede the latest war (1992-95); it goes back for centuries to the medieval and the Ottoman era. The often negative perceptions of 'the other' (ethnic, religious, cultural groups etc.), including prejudice and stereotyping, developed in the Balkans mainly in the 19th century with the age of "national awakenings" and romantic nationalism, leading to the Berlin Congress (1878) and the emergence of newly independent states in the region. The 20th century, with the Balkan Wars (1912-13), the First World War and the Second World War strengthened the perceptions of the other ethnic group as "an eternal, blood-thirsty enemy of us" (Zupančič and Arbeiter, 2016); the latest war

¹⁰ Between 2009–2015, Dodik threatened with the eventual referendum on the independence of RS more than 30 times (Mušinović, 2015).

¹¹ The plaintiffs in this law suit were two citizens of BiH, Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci, who are of Roma and Jewish ethnicity, and could not as such stand for the elections as candidates.

¹² In 2008, the EU concluded visa facilitation agreements with all Southeast European countries. However, in 2009, the EU announced that the citizens of BiH would not enjoy a visa-free travel due to lack of reform progress (Biermann, 2014, p. 502). The EU conditions were met in October 2010 and BiH was granted visa liberalisation.

¹³ It is important to mention that this initiatives were exercised in the midst of the protests in Tuzla, where the non-ethnic momentum occurred as the protesters demanded the social justice (Puljek-Shank and Fritsch, 2018).

in BiH only further entrenched such commonly-held beliefs. When thinking how the troubled past can be overcome – and which policy recommendations should be proposed – it needs to be taken into account that the cleavage between the peoples in BiH does not appear along ethno-religious lines only. On the contrary, these *longue durée* conflict(s) have been marked with severe *intra-ethnic* divisions for decades, leading to the opposing interpretations and mutually exclusive ideologies at this level, as well.

Therefore, we acknowledge it is difficult to expect any significant steps in overcoming the troubled past, as the current political system, which is constructed in the way that it entrenches the ethno-political divisions, is a desired outcome and an appropriate *modus operandi* for ethno-political elites of all major ethnic groups in BiH.¹⁴ This has also been confirmed in our earlier research in the RePAST project and can also be documented in the work of other scholars (Bieber 2010; Bojicic-Dzelilovic 2015; Bose 2002; Calic 1995). Although we, in line with the Instructions for WP6.6, break the recommendations down into four distinct sections (history, media, politics, culture & arts), we do so for the analytical purposes only; the recommendations should be read comprehensively, as they address the intertwined character of the troubled past pervading several fields of social life.

4.1 History

First recommendation. As the students at all levels of the educational system in BiH have different curricula (and different textbooks etc.), it comes as no surprise that different emphases on “important events” are being made at different schools, and that ignoring the other events, which do not speak in favour of a given dominant (ethnic) narrative, is a norm.¹⁵ Thus, our first recommendation concerns **the need to reform the teaching of history in schools**, which is the recommendation to all ministries of education in BiH.¹⁶ The reform should aim at “de-ethnicizing” history courses at all levels of educational system and seek to establish curricula, which would transcend the glorification or exclusive rightfulness of one ethnic group – and, *vice versa*, to transcend portraying the other ethnic group as a solid, monolithic bloc, responsible for all misery that has happened to ‘our’ ethnic group. This would be possible if comparative and competitive history teaching and education, based on historic facts, are developed.

Second recommendation. This recommendation is linked to the previous and suggests that not only the most recent history (the war 1992-95), but also **the events that have led to the war and the inter-ethnic issues preceding this war should be brought into school discussions** – in particular how

¹⁴ The difficulty of moving forward with regard to the troubled past at even the most imminent issues can be observed fairly well in the fact that BiH as a state has not endorsed the establishment of the Regional Commission for the establishment of facts on war crimes in the territory of the former SFRY (REKOM). The reason for not endorsing it was the absence of consensus among the members of the BiH Presidency on this initiative (RECOM 2018).

¹⁵ See, for example, Soldo (2018).

¹⁶ In accordance with the BiH Constitution, there are twelve responsible institutions of education in BiH: the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska, ten cantonal ministries of education in the Federation of BiH and The Department for Education of the Brčko District Government (European Commission 2020).

different ethnic groups nowadays assess certain important historic events related to the troubled past, and what arguments do they use to support their stances. In particular, it has to be debated how and why the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) was established after the World War 1, how diverging opinions on the country's future, promoted by different ethnic groups, have developed since its inception more than a century ago, how different ethnic and social groups saw their place in the socialist Yugoslavia, how and why nationalistic ideas in republics have been suppressed "in the name of unitary Yugoslavia" etc.

Third recommendation. Since recommending to write common history textbooks that would be used throughout BiH is at a given point perhaps an over-ambitious goal due to the current political divisions (regardless of the need for doing so), a step forward might be our next recommendation. We suggest the ministries of education in both the Federation BiH and Republika Srpska to develop a scheme, which would **support the teachers to travel to other parts of BiH in order to give lectures or organize seminars at the schools with different curricula than their own**. Although this seems to be most relevant for history teachers, the scheme could provide means also for teachers in other subjects to benefit from this scheme and engage in lectures or seminars throughout BiH.¹⁷

Fourth recommendation. This recommendation concerns expanding the scope of history teaching. Namely, not only in history courses, but also in other subjects it should be encouraged **to promote "the individuality of war crimes"**, so as to contrast the belief that a specific war crime was committed by "the nation" as a whole. Moreover, not necessarily in history classes only, but also elsewhere (in high schools also in ethics, philosophy, psychology, sociology etc.), it should be emphasized that if a member of one ethnic group committed a war crime, it does not mean that the whole ethnic group the perpetrator belongs to is responsible for committing the war crime. However, it has to be acknowledged – if this was the case – that the crime might have been committed "in the name" of a given ethnic group or a particular political idea, but the teachers should be careful in their explanations that this does not automatically mean that the whole ethnic group support(ed) the perpetrators' actions.

Fifth recommendation. We propose the ministries of education in BiH to consider how **the evidence, which demonstrates that all ethnic groups suffered in the war, could be included in the curricula**,¹⁸ **and also how the many examples of inter-ethnic help during the war could be discussed at schools**.¹⁹ This might sensitize children and students in the sense of universalism (humanism), which transcends ethnic identities and make them understand that it were *the people* who suffered (and

¹⁷ In addition to this, it has to be noted that, when it comes to the teaching of 20th century history, the debate often revolves about "big" geopolitical ideas and ideologies at the global level, whereas their impact on the local environment(s) of BiH or wider Yugoslavia has often been neglected.

¹⁸ For example, teaching about the cases, which show that people of different ethnic groups often suffered from the same atrocity. A good example is the story of Suada Dilberović and Olga Sučić, two young girls belonging to two different ethnic groups that fought in the war (Bosniak and Croatian). The two girls are considered the first victims of war; they were killed in Sarajevo on the same day, on the same place (Historija, 2020).

¹⁹ For example, the cases, when the neighbours of different ethnic origin tried to save each other during armed violence.

not that only members of *a particular ethnic group* suffered), and could eventually demythologize the other ethnic group as a monolithic bloc attempting to destroy “us”.

Sixth recommendation. We recommend the BiH ministries of education **to offer teachers at all educational levels the possibility of continuous education and training at the international level**; this pertains not only to history teachers, but wider, as explained in the previous section. To stimulate this, the ministries of education in the Federation BiH and Republika Srpska should allocate resources, which would encourage and financially support the expansion of schemes enabling teachers to travel abroad for study reasons. Such schemes would allow teachers attending the seminars or other activities, where they would have a chance to learn how other countries – also previously involved in armed conflicts – managed to reach a certain level of mutual understanding or a certain degree of reconciliation (e.g. France–Germany after World War 2). At such events, the teachers from all parts of BiH, otherwise working within different curricula, could come together on “a neutral terrain” without being closely monitored for their words from their peers (*intra-ethnic* pressure). In addition, developing some other skills could also be possible at such seminars (e.g. how to recognize and deal with trauma, the skills in trauma-informed active listening and treating students; learning how psychosocial issues prevent people from being inclined to reconciliation). International donors in BiH could also further support programmes and activities of this kind.

Seventh recommendation. The last recommendation in this section concerns **building the places of consciousness** throughout BiH (monuments, artistic installations etc.). It is the BiH Ministry for Civil Affairs which could advocate for building such places throughout BiH.²⁰ The places of consciousness would not counter, but rather complement the existing places of remembrance (e.g. Srebrenica-Potočari commemoration on 11 July, where the predominantly Bosniak victims of genocide are remembered every year, the commemoration for the Serbian victims in Bratunac; commemorations for Croats killed in BiH). The places of consciousness would perhaps offer a possibility, to some people at least, to transcend the particularities or burdens of narrowly defined ethno-religious identities and the narrative that only ‘our’ ethnic group suffered during the war. This might sound idealistic, but perhaps at least some people might come closer to each other at the humanistic (universalistic) level in this way.²¹

²⁰ The BiH Ministry for Civil Affairs coordinates the work of several entity ministries throughout BiH. In the Federation of BiH, these institutions are: Ministry of Regional Planning, Ministry of Culture and Sports; Institute for the Protection of Monuments; in Republika Srpska, these institutions are: Ministry of Regional Planning, Civil Engineering and the Environment; Ministry for Education and Culture; Institute for the Protection of cultural-historical and natural heritage (Council of Europe, 2017).

²¹ It has to be acknowledged that such initiatives already exist in BiH, but are hard to be implemented. In Prijedor, for example, building the memorial for killed children is being delayed for years, although the international community, including the OSCE, have been actively trying to implement this, yet to no avail. However, there are already some places, which could be regarded as the places of consciousness – The War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, for example.

4.2 Media

Similar to what we have observed in the previous section on history, it is also important to note that some of the recommendations below have already been given recently by several organizations,²² which brings us to the conclusion that the issues addressed are recurring in BiH and are that more problematic.

First recommendation. This recommendation pertains to BiH media outlets, which should gain more independency and break away from political and business influence. The socio-political context in BiH makes this a great challenge, and in this regard, we suggest the authorities **considering the possibility of establishing the central registry of media ownership, including online media**. Another way to decrease the political and business influence over media, partially at least, is **to stimulate journalist associations to seek funding from international organizations (including the EU), NGOs and other initiatives** that support professional journalism.²³

Second recommendation. In the interest of raising the quality of BiH media, our second recommendation emphasises the need to strengthen, improve and update media regulations in the country. Although the Communication Regulatory Agency of BiH is operational, multiple analyses²⁴ have shown that the Agency's independent work has been hindered by several issues (e.g. the budgetary constraints, the over-politicized process of selecting its leadership and supervisory bodies). Thus, NGOs, international organizations, local and foreign media experts and/or political parties could **send an initiative to the Council of Ministers to launch the process of making necessary changes, which would decrease the political influence over the Communication Regulatory Agency, especially its governing bodies**. This would foster the professional standards needed for the overall improvement of media reporting in BiH, as also some other institutions could directly benefit from this.²⁵

Third recommendation. This recommendation pertains to the changes of laws for the protection of journalists, who are, as the RePAST research and several other analyses have shown,²⁶ often targeted because of their work (especially when it comes to unravelling corruption and crime). We recommend the relevant institutions – first and foremost, the Ministry of Justice of the Federation BiH and the Ministry of Justice of Republika Srpska – **to launch the public debate, followed by the**

²² See UNESCO & The International Programme for the Development of Communication (2019), for example.

²³ An example that can be followed is the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network – BIRN. This is an independent network of local and regional NGOs that strive to foster media independency and freedom of speech (the BIRN's platform Balkan Insight regularly publishes professional and evidence-based reports about the 'troubled past' of BiH, including war crimes and sufferings, as experienced by all victims of war, regardless of their ethnicity).

²⁴ See Bukovska (2012).

²⁵ There is also the Press Council (*Vijeće za štampu BiH*), which is supposed to support professional standards in print and online media, but as a non-governmental entity it has limited powers with regard to the imposition of regulations and laws in the media and is, according to a few experts (Kasumović, Memčić and Mehmedović, 2019; Sokol 2019), mostly inefficient.

²⁶ See, for example, Institucija ombudsmena/ombudsmana za ljudska prava BiH (2017).

procedure leading to the legislative changes, which would define the attack on journalists as a serious violation of public order (or, in the most serious cases, as a special act of crime).

Fourth recommendation. The political landscape, ethnic divisions and even journalist intimidation minimise the diversity in the media, promote segmentation and discourage freedom of expression in BiH. Although the country's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, it remains questionable how much people truly feel comfortable practising it.²⁷ Thus, our recommendation is to further promote and ensure the freedom of expression in the media, but at the same time, to limit and sanction the spread of disinformation and fake news. In this regard, as the first step, we suggest **launching public debates at the institutional levels throughout BiH in order to come up with the draft of legislative changes in relevant domains – including the sanctions for violations and hate speech in the media.**

Fifth recommendation. As a non-traditional form of media, social media represents a great challenge in terms of regulation, as it has been the hub of hate speech rhetoric and tensions among the main ethnic groups in BiH, especially among the younger generations and the diaspora, which is also very active online in these regards. Hence, this recommendation, which is related to the previous one, necessitates **strengthening the regulations of hate speech in social media and its sanctioning.** By establishing stronger regulations within the relevant legislative frameworks,²⁸ online space for ethnic animosities could potentially be minimised.²⁹

Sixth recommendation. This recommendation concerns the education and training of journalists. We recommend that **faculties with journalism departments consider modernizing media curricula** (new special courses, practical teaching methods etc.). In this regard, the ministries and other institutional bodies in BiH responsible for media and/or education, NGOs etc. should **support or offer courses, workshops and conferences to improve the skills and professional standards of journalists.**

Seventh recommendation. In the RePAST media analysis, we found that BiH media mostly focus on political and historical issues that solely pertain to ethnic divisions, and much less on gender issues.³⁰ Thus, our final recommendation in this section is **to stimulate the debate on gender issues in the media,** especially de-stigmatization of wartime rape and its male and female victims.

²⁷ See, for example, UNESCO (2019).

²⁸ Law on Communications of BiH, the Law on Public Information of RS and Law on Communications of FBiH etc.

²⁹ The Press Council has the role in this regard; its work and responsibilities should be further promoted, so that people in BiH would become aware of the existence of this important institution.

³⁰ On the other hand, an increasing number of artists and activists are addressing stigmatised issues of BiH history, which is an example to be followed also by the media.

4.3 Politics

First recommendation. The first recommendation concerns **the need to support the “de-ethnicisation” of BiH political parties – especially those with ethno-political rhetoric – through fostering integration into the political groups in the European Parliament.** While the divisions along the ethnic lines are mostly visible in the BiH’s political arena, the potential “Europeanization”³¹ of political parties in BiH is still not explored and utilized enough. In this regard, the EU could, through the European Parliament, for example, guarantee internship or traineeship positions for professionals and leaders from BiH political parties.³²

Second recommendation. Many political parties have the so-called “youth wings” (sections), which are the extensions of parties that provide space for young people to develop their skills and meaningfully participate in political life.³³ This recommendation concerns **the need to professionalize national youth party wings in BiH through EU grants and programmes,** for example, via The Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies,³⁴ or via already existing seminars and workshops that could be organized by the EU Delegation in BiH. **The BiH educational ministries and institutions should launch a public campaign, meant at encouraging political parties’ youth wings to engage in these frameworks** in order to develop skills, expand knowledge and create networks.

Third recommendation. Our research in the RePAST project has shown that the links between youth of different ethnic background in BiH are scarce and weak. Thus, this recommendation links with the previous recommendation and concerns the need **to support intra-country mobility of political youth wings.** While the political reality of BiH is predominantly unravelled within each respective political entity, this does not mean that the strongest political parties (such as the Party of Democratic Action, Alliance of Independent Social Democrats and Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, HDZ BiH etc.) do not have their local branches throughout BiH and assure their representation in each of the two political entities. Furthermore, they are usually even more instrumentalized if they are originally perceived as representing one ethnic group in entity where this ethnic group does not have a clear majority. This type of antagonizing, which is predominantly based

³¹ Europeanization is referring to the the interactions between the EU and the countries that aspire to join the EU. In this respect, the prospective candidates adopt certain changes in their countries and implement a few good practices that already exist in the EU and implement them in the political, economic, social, legislative etc. systems.

³² Until now, this kind of “Europeanisation through socialisation” was left to individual political groups in the European Parliament, which are usually filling these positions with members of their affiliated political parties from member states.

³³ Youth wings in general serve different purpose, all of which in order to provide entry points to enhance both youth political participation and strive towards reconciliation. As Ozerdem (2016) argues, there are many examples of the contribution that youth has made towards reconciliation such as strengthening of community cohesion and trust-building activities across different ethno-religious groups. The potential of youth party wings within this paradigm should not be neglected. Even more, the prospective of youth wings for facilitating networks and formation of personal and/or issue-based alliances across ethnical lines is perhaps possible due to their shared burden of being young and inexperienced and often not taken seriously in public sphere.

³⁴ For more on the Council of Europe Schools of political studies, see: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/schools-political-studies>

on the talks on ‘who is the legitimate representative of one ethnic group in one political entity’³⁵ could be mitigated if younger generations of future political elites would bridge the lack of intra-country mobility. Such initiatives could strengthen the civic dimension and in return offer a platform for conducting political activities beyond entity-level. Last, but not least, the actions that stimulate political or civic participation of young people, who are not members of youth wings of political parties, should also be supported.

Fourth recommendation. This recommendation is to support initiatives that try to hold accountable BiH’s political parties, in particular its elites. Consolidated democracies have, through time, developed robust civil society platforms – usually called Truth-meters – that are focused on promoting the accountability of political parties and public officials towards their citizens. Such platforms already exist in BiH; one of them is *Istinomjer*, which evaluates public officials’ statements in terms of their truthfulness and fulfilment of the promises they have given.³⁶ **By backing *Istinomjer* and similar initiatives with the financial and political endorsements and public campaigning,** the EU could foster the accountability of political parties and public officials. This would shed light upon (shallow) promises from main BiH’s political parties, which have been exhibiting a clear pattern of populism and ethno-political exclusivism.

Fifth recommendation. Despite the fact that reality in BiH is dominated by ethno-politics, it does not mean that social solidarity across ethno-politics never happens. In the last few years, our findings in the RePAST project have shown there have been several examples of mobilization ‘beyond entity lines’ and beyond identity politics (the protests in Tuzla in 2014, floods throughout the country in 2014, protests for David Dragičević in 2019, LGBT activities that connect activists from both entities etc.).³⁷ Stemming from this, the *fifth recommendation* is **to advocate for functional partnerships through issue-based policies and topics beyond ethnic lines.** In line with this, new political parties or younger political parties should learn from such trans-ethnic or civic activities and search for policies that do not inherently contain ‘ethnic character’.³⁸

4.4 Arts and culture

The field of arts and culture is also in BiH perhaps one of the most relevant in terms the possibility of making a step further in overcoming the troubled past, as the majority of artists believe in universalistic (humanistic) rather than ethnic principles. The ‘inter-ethnic contacts’ between the

³⁵One such example are recent words by Milorad Dodik, Bosnian Serb member of the BiH's Presidency, who said that his party should have a vice-president in the Federation of BiH as the Alliance of independent Social Democrats are the only legitimate representatives of Bosnian Serb people (BHRT, 2020).

³⁶ In addition, *Istinomjer* monitors the fulfilment of the election promises made by both individuals and political parties through election programs.

³⁷ We mentioned only the most vivid examples, which demonstrate that ordinary people do not always follow the ethno-political exclusivism promoted by political elites, when people can relate to a particular situation or a common goal.

³⁸ Here, the contemporary strategies adopted by the EU such as the New Green Deal or Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans could be used in order to forge trans-ethnic political partnerships in order to achieve socio-political transformation of BiH’s political landscape.

artists and cultural workers and the exchanges are something that made significant progress in the last years, and this should be further supported.³⁹

First recommendation. Our first recommendation is **to enhance the support for cultural and artistic projects and activities that foster the idea of the common belonging of all human beings**, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political opinions etc. The ministries and institutions⁴⁰ responsible for cultural affairs in BiH should stimulate such projects and should also engage in acquiring donors' money for supporting such activities. Such projects, transcending ethnic boundaries, could eventually decrease the grip of ethno-political narratives pervading in BiH.

Second recommendation. This recommendation concerns a shortage of qualified and skilled professionals in the cultural sector in BiH; this is what the findings in the RePAST project and some other studies – e.g. the analysis of the British Council⁴¹ – have shown. The latter study demonstrated that the skill gaps in the cultural sector are so wide-ranging that the potential of cultural workers cannot be fulfilled. Thus, we recommend that the BiH institutions responsible for cultural affairs, in cooperation with international donors, who eagerly support such activities, **strengthen the programmes for acquiring the knowledge on cross-sectoral and technical skills** of workers in cultural sector.

Third recommendation. We propose the ministries of education and faculties **to modernize educational and training programmes in culture by fostering knowledge and skills needed in the 21st century**. For example, knowledge on general cultural management (including event management and marketing), strategic planning, critical thinking and critical writing, audience development and audience engagement, entrepreneurial and business skills (including proposal writing and income generation) is something that can be fostered and financially supported.⁴²

Fourth recommendation. It is recommended that the institutions responsible for cultural affairs throughout BiH develop **programmes and policies for “audience development”**. The need for “audience development” is important for all segments of the cultural sector; in particular, public cultural institutions face a big problem of attendance of their cultural offer. However, the costs of

³⁹ See, for example, Regional Consultation Meeting EU – Western Balkans Cultural Relations (more information at <https://www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/2019/04/11/regional-consultation-meeting-sarajevo-8-9-april/>).

⁴⁰ Similar to other ministries, also the cultural affairs fall under the jurisdiction of different political entities. This means that cultural affairs are also not centralized, as several institutions throughout BiH deal with culture.

⁴¹ See British Council (2018), available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/h086_02_culturalskillsunit_western_balkans_final_web_1.pdf

⁴² As the British Council report (2018) has shown, individuals working in the cultural sector, including those in managerial positions, lack the managerial skills and are “self-taught” or work based on their “inspiration” in this regard, because these skills have not been taught during their education.

people's participation at such events in a country with difficult economic circumstances is something that should be prioritized in the future thinking (e.g. free or subsidized tickets), because many people cannot afford to participate in cultural events.

Fifth recommendation. With regard to understanding the position arts and culture have in BiH, it has to be acknowledged that the stereotype of artists as persons who are always depending on the other (e.g. state support) and cannot earn money with their work is quite common. Thus, it is recommended that the ministries and institutions responsible for culture in BiH launch **the campaigns for altering the belief of artists as people who cannot live from their artistic work** (e.g. by showing some good examples of artists, who earn enough to live from their artistic work).

Sixth recommendation. Our research has shown that, with some exceptions, the majority of BiH artists work and perform/display their work in the political entity they live in. Thus, our last recommendation concerns fostering mobility in the artistic and cultural sector. In addition **to the need to enhance international exchange of cultural workers and artists** (which would enable visiting professors and experts coming to BiH and BiH teachers and cultural workers going abroad), **intra-country mobility programmes of cultural workers and artists should be developed by the ministries and institutions responsible for culture and education** in BiH. Also, cooperation between schools and universities teaching arts across the boundary of a political entity is something that can be encouraged with different projects (e.g. Bosniak and Bosnian Croats students meeting their peers in Republika Srpska, and *vice versa*, or, at least, to exchange ideas and works online).

5 Conclusion

Our research confirmed that although the conflicts in BiH are complex and intertwined, and thus, hard to dissolve, because they serve the ethno-political elites and the centres of power well, there are anyway several positive elements that could be utilized in the future attempts for overcoming troubled past. The loss of the two most important ethno-political parties SDSS and SDA at the local elections in Sarajevo and Banja Luka in late 2020, voices of some journalists, civil rights activists and others that unequivocally speak against ethnic nationalism, civil rights actions that cross ethnic boundaries (LGBT movement, the initiative 'Justice for David' etc.), inter-ethnic cooperation during the emergencies (floods) and some other developments we unravelled in the earlier work in the RePAST project have shown that 'the ethno-political glue' might not be a means which would *per se* and always be a trump card that wins in BiH.

New information technologies and the overall digitalization of life – the topics that have not been explored in this project in detail, but can nevertheless be considered in these concluding thoughts – offer a number of possibilities for BiH, as well. They are relatively cheap and offer more chances for a greater participation in public life, and are, as some authors would claim, consequently more 'democratic' (Ulbricht, 2020). Some of these aspects can be directly and relatively quickly utilized in

the implementation of these policy recommendations (e.g. exchanging work of artists across ethnic lines or history textbooks through e-platforms).

Our research – especially working package on Oral History (WP2) – has also shown that many young people are less burdened with the impact of the most recent war in BiH. A lot of them are willing to question prejudices against other ethnic groups, have less stereotypes and are prepared to challenge the dominant ethno-political narratives despite the fact that they might face pressure from their social groups.⁴³ Hence, as cliché as this might sound, but youth in BiH is the group that is on average more willing to engage in the activities that go beyond ethnic boundaries – if the opportunities are provided, of course. However, exactly here lays the problem. It is the dire social, economic and political context that generates frustration for young people. In such circumstances, it is easier to fall prey to ethno-political narratives, which do not only give people a sense of (illusory) stability, but often also provides with some sort of economic security (e.g. by securing jobs through political connections). Creating viable opportunities for youth, thus, might be a step forward in overcoming troubled past. As this is not happening, it is no surprise that young generations from all ethnic groups are leaving BiH at alarming rates.⁴⁴

The public debate on troubled past should be promoted by all means, especially among youth. However, such a debate should aspire to go beyond ethnic boundaries and the questions that do not work for the good of reconciliation (e.g. which of the groups suffered more during the war). The discussions should perhaps be led by actors that do not resort to narrow ethno-political interpretations of history and the present; there are a few of them in BiH and could be mobilized by the stakeholders that strive for overcoming troubled past in cooperation with international actors for this purpose. This way, the message that people from all ethnic groups suffered in the war – and are still suffering today from the things that fairly transcend ethnic boundaries (poverty, lack of opportunities, corruption etc.) – could be better heard.

⁴³ We have confirmed in our paper, which has been published in the days, when these recommendations were submitted (see Zupančič et al, 2020) that especially young people (students) in BiH do not necessarily perceive ‘the other’ in BiH through an ethno-political lens, as the literature often suggests.

⁴⁴ Since 2013, more than 200,000 people have left the country (Sarajevo Times 2020).

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