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INFORMATION POLICIES AND INTEGRATION OF BIH AND MONTENEGRO IN THE EU



Hybrid Warfare Research Institute
Zagreb, Croatia

Institute for Socio-Political Research
Mostar, Bosna i Hercegovina

2026.



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Hybrid Warfare Research Institute, Zagreb, Croatia

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The project is financed by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. The views expressed in this publication are the sole responsibility of the Contractor/Author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia



REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Ministry of Foreign
and European Affairs

ISBN: 978-953-47211-1-7

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REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
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Imprint

Title:

- Information Policies and Integration of BiH and Montenegro in the EU

Publishers:

- Hybrid Warfare Research Institute, Teslina 10, Zagreb, Croatia
- Institute for Socio-Political Research, Kralja Petra Krešimira IV b.b., Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

For publishers:

- Assoc. Prof. Gordan Akrap
- Stipan Zovko

Editors:

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REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
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and European Affairs

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Print preparation: Davor Maričić, Institute for Electronic Business Ltd., www.INSTITUT.hr

Print:

PRESSUM – University of Mostar, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Zagreb 2026.

Mostar 2026.

Financed by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia:
VIII-JP-OCD-01-2024/7

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- Institute for Research of Hybrid Conflicts, Teslina 10, Zagreb, Croatia
- Institute for Socio-Political Research, King Petar Krešimir IV b.b., Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

ISBN: 978-953-47211-1-7

Cover photo: Gordan Akrap and Artificial Intelligence

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Executive Summary

In the modern information environment, the media are no longer just intermediaries in the transfer of information between different political actors and the target public. They represent one of the key factors in shaping perceptions, social identities, interpretation of history, collective understanding of reality and projection of desirable futures. In societies marked by complex political relations, historical disputes and unresolved social, political, economic, security and institutional issues, media content often goes beyond the function of informing. They become an important instrument of political interpretation, framing reality using different messages and symbols, and constructing social narratives. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a country marked by a complex constitutional structure, multiple identity layers and long-standing political and social disputes, represents a particularly relevant space for studying the relationship between the media, politics, and public discourse. Montenegro is in a remarkably similar, demanding and challenging moment, burdened with numerous open issues, some of which even reach for the abolition of its statehood.

Conflicts and wars are no longer fought exclusively in the physical domain, on the classic battlefield. In addition to military, political, security, social, intelligence and security, religious, digital, and economic instruments of power, the information space is one of the key areas in which a strategic competition takes place between varied factors (states, political movements, interest groups and individuals). The battle to control narratives, shape perceptions and direct the cognitive processes of the public is an integral part of almost every political and social process. The ability to influence the individual, group, and collective perception of social reality, and thus the decision-making process, has become one of the most valuable resources of modern times.

In such a context, the media play an extremely important role because with their choice of topics, the way of interpreting events, the choice of interlocutors and the use of certain linguistic patterns and narratives, they actively participate in shaping the perception and interpretation of political processes. The media are no longer just transmitters of information. They are an important factor that shapes the information space, participating in the creation of interpretative frameworks which are used by different audiences to interpret political events, international relations and social processes. The boundary between information, political activism, strategic communication, and information action is becoming increasingly blurred. That is why the analysis of media content today is not only a question of the existence of journalistic ethics or information and communication research. It is also an issue that is associated with social and political stability and

national security. It is especially important to understand how the media represent neighboring countries and their political actors, since information content directly affects public opinion, interstate relations, and political communication.

Three decades after the signing of the Washington Agreement and the Dayton Peace Agreements, Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces numerous challenges regarding the functioning of the political system, relations between constituent peoples, the process of European integration and the defining its own position within the regional and international environment. Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most sensitive information environments in Europe. Its complex constitutional architecture, numerous unresolved political issues, deep identity divisions, and permanent exposure to internal and external political influences create a space in which media narratives have an exceptional power of shaping reality. The information space of Bosnia and Herzegovina is therefore not only an arena for public debate, but also a space in which social perceptions of legitimacy, political affiliation, collective identities and various models of possible future development of the state are formed.

The Republic of Croatia occupies a special place in the political, information and media space of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a member of the European Union and NATO, a signatory to the Dayton Agreements and a country that shares the longest land border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia is an indispensable factor in preserving the stability and security of BiH. At the same time, due to its

protection of the constitutional rights of the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are one of the three equal and constituent peoples, Croatian policy towards BiH is regularly the subject of intense political discussions, different interpretations and often contradictory media coverage. Both in BiH and in certain circles in the Republic of Croatia. That is why the way certain media interpret the open issues of BiH's possible integration into the EU and NATO, and Croatian institutions and Croatian political representatives related to these processes, is an important indicator of the political and social situation (as well as processes) in BiH.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is not the only information environment observed in this study. The research also covers the information and media space of Montenegro, a country that has been undergoing intense political, identity and geopolitical transformations in recent years. As in Bosnia and Herzegovina, media discourse in Montenegro often goes beyond the framework of classical reporting and becomes a space for the confrontation of different political, religious, national, and geopolitical narratives. The study shows that certain patterns of interpretation and presentation of the Republic of Croatia, Croatian politics and regional relations appear in both observed (information and media) systems, although in different intensities and in accordance with specific local peculiarities and contexts. That is why this study does not look at individual publications as isolated occurrences but seeks to identify broader (and regional) trends that influence the formation of perceptions, political attitudes and interstate relations in Southeast Europe.

Hybrid Warfare Research Institute, together with its partners, continuously monitors phenomena that can negatively affect the stability of BiH and Montenegro, the reliability and credibility of information spaces in BiH and Montenegro, the development and complexity of interethnic relations, and the achieved level of resilience of democratic processes. This study was created as a result of the need for a systematic analysis of media content related to the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro to the EU, relations with the Republic of Croatia and the creation of narratives about Croatian and foreign factors, with special emphasis on the position of the Croatian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro in the observed period.

The subject of the research includes media coverage of selected television companies, internet portals, political shows, commentary content, and author's analyses published during 2025 and 2026. Hundreds of media releases, shows, texts, commentaries, interviews, and political analyses published on the most influential television stations and internet portals were analyzed. The aim of the research was not to evaluate the political views of individual media outlets or to limit the right to criticize political actors. Namely, democratic societies are based on freedom of expression, pluralism of opinions and open public debate. However, it is important to analyze phenomena in which information crosses the boundary of professional reporting and becomes an instrument for shaping political perceptions by selectively presenting information and tendentiously interpreting facts, emotionally framing events or systematically repeating predefined narratives. We

have already written numerous analyses of false information content during the implementation of the Athens project (www.iihs.hr/atena). We pay special attention to the identification of dominant communication patterns, repetitive narratives, rhetorical strategies and discursive techniques that influence the formation of public opinions and attitudes.

The research published here is based on a qualitative analysis of the content. This allows for a detailed study of the way in which certain topics are presented to the public. The analytical framework includes the study of the choice of topics, titles, symbolic elements, sources used, value qualifications, emotional messages, and patterns of interpretation. Special emphasis is put on recognizing the elements of selective reporting and distribution of untruths, sensationalism, political bias, propaganda patterns and communication techniques that try to influence the formation of public opinion. The results of the research indicate the existence of several dominant narrative patterns that appear in different media and are distributed through different communication channels. These patterns go beyond individual journalistic reports or isolated editorial decisions. Certain topics, political actors and events are often interpreted through predefined ideological and political frameworks. We can notice patterns that include the personalization of political conflicts, the symbolic connection of contemporary events with historical conflicts, the creation of simplified models of interpretation, and the use of emotionally strong narratives for the purpose of mobilizing one's own audience, deepening existing ones while introducing additional divisions. Such phenomena deserve

special attention because they have the characteristics of malicious information operations of influence aimed at long-term formation of the corpus of public knowledge of the target audiences. And thus, the impact on decision-making processes over a longer period.

A special research focus is put on the phenomenon of negative impacts from the spectrum of hybrid threats, with an emphasis on their information component. Media, social networks, digital platforms, and various forms of public communication are increasingly used to try to shape the corpus of public knowledge. In this context, information analysis allows for a better understanding of how political messages are created, shared, and received within certain social groups.

Particularly worrying is the fact that some of the analyzed content is not based on the classic journalistic function of informing, but on the creation of symbolic constructions that present individual political actors, institutions or states through predefined patterns of moral and political delegitimization. In such information environment, facts become less important, they are subordinated to the desired narrative. Political opponents cease to be legitimate interlocutors and turn into opponents who are attributed with negative intentions, hidden agendas and historical responsibility for various social problems.

The analysis of the media space of Montenegro shows the existence of a relatively consistent set of narratives that present the Republic of Croatia as a political, security and identity opponent of the Serbian people and a part of the Montenegrin public. Unlike the Bosniak media

space in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is filled with accusations of an alleged Croatian-Serbian agreement to the detriment of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the pro-Serb media of Montenegro, Croatia is primarily portrayed as the heir to the hostile policy towards the Serbs and as a regional exponent of Euro-Atlantic interests directed against Serbia and the Serbian political factor in the Western Balkans.

In the observed period, online portals stood out through commentaries, original texts, political statements and interpretations, which systematically create and repeat negative narratives about Croatia as a country that uses membership in the European Union and NATO to exert political pressure on the countries of the Western Balkans. At the same time, Croatia is not presented as an equal partner or a neighboring country that legitimately represents its own national interests, but as a factor that acts from a position of political supremacy, mentoring and blackmail. With such an approach, Croatia is described as hegemonistic, trying to politically discipline Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Montenegro, while any form of compromise or dialogue by a part of the political elites from these countries is presented as an expression of their weakness, on a personal and institutional level.

The second information form is based on the constant connection of the contemporary Republic of Croatia with the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustasha movement. In the analyzed media content, events from contemporary political and social life are often interpreted through the prism of the World War II, creating the impression of historical continuity between the Independent State of Croatia and

today's Croatian state. Such an approach is especially evident in reporting on sporting events, music events, fan incidents, and discussions about the education system. Individual incidents or statements are attributed to the entire Croatian society, while sporadic occurrences are presented as evidence of alleged institutional tolerance of extremism. The consequence of such a discourse is the creation of an image of Croatia as a state that has not cleared up its own past and that continues to pursue hostile policies towards Serbs and Serbian identity.

The third dominant narrative portrays Croatia as part of a broader Western political and security project aimed at limiting Serbia's influence in the Western Balkans. In this framework, Croatian foreign policy is presented as an extended arm of the malign interests of the European Union, NATO, Germany, or certain Western countries. The analyzed contents often suggest the existence of coordinated political, media, and diplomatic activities directed against the interests of Serbia.

The study shows that such information and communicational processes do not occur spontaneously. They are created by long-term repetition of the same information content and communication patterns, the use of the same sources, the repetition of the same interpretations, and the inclusion of certain political, media and quasi-academic authorities that give certain narratives the illusion of professional, international, or scientific legitimacy. It is in this constant repetition that their real strength lies. The goal of modern information operations is not necessarily to convince the audience of a certain claim, but to create an

emotional and cognitive framework within which certain claims will seem logical, expected, and self-evident.

This study does not aim to make final judgments of political and social reality or to offer solutions to the complex issues of relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. The study seeks to contribute to the development of scientific research of the media, political communication, and information operations in these countries, but also to open a space for expert discussion on the role of the media in BiH and Montenegro and the malicious shaping of public knowledge. In times when the information space is recognized and understood as another domain in which conflicts and wars take place (along with land, sea, air, space and cyberspace), the ability to recognize malicious patterns of shaping public knowledge becomes the issue on which the strategic resilience of every society is based. Democratic systems cannot be defended solely by military or security mechanisms. Their long-term stability depends on the quality of the space of public knowledge, citizens' trust in institutions, and the ability of society to distinguish facts from untruths and propaganda, arguments from political constructions, and legitimate criticism from systematic discrediting.

Therefore, this study is not just a review of media releases over a period. It represents an attempt to understand the deeper processes that shape the contemporary information space of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Its purpose is not to produce new divisions, but to contribute to the understanding of the mechanisms by which public

knowledge, and thus social relations, in the observed countries are maliciously shaped. Only with a reasoned, documented and methodologically based analysis is it possible to build resilience to disinformation, propaganda and other forms of malicious information activities that undermine the quality of public debate and social unity in the long run.

For the academic community, the results of the research represent a valuable contribution to the study of the relationship between media, identity and politics in societies and countries with many open questions. For the world of media, this study can serve as an incentive for further reflection on professional standards, their co-responsibility for the state of public knowledge, and the importance of balanced, objective, truthful and complete reporting. In a broader social sense, this study contributes to the understanding of how information shapes the perceptions of political actors, international relations, regional cooperation, and points to the need to develop a resilient, free, transparent and plural public information space and media environment.

With this publication, the Hybrid Warfare Research Institute and its partners want to contribute to the development of a culture of critical thinking in the information space and to open an academic and professional discussion on the role of the media in shaping political processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. We believe that such a discussion is a prerequisite for strengthening democratic

resilience, mutual trust and stability both in these countries and in the Western Balkans.

At a time when battles for territory are increasingly being replaced by battles for perception, understanding the ways (as well as instruments) of shaping the information space is becoming as important as understanding the political, economic, religious, historical and security processes. That is why this study is not only an analysis of the information environment and the media image of these countries. This study is an analysis of the information environments of the two countries, one of the key spaces in which political and social reality is shaped (maliciously) today to influence their future.



1. Information environment in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

1.1. Introduction

The way the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina describe and interpret political actors, socio-political processes, and bilateral relations goes beyond the framework of classical information and takes on the characteristics of political positioning, ideological and biased interpretation, and discursive construction of social reality. This is especially pronounced in the attitude of one part of the media scene in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the Republic of Croatia, its institutions, its highest state officials, and Croatian political representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The subject of this research is the analysis of the media content of selected media in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Federal Television (FTV), a public television company within RTV FBiH, as well as commercial television companies Hayat TV and Face TV, and N1 television, which is a regional affiliate of CNN. As far as web portals are concerned, the most widely read portals focused on informative and political content were analyzed: Klix.ba, Faktor.ba, Slobodna-Bosna.ba, Istraga.ba, Politički.ba, Oslobođenje.ba, STAV.ba, RadioSarajevo.ba, Vijesti.ba, Mostar.live and the News Agency Patria (NAP) – with the aim of determining the dominant reporting patterns on the process of BiH's accession to European integration, and the Republic of Croatia and Croatian political actors during 2025. The research primarily covered the periods from April to June and from September to November 2025, with methodologically justified tolerance of approximately fifteen to twenty days in cases of politically and media-highly relevant events that, due to their importance, required inclusion in the analytical framework. Such an approach enabled the inclusion of key political processes, public polemics, and media campaigns that significantly influenced the shaping of public discourse on the Republic of Croatia, as well as on Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The research was conducted using the qualitative method of content analysis in which the subjects of the analysis were news on web portals, political shows and news of Federal Television and Hayat TV, public appearances and statements of relevant political and social actors, as well as analyses, comments and columns of editors and journalists of

these media. A special focus was put on identifying patterns of selective reporting, discursive bias, sensationalist interpretations, and the use of manipulative and propaganda communication techniques. The analytical framework included the observation of the topic's selection methods, linguistic constructions, symbolic patterns, rhetorical strategies and value qualifications through which individual political actors and processes were presented to the public.

The results of the analysis indicate the existence of different approaches to the observed topic. The Slobodna Bosna portal stood out with its political activism and sensationalist headlines, which often served as a means of emotional mobilization of the audience, although the content of the texts themselves was often more moderate and informatively correct than the initial titles. With the Faktor.ba portal, the use of suggestive and manipulatively conceived titles and headlines that direct the interpretive framework of the reader before the actual consumption of the content has been noticed. Klix.ba, on the other hand, was characterized by the publication of more extensive analyses and interpretive texts in which, in addition to elements of professional journalism, incorrect or partially accurate claims occasionally appeared, as well as sophisticated forms of political-media propaganda and ideological framing.

In the same context, the analysis of the second group of observed media – Hayat TV and the portals Istraga.ba, NAP and Politički.ba points to the existence of a deeply intertwined media system that functions on the principle of connected vessels, creating the illusion of mass and

general acceptance of anti-Croatian attitudes. Hayat TV acts as the leading pro-Bosniak commercial television with the widest reach, establishing the main media discourse. The Istraga.ba portal has a strong public and political influence and functions as an "elitist" medium that, thanks to access to specific data and documents, primarily opens and imposes topics that are later reproduced and recycled by other media. On the other hand, the Politički.ba portal is aimed at a narrower, politically and institutionally profiled audience, acting more as an analytical platform for interpreting and shaping discourse within higher levels of decision-making in BiH. The News Agency Patria (NAP) also fits into this closed and synchronized circle, serving as a strong distribution channel that reproduces texts from Istraga.ba and Politički.ba and other media almost daily. On the other hand, the columnists of these media stand out as generators of an atmosphere that opposes the integration of BiH into pro-Western alliances, and the Republic of Croatia and its officials are often the subject of strong criticism in this context, which often does not correspond to the standards of the journalistic profession and publishing.

Of particular importance within the research is the analysis of the political show Mreža (Network) broadcast on Federal Television, a network which should act in accordance with the standards of the public media service, regarding the principles of professional impartiality, pluralism, and balance, since FTV is a public broadcaster. The analyzed contents, however, pointed to the presence of extremely negative and ideologically intoned interpretations of Croatian political actors, especially the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, Andrej

Plenković and the President of the HDZ BiH, Dragan Čović. In some shows, rhetorical and symbolic constructions were used to connect their political views and actions with the concepts of racism, fascism, Nazism, anti-Semitism, colonialism, and even the Inquisition, while the policy of the Croatian Government was presented as "demonic" in certain segments.

Through the joint action of these media, several dominant, almost obsessive narratives have crystallized, which demonize the Republic of Croatia, and delegitimize the political demands of Croats in BiH. This primarily includes the construction of a "Serbo-Croatian axis" by which official Zagreb is maliciously equated with Belgrade, any diplomatic effort by Croatia is labelled as interference in internal affairs, while aggressive media campaign tries to justify attacks on the verdict in the case of "Kovačević v. BiH". The central tool of this media architecture remains historical revisionism and abuse of the Hague verdicts, where insisting on the constitutional position of Croats and legitimate representation is automatically declared a continuation of a joint criminal enterprise. To give these attitudes an illusion of intellectual, international, and academic weight, the media system makes abundant use of press releases and guest appearances by generators of negative and untrue narratives, such as the "Circle 99" association and the IFIMES institute.

According to official data from 2025.¹, there are 3.96 million mobile telephone connections in BiH, which is 26% more than the number of inhabitants (about 3.15 million). About 2.73 million BiH

residents are connected to the internet, which represents 86.7% of the total population. Slightly more than 2 million profiles on social networks were activated by BiH residents, 49.3% of which are female users. Of the total number of internet users in BiH, as many as 75.3% have at least one profile and visited social networks in 2025. At the beginning of 2025, about 1.45 million BiH residents were connected to the Facebook social network, about 983 thousand to the TikTok network, about 470 thousand on LinkedIn, and about 159 thousand on X. During 2024, 81.8% of men and 79.7% of women connected to the Internet several times a day². During 2025, the existence of 488 media web portals in BiH was determined, only 40% of which were transparent³. The portals klix.ba, avaz.ba, oslobodjenje.ba, nezavisne.com, slobodna-bosna.ba and faktor.ba have the greatest reach and impact on the information environment in BiH⁴. By analyzing the content of hundreds of texts and shows produced in these media, several dominant narratives have crystallized, the primary goal of which is to present the Republic of Croatia as the aggressor against BiH, and the Croatian policy towards BiH as hegemonic. The key tendencies that this analysis shows are the following.

1.1.1. The Construction of the "Serbo-Croat Axis" and the Myth of the Division of Bosnia and Herzegovina

One of the most persistent narratives is the complete equalization of official Zagreb and Belgrade. Through the phrases about "combined Serbo-Croatian influence" or "aggressor policies of neighbors", the Republic of Croatia is equated with the Republic of Serbia, Franjo

Tuđman with Slobodan Milošević, and Andrej Plenković with Aleksandar Vučić. The goal of their activities is, as shown in several texts, to defend the position of political Sarajevo (primarily SDA and DF) with the thesis that the political representatives of Croats and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are to a large extent a tool of "greater-state" projects from the neighborhood that want to destroy the state. Moreover, Croatia is accused of being a covert Russian player that supports Russia's aggressive policy.

1.1.2. Interference of the Republic of Croatia in internal processes in BiH and discrediting the OHR

Almost every diplomatic effort of the Republic of Croatia to protect the constitutional position of Croats in BiH (such as amendments to the Election Law) is labeled as aggressive colonialism, tutelage, or interference by the Republic of Croatia in the internal affairs of BiH. In this narrative, High Representative Christian Schmidt is not seen as an international mediator, but as an "agent of Zagreb" and a henchman of Andrej Plenković, who does not make decisions on his own, but "according to the dictates of Croatia".

1.1.3. The Kovačević case

The fall of the "Kovačević" lawsuit before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has aroused great interest. Instead of legal analysis, these media primarily put forward the thesis that the Republic of Croatia overturned the verdict through aggressive lobbying, interference, and even "buying the Court through a donation of 100,000

Euros." In this context, Croatia is presented as a state that protects "apartheid" and prevents the introduction of a civil state (dominated by the largest ethnic community).

1.1.4. Historical revisionism and the emphasis on the alleged JCE

The central tool for delegitimizing the demand for equality of Croats with the other two peoples in BiH is historical revisionism based on the abuse of the Hague verdicts. Mentioning the constituency of the Croat people, Herzeg-Bosnia or the right to a legitimate representative is often proclaimed as a continuation of joint criminal enterprise (JCE) and fascism.

1.1.5. "Institutional and Intellectual" Narrative Generators: Circle 99 and IFIMES

To give the above-mentioned views an illusion of intellectual, academic, and international weight, the aforementioned media system makes extensive use of press releases and guest appearances by members of the **Association of Independent Intellectuals "Circle 99"** and the **International Institute IFIMES** based in Ljubljana. Their members (such as **Zijad Bećirović**, **Enver Halilović** and **Adil Kulenović**) serve as "experts" who release theses into the public space, such as that Zagreb's goal is the restoration of the Banovina of Croatia, which Hayat, Istraga, NAP, and Politički.ba recycle for days and draw conclusions from them.

This document is continued by providing a detailed overview and categorization of articles that demonstrate the existence of harmful policies within the observed media space, through the prism of these narratives. Please be aware that the way stories are presented often intertwines and reinforces one another, creating the appearance of numerous arguments designed to influence readers' perspectives.

1.2. The Construction of the "Serbo-Croat Axis" and the Myth of the Division of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Throughout the observed period, a significant media narrative focuses on the imposition of the Croatian-Serbian axis/conspiracy as the primary cause of all negative processes in BiH. The reminiscence is clearly drawn from the war discourses that "identified" the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Serbia as aggressors, two large-state entities that wanted to divide BiH by mutual agreement. This assumption is taken as an axiom without any well-founded facts, historical sources or concrete evidence. Regardless of this, the entire view of the current constitutional and political problems that burden BiH is interpreted as a continuation of the great-state projects of Croatia and Serbia. The way this moment is used in everyday political speech, with a dose of relaxation, persuasiveness, and social and professional irresponsibility, is faithfully evidenced by the statement (31.10.2025) of Željko Komšić, member of the Presidency of BiH, in his address before [the UN General Assembly states](#):

"I remind you that the current structure of BiH is not a product of a social or political process or agreement, it is a product of a

peace agreement that no side in BiH is satisfied with. Even **the neighboring countries that participated in the war and aggression against BiH** are not satisfied with it."

Bosniak circles have no doubts about the depth of this alliance. Moreover, the bidding on the temporal depth of this "malevolent alliance" has begun. Thus, according to **Mostar.live**, a panel discussion titled "Legitimate representation of Bosniaks in Herzegovina" [was held in Mostar in October 2025](#), with the probable goal of making meaningless the phrase used by Croats to articulate their political demands for legitimate representation, and at the same time trying to show that Bosniaks in Herzegovina also suffer from the same systematic deficiency, that they cannot elect their legitimate representatives in Herzegovina. Although they do not offer a single piece of evidence or example where Bosniaks are not legitimately represented in Herzegovina, this does not prevent the artificially created process from being placed in an artificially created mythopoetic context:

"If we consider the wider regional context, what the HDZ is doing is part of the Serbo-Croat action towards BiH. This **strategic alliance is very old**. This is a continuation of a policy that **has lasted for over 100 years**."

As incredible as this statement was, historically and sociologically unfounded, and politically untenable, no one within Bosniak intellectual circles opposed it. It would be interesting to see how they explain this "old alliance" in World War II or in the Socialist Republic

of BiH. Undoubtedly, the most frequent and vigorous propagator of such a narrative is **Circle 99**, which is known as a self-proclaimed association of intellectuals who promote the "civil state". One of the reasons for presenting variations of this narrative was the declaration of the HNS from February 2025. The principles presented in that Declaration at the session of Circle 99 were explicitly defamed as "hegemonic intentions towards BiH", while Croats are not even referred to as a national determinant, but are reduced to the confessional "Bosnian Croat Catholics". In this regard, [according to the announcement on Federalna.ba](#), it refers to the Serbian-Croatian axis, while the HNS Declaration is only one of the program documents of the aforementioned:

"... this **"Serbian-Croatian coordination** of declaration action points to the continuity **of the anti-Bosnian alliances of Belgrade and Zagreb**, which is a clear sign that they, unfortunately, have no other policies towards Bosnia and Herzegovina than **the policy of division and plundering of its territory.**"

In May of the same year, [at one of its next sessions, Circle 99 presented the thesis](#) that Serbia and Croatia as signatories of the Dayton Agreement were directly involved in the crises in BiH, indirectly accusing them of hostile attitude towards official Sarajevo. In September, this association organized a session on the topic "International Pressures and Resistance of the Modern Bosnian State" in which the introductory speaker, **Ademir Lisica** again [accused](#) Serbia

and Croatia of aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially added that

"Croatia, on the other hand, is trying to continuously exert pressure on the state by propagating a model of political control over the one part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, trying to proclaim its own ideas on the territory of another internationally recognized state."

An important event that activated the described narrative within the Bosniak political and media scene was the celebration of the anniversary [of the Dayton Agreement with an international conference in Dayton itself](#). For example, an unsigned article was published on the [vijesti.ba](#) ["Thirty Years Later: Aggressors Again in Dayton,"](#) with a tendentiously published photo of Croatian and Serbian Foreign Minister Goran Grlić Radman and Marko Đurić shaking hands. The text itself tendentiously presents the participation of Croatian officials as an act of hostility towards BiH and their attitudes as explicitly hostile.

"Thirty years later, along with officials from Bosnia and Herzegovina, representatives of the countries that had committed themselves to stop armed aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina by signing the Peace Agreement - Serbia and Croatia - appeared again in Dayton.... **It was all accompanied by the lies of the Prime Minister of Croatia, Andrej Plenković, about Croatia as a great friend and savior of BiH.**"

In a very defeatist tone, analyst **Jasmin Mujanović** [reports from the spot](#) and concludes that BiH officials have failed. He implicitly reproaches the officials of the Republic of Croatia for their diplomatic efforts and their attitudes by which they warned world leaders about the unequal position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the unsustainability of the existing electoral framework. Mujanović concludes that Andrej Plenković and Dragan Čović are dissatisfied with what High Representative Christian Schmidt has done with his interventions, and that they are trying to work in synergy **"and are ready to totally take over almost all institutions and processes within BiH."**

"He points out that nothing new was heard in Dayton, neither from Belgrade nor from Zagreb. **They're going to continue with their evil agenda.**"

He labels Milorad Dodik as one of the biggest problems, for whom he claims that he is one of the greatest allies of the Republic of Croatia, without any evidence to support that claim:

"Croatia is one of its main allies and it is one of the key actors and reasons why this crisis is so deep and serious. This had to and must be explained to our partners and friends in the West. I'm afraid we didn't manage to do that either." (Politički.ba, 24.5.2025., <https://politicki.ba/politika/mujanovic-skupom-u-dejtonu-potpuno-je-dominirao-hdz/76939>)

On a similar track, **Ismail Ćidić** publishes the article ["How Dayton exposed the extremist and maximalist agenda of Croatia in BiH?"](#) in

which he aggressively emphasizes exclusively "Croatian nationalism as a fundamental problem in BiH".

"The conference (on Dayton, May 2025) confirmed my position that Serbian nationalism is the greatest threat to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but **Croatian nationalism, which is being implemented through actions by both the Mostar and Zagreb HDZs, is the greatest threat to all other interests of Bosnia and Herzegovina** - from energy and financial, to social, international and political."

Without hiding his own political agenda at all, the author tries to draw a narrative line from wartime to the present day, where Serbs and Croats are aggressors, and that by celebrating Dayton they are again questioning the very existence of the state, because they are undermining it with their nationalism? The author does not specify how it is undermined and whether Bosniak nationalism exists on the same level, he only tries to legitimize his intellectual position as, "by no means Bosniak" and "by no means political" by using labels and false interpretation of historical facts.

"Thirty years after the negotiations in that exact place, **Milošević and Tuđman were treated as war criminals by international participants**, while President Alija Izetbegović was cited as a leader who wanted to preserve peace, give dignity to all, especially the victims, and oppose destructive forces."

This author, co-authored with **Ismet Fatih Čančar**, tried to internationalize this propaganda discourse. They published an article for the occasion of the Dayton conference in [Foreign Affairs](#). The only target in their text was Croatia, which was strongly tied to the axis with Belgrade as they tried to present it as a permanent source of instability and a permanent aggressor in BiH.

"The gathering resonated with the war rhetoric of Croatia from the nineties. Among the worrying messages were open support for ethnic segregation in Bosnian schools, revisionist narratives about the war and direct interference in the internal affairs of BiH, especially when it comes to proposals to amend the election law... Today, Croatian policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina still reflects unrealized war ambitions – according to the plan created by Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman – according to which Bosnia and Herzegovina was to be divided into ethnically pure territories between Croatia and Serbia through systematic expulsions and mass murders of non-Croats and non-Serbs. Today, Croatia's ambitions have evolved into a new political strategy: the continuation of the Tuđman-Milošević war project by political means."

Throughout the text (**klix.ba**), the authors present an element, as they interpret it, of the Croat undermining of "Bosnian sovereignty" and the permanent effort to divide BiH. As an extremely malicious discursive maneuver, the authors try to portray Croatia as a "Russian player", a state that offers false resistance to Russia, but in fact is an instrument in the hands of Russian geopolitics. Without a single piece of evidence or

coherent argumentation, the authors do not give up on their malicious theses, and in order to further spice them up, they "enrich" the text with a tendentious photograph of Tuđman, Milošević and Gorbachev, which should convince readers of the uninterrupted strategic interests of the cooperation of these three actors, albeit performed by some new officials.

"Croatia's growing aggressiveness, presented as concern for Bosnian Croats, is in reality a strategic campaign that promotes ethnic division under the guise of legitimacy. This campaign, increasingly **aligned with Russian interests**, threatens not only BiH's sovereignty, but also the stability of the region and the credibility of Western alliances."

The description of the next event speaks volumes about how grotesque narrative about the Serbo-Croatian axis can become. Namely, at the end of November 2025, employees of the public broadcasting service BHRT protested the non-payment of salaries and the very uncertain future of this public media company. Therefore, the theme is the status of employees and the survival of the public broadcasting service, which is entirely within the competence of the state level of government and an internal issue of BiH. However, even in such a context, one of the oldest journalists, **Rinko Golubović**, [compared the situation](#) to "**an attack on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnians and Herzegovinians, and as a further step of the criminal enterprise from Belgrade and Zagreb which was sentenced in The Hague, which was conceived in 1939 by the Cvetković-Maček agreement.**"

One of the examples of a specific media discourse in which current legal and political processes are interpreted through the prism of war events can be found on the Istraga.ba portal. It is an article published on June 26, 2025, under the title: *"The Slaven Kovačević Case: Why Today, at the Time of Peaceful Aggression on BiH, the Montenegrin Voice Again Stands on the Side of the Same Criminal Policies of Milošević and Tuđman?"*.

This text illustrates how one part of the Sarajevo media space uses the decisions of international courts for a broader criticism of the policies of neighboring countries, in this case the Republic of Croatia. The cause to write the text was the outcome of the "Slaven Kovačević" case before the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights. The author primarily directs the criticism towards Montenegrin judge Ivana Jelić, who voted for the annulment of the first-instance verdict. However, her legal position is used in the text as an argument for criticism of Croatian state policy and actualization of the thesis on the "Serbian-Croatian axis", whereby the actual reason for the text (the role of Montenegro) is pushed into the background.

In such an interpretation, the political goals of official Zagreb and Belgrade are equalized, and contemporary political processes in BiH are characterized as "peaceful aggression". The first Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman, is put in the same context as convicted war criminals (Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, as well as Slobodan Milošević), which suggests symmetry in the historical roles of the politics of Croatia and Serbia. It is further stated that the current authorities in

Croatia and Serbia are continuing with the policies of the 1990s. The Republic of Croatia is accused of preventing the BiH's progress and participating in "apartheid" with its influence in BiH, while "combined Serbo-Croat influence" is cited as the key threat to the region:

"During the aggression in 1990. Montenegro, as part of the FRY, was an accomplice in the aggression, until later, with some wiser policies, a **move away from the criminal policy of Milošević and Tuđman** followed... Why is today, at the time of **peaceful aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the Montenegrin voice again on the side of **the same criminal policies of Milošević, Karadžić, Mladić, Tudman?**... Today, the same policies of the nineties are in power in Serbia and Croatia, which **keep their tentacles firmly glued to Bosnia and Herzegovina**, thus preventing the progress of that country and stifling the rights of the majority, consciously **creating apartheid**... one cannot turn a blind eye to the obvious – that the combined Serb-Croat influence is being refracted through Montenegro, **at the expense of Bosniaks.**"

Further elaboration of the thesis on the joint venture of "susjedi i komšije" (the phrase "susjedi i komšije" is used in a part of the Sarajevo media as a synonym for the joint venture of Croatia and Serbia using words meaning neighbors in Croatian and Serbian languages) against Bosnia and Herzegovina is offered by the News Agency Patria (NAP) in an interview with a former Bosniak diplomat and prominent member of "Circle 99", Enver Halilović. In an article published on April 8, 2025, entitled [*"The only thing Croatia and Serbia*](#)

agree on is the destruction of BiH", official Zagreb is again directly accused of the destruction and dismemberment of the neighboring state. Halilović refers to Croatia's foreign policy as "Danish", alluding to the mythological Trojan horse, and claims that Croatia, under the guise of support on the European path, is systematically "suffocating and killing" BiH. The focus of his interview is Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, who is defamed for alleged hypocrisy, demagoguery and a covert alliance with Milorad Dodik (because he said that Croatia will not impose sanctions on Dodik). To discredit the politics of official Zagreb, the thesis of the Zagreb-Belgrade axis is used. Halilović equates these two countries, calling them "connected vessels" whose only common interest is "hostile attitude towards BiH". In accordance with the above, the proposal to amend the Election Law of BiH, which was submitted to the parliamentary procedure by the HDZ BiH, and which was also supported by Plenković, was called an "anti-Bosnian attack".

Halilović's proposal of a diplomatic "strike back" is particularly indicative. In response to alleged Croatian interference in the internal affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he proposes that Sarajevo officially begin to publicly demand the establishment of territorial autonomy for Serbs in Croatia and constitutional constituency for Bosniaks or, as he calls them, "Bosnians and Herzegovinians", thus encouraging the violation of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia.

"It is a pure Danish politics in which Croatia, under the guise of help, offers Bosnia and Herzegovina gifts that actually suffocate it, kill it... They support each other by a system of

connected vessels. The only thing in which Croatian and Serbian politics coincide is exclusively and primarily their **hostile attitude towards Bosnia and Herzegovina...** And this means that we should talk about **the need to establish the autonomy of Serbs in Croatia**, who were a constituent people in that country until operation 'Storm'. And also, to talk about **the constituent rights of** Bosnians and Herzegovinians, that is, **Bosniaks in Croatia."**

Ten days after he gave a statement for NAP, [*Enver Halilović*](#) elaborated on the same thesis on the destructive role of Croatia and Serbia at the Circle 99 session (May 18, 2025). The speech broadcast by the NAP accuses both countries of direct responsibility for the security and political crisis in BiH, because they allegedly abuse the status of signatories of the Dayton Peace Agreement for the internationalization of their national interests.

"In both crises in BiH, the neighboring countries of Serbia and Croatia, as signatories of the Dayton Agreement, are directly involved... They have internationalized their national interests in BiH, the so-called protection of the Dayton competencies of the RS, i.e. the provision of the so-called legitimate interests of Croats, **to all addresses around the world."**

The guest appearance of the former President of the Republic of Croatia Stjepan Mesić in the show "Sedam plus (Seven plus)" on Hayat TV (May 24, 2025) fits into the same narrative framework. As a guest at

Hayat, [Mesić again uses the thesis of the Serbia-Croatia axis](#), claiming that the ambitions for the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina "remained alive" even after the departure of Tuđman and Milošević. Croatia is put on the same level as Serbia. Mesić says that there was an agreement between Tuđman and Milošević on the division of BiH⁵:

The ambitions for the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not end with the departure of Milošević and Tuđman. And that is one of the facts. Some think it's achievable. Time will convince them that BiH will survive. Regardless of the war, Bosnia survived. I hope that it will convince those who think that the ideas of Tuđman and Milošević can be realized. Their ideas were for Serbia and Croatia to make an agreement, says Mesić.

The mention of the Croatian-Serbian axis is not reserved only for reviews when authors refer to war topics but is applied to the speeches of officials of the Republic of Croatia at the stages of the most important international organizations. A text by Amina Čorbo-Zećo, published on November 1, 2025 on the NAP portal under the title ["Before the eyes of the UN: BiH sovereignty under pressure from its neighbors"](#), is an example of how diplomatic activity in the United Nations is discredited in advance. The occasion for the text was a session of the UN Security Council on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author "translates" the speech of the Croatian diplomat Hrvoje Ćurić Hrvatinčić, who argued about the need to ensure the constitutional equality of Croats through amendments to the Election Law, into the context of a "conspiracy of neighbors". The appearances of official

Zagreb and Belgrade are equalized, and the diplomatic struggle for the rights of the constituent people is declared a "denial of sovereignty" and an attempt to resolve the internal situation of BiH exclusively on the "Zagreb-Belgrade route". This is an attempt to degrade Croatia from the position of the first neighbor, the greatest advocate of the European path and the largest investor in BiH to the status of an aggressor who "shapes narratives" at the expense of the sovereign "Bosnia".

"Croatia, through the care of "legitimate representatives" (...) Serbia through the "protection of Dayton" – both act as if BiH is not a sovereign state, but a territory whose internal circumstances are resolved between Zagreb and Belgrade. (...) Unfortunately, while neighbors are shaping narratives (...) no one from BiH puts their foot down to remind them that the state is a state of all its citizens, and not a political experiment of Zagreb and Belgrade."

Prof. Dr. Hazim Bašić, a member of the Presidency of Circle 99, in his article published on June 1, 2025, on the NAP.ba portal entitled [*"The High Representative as a Guardian of the Past or a Visionary of the Future"*](#), challenges the constitutional order of BiH established by the Dayton Peace Agreement. Analyzing Christian Schmidt's speech on the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in Dayton itself, Bašić interprets the rejection of the concept of the "civil state" as a direct pandering to neighboring countries, whereby he again positions Croatia and Serbia as hegemonic centers that manage crises in BiH. Also, the author accuses Croatia of continuous pressure and

diplomatic offensive towards Brussels and Washington with the sole aim of imposing "legitimate representation". He describes the High Representative as a "mediator of the politics of Belgrade and Zagreb" who put himself in the position of the HDZ BiH by agreeing to, as he states, "the invented notion of the Croatian issue". In this way, the attempt to ensure the equality of Croats and respect for the Dayton framework is presented as a continuation of paternalism.

"His position is an echo of a narrative that suits Zagreb and Belgrade, regimes that want to keep Bosnia and Herzegovina as a permanently open issue, a state whose sovereignty is easily undermined precisely because of its internal constitutional design. A civil state would mean the end of the mentoring, paternalistic and hegemonic relationship that Serbia and Croatia practice over the entities and peoples in BiH, and the final closing of the chapter of the war logic of the 1990s."

One can put **the guest appearance of a long-time SDA official in Republika Srpska, Ramiz Salkić, [in the show "7plus" on Hayat TV](#)** (May 6, 2025) in a similar framework of emphasizing the Zagreb-Belgrade axis. Although he formally comments on the UN Security Council session, the key part of the conversation is dedicated to the thesis that Belgrade and Zagreb, through the Dodik-Čović axis, are working on weakening institutions and preparing the territorial division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Salkić claims that the international community "does not recognize" this axis, but he describes it as the main channel through which the war goals of the 1990s are

implemented. Čović and the HNS are accused of being created on the "platform of war goals", while Zagreb is placed on the same level as Belgrade; as a center of power whose interest is that BiH is not a functional state.

"The world does not recognize this axis, that they are trying to implement the goals of Belgrade and Zagreb through this connection. And that is weakening of the institutions of BiH and the creation of preconditions for a territorial division."

Another example of such a media narrative can be seen in the original text by Amina Čorbo-Zećo entitled ["Briefly about the meeting of Đurić and Grlić Radman High degree of agreement: An old song from Karadžević"](#). The text was originally published on June 13, 2025 on the NAP.ba portal and repeats the thesis about the Serbo-Croat agreement on the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is interesting to note that the text was subsequently withdrawn from the NAP.ba portal, but it remained available thanks to its publishing on the Regional.ba portal. It is also worth noting the business background of the publisher of the news agency Patria (NAP.ba). According to publicly available business registers, the publisher of the portal is the Slovenian company PUBLIC NET d.o.o. Data from the online service CompanyWall.si (<https://www.companywall.si/podjetje/public-net-doo/MMA6KX7C>) show that the company has not recorded significant revenues in the last three years. Also, according to the data of the same service, the company has no registered employees, which represents an interesting business model for the publisher of the portal, which has a significant influence and readership in the Sarajevo media space.

The author uses the official diplomatic meeting between the Croatian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Gordan Grlić Radman and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia Marko Đurić as an occasion to draw a parallel with the alleged meeting between Tuđman and Milošević in Karađorđevo⁶. The author interprets the formulation from the press release on the "high degree of agreement" between the two ministers on the importance of equality of peoples in BiH as a continuation of the policy of agreeing on the division of BiH "behind closed doors". The demands for equality of peoples are described in the text as "dust in the eyes", while Croatia and Serbia are placed within the framework of a common policy in relation to which Bosnia and Herzegovina is positioned as permanently "trapped".

The **"high degree of agreement" between Serbia and Croatia on Bosnia and Herzegovina**, admit it, sounds like the latest hit from the stage of good old regional politics, which we have heard before, countless times, but with a slight modification. We know very well what that actually means. **Do you remember Karađorđevo? Where "big plans" were agreed behind closed doors**, and behind the backs of everyone else? Where the fate of Bosnia and Herzegovina was being shaped, where Serbs and Croats, with the tacit consent or impotence of the international community, wanted to divide Bosnia according to their interests, **of course, then as now, "for the benefit of all" and in the spirit of peace...** (...) Only instead of Milošević and Tuđman, Serbian Foreign Minister Marko Đurić and Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić Radman reached a high

degree of agreement. (...) In short, "a high degree of agreement" is just another diplomatic euphemism for what we all already know, that the power and influence continue to be shared **without a real solution for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which remains trapped in the political games of Serbia and Croatia.** (Originally published on NAP.ba 06/13/2025, deleted, saved at Regional.ba)

In the shackles of "great-state aspirations"; is another of Hayat's contributions to this topic. The guest appearance of the Secretary General of the **Council of the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals (VKBI), Emir Zlatar**, in the show ["Seven Plus"](#) (May 15, 2025) analyzes 30 years of Dayton through the prism of the alleged "greater-state aspirations" of Serbia and Croatia, which, as he claims, "have never stopped". Zagreb is placed in a pair with Belgrade as the bearer of "crazy ideas about the division of Bosnia" that maintain contemporary entity division and parallel structures, and do not respect Dayton. Croatia is indirectly reproached for "not instructing" the political representatives of Croats in BiH to respect the Dayton Peace Agreement.

"The key problem is the greater-state aspirations that have never stopped... The history of Bosnia is the history of the seizure of Bosnia. **These insane ideas about the division of Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia are still alive** and these policies have not accepted the basic provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement, because if they had, they **would have**

instructed the political structures of Croats and Serbs in BiH to respect that agreement."

A similar argument about the joint action of neighboring countries towards Bosnia and Herzegovina is presented by **Zijad Bećirović, director of the IFIMES institute**⁷, during a guest appearance on the show ["Seven plus" on Hayat TV](#) (September 24, 2025). Although the topic of the conversation was primarily focused on the economy and the distribution of VAT revenues, Bećirović soon moved on to a broader political context in which Croatia (along with Serbia) is mentioned through the phrase "secessionists on both sides of the border".

Bećirović describes Croatia as an external actor who maintains hopes for the redrawing of borders and the dissolution of BiH.

"These policies are guided by the idea that there can still be a dissolution of BiH and a change of borders... So, **these secessionists on both sides of the border have some hopes that there can be a change in the borders.** However, the architecture of the borders ended with the declaration of independence of Kosovo, and everyone should finally understand that."

Prof. Dr. Hazim Bašić, a prominent member of the Circle 99 association, in his article published on September 9, 2025 on the NAP.ba portal entitled ["The myth of the 'consensus of three peoples' and veto mechanisms hold Bosnia and Herzegovina hostage to projects designed outside its borders"](#), is another example of bringing Croatia

and Serbia on the same level when it comes to the relationship with BiH. The author describes the concepts of constitutional equality and veto mechanisms as tools intended to block and destabilize BiH, claiming that Croatia and Serbia continue to implement their political projects from the 1990s.

Bašić claims that all crises are a "long-conceived plan" created in Serbia and Croatia through memoranda and laws. According to the author, the two neighboring countries have never given up their war policy but have replaced open aggression with veto and apartheid. Zagreb is paired with Belgrade as the "real destroyers of the state" who maintain BiH as their "political experiment", labeling Bosniaks as "Islamic radicals" to weaken the state from within.

"This process is not spontaneous, it is a long-conceived plan that has been elaborated through various documents, laws, memoranda, and resolutions written in Serbia and Croatia. Veto mechanisms are actually key levers for the implementation of large-state projects and the potential disappearance of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign state. They create the anatomy of political sabotage in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (...) The real destroyers of the state are the hegemonic projects of the two neighboring countries, which have never given up on the policy of the nineties, they have only changed their methodology and tactics. (...) Instead of open aggression, now the veto is used in the political domain, along with countless other strategies such as: spreading interethnic fear and hatred, apartheid, labeling of Bosniaks (Islamic radicals,

connection with ISIL, Hamas, anti-Semites,...), along with a false discourse on the 'sovereignty of the people', with the aim of weakening the state from within."

On the same basis, the portal Politicki.ba reports presentations from the Circle 99 meeting (September 14, 2025) entitled "BiH under the pressure of opposing geopolitics: between hegemonic aspirations and European standards". **Ademir Lisica, director of the Sarajevo-based Center for Geopolitical Research (GEOPOL)**, puts Croatia in the context of centuries-old territorial claims, equating it with Serbia as the main source of instability in BiH.

"Lisica points out that the territorial aspirations of Serbia and Croatia have been present for centuries. The main source of instability (...) Croatia, on the other hand, through political propaganda and insistence on controlling a part of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is trying to impose its interests within an internationally recognized state.

Politicki.ba continues to report in a similar tone, publishing a short report on September 24, 2025, entitled "Sovereign BiH bothers its neighbors: Vučić and Milanović crossed the 'border' at the UN". The editorial board equates the presidents of Serbia and Croatia, Aleksandar Vučić and Zoran Milanović as neighbors who are "bothered by sovereign BiH", suggesting that any mention of the constitutional rights of Croats represents diplomatic interference and a violation of sovereignty. Milanović's speech at the UN, in which he calls for "the exercise of the constitutional rights of all constituent peoples" as a

fundamental right, is assessed by the portal as "a speech about something he is not competent for". Thus, the statement, made within the framework of diplomatic expression appropriate to the UN speakers, is interpreted as an expression of hegemony and relies on the thesis of joint action of Zagreb and Belgrade towards BiH. The difference between the editorial interpretation and the actual quote conveyed by the portal is obvious:

Editorial title and commentary: "Sovereign BiH bothers its neighbors: Vučić and Milanović crossed the 'border' at the UN... "Croatian President Zoran Milanović also spoke about what he is not competent for - the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

The actual statement of Z. Milanović reads: "'Croatia continues to promote political processes in the region that lead to progress... **In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we call for the realization of the constitutional rights of all constituent peoples.** Respect for constitutional rights must be ensured and that is what is fundamental," Milanović said.

A similar planting of taking over "Dodik's rhetoric" and linking Croatian and Serbian political actors happened with the Croatian MEP Željana Zovko, when Klix.ba categorically claims in its title – [Zovko introduced Dodik's narrative into the EU Parliament: Konaković is attacking the constitutional order, Schmidt is unelected](#). The article states the following

- "In BiH, we have attacks on the Constitution by the Minister of Foreign Affairs who insists on the unelected High Representative to impose a nomination of minister in her government. I wonder who we are financing in BiH – only the Office of the High Representative, or should we also strengthen the local administration that should be doing its job? Zovko said, using the term "unelected" used by Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik when delegitimizing the position of High Representative Christian Schmidt. With this, Zovko, at least in a rhetorical sense, stood shoulder to shoulder with Dodik, who has been leading an open political and institutional attack on the High Representative, the constitutional order of BiH and state institutions for months."

It is important to notice a trend in the Bosniak media space, especially when it comes to the most widely read BiH portal Klix.ba. It is a well-known fact that Croatian political actors (politicians, academics, analysts) are almost nonexistent in the Bosniak media space in the sense that they are considered relevant to comment on crucial socio-political topics. They are simply ignored since they do not speak with a "desirable voice" and would spoil the decades-long, carefully created Sarajevo *echo chamber*, which is not used to convincing counterarguments. Therefore, when the most widely read BiH portal publishes a statement from a minor Croat local party that most Croats in BiH do not even know exists, it is natural to wonder why that is the case. It is a statement by the president of the Čapljina Party, Pero Previšić – [Member of the Presidency of the HNS: Is Dodik a vital](#)

national interest of the Croat people in BiH and a partner of Croatia?

The first thing that can be noticed from the title is that suddenly the Croatian National Assembly (HNS) is not just some random non-governmental organization as it is often talked about in Sarajevo, now the most widely read portal in BiH emphasizes in its title that the speaker is a member of the Presidency of the HNS. Considering that the statement was issued at a time when the Bosniak media space was creating pressure for the Republic of Croatia to support the sanctions against Milorad Dodik, and thus isolating him from the political scene and this statement aligned with the dominant Bosniak view, it is clear that Croat political actors also have space in the Bosniak media, but only if they speak with a "desirable voice" and fit into the established matrix of Bosniak nationalism. The fact that Previšić's question fits into the axiom of Bosniak nationalism according to which the so-called Croat-Serb alliance is working on the destruction and division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is why the statement was given importance in the first place.

During the research, a trend of ridiculing certain Croatian political actors was also noticed, with the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, Gordan Grlić-Radman, being the greatest target of such tendencies. Slobodna Bosna published an article in which it describes Radman as "otherwise a good friend of the leader of the HDZ BiH, Dragan Čović", and not only are they trying to put negative connotation on Grlić-Radman, but also on Dragan Čović as

the president of the HNS. The title of the mentioned article reads – [SHAME OF THE YEAR OF ČOVIĆ'S FRIEND: See how Gordan Grlić Radman struggles with the Croatian language...](#)

1.3. Interference of the Republic of Croatia in internal processes in BiH and discrediting the OHR

One of the methods to discipline Croat political actors by Bosniak representatives in the broadest sense (political subjects, media, academia, non-governmental organizations) is the imputation of "interference in the internal affairs of BiH". This is intended to suppress all engagement that the Republic of Croatia is undertaking on the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, Bosniak representatives forget two important determinants of the matter.

The first one is about Article 5 of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which reads as follows:

- "The Parties welcome and endorse the arrangements that have been made concerning the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as set forth in Annex 4. The Parties shall fully respect and promote the fulfilment of the commitments made therein.'

One of the parties is, of course, the Republic of Croatia, which has the obligation to respect and promote the execution of Annex IV, i.e., the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Given that the position of the Croat people as one of the three equal peoples is endangered and that they are significantly politically marginalized by various external

interventions, this being legally confirmed by the so-called Ljubić Verdict of the Constitutional Court of BiH, then it is undeniable that the Republic of Croatia, according to Article 5 has an obligation to promote the full implementation of Annex IV.

Another determinant that is unreasonably ignored is that BiH is an aspirant for membership in the European Union. As a full and long-standing member of the European Union, it is quite natural that a member of the European Union has the right to express its views on an aspirant for EU membership.

Below are examples of systematic challenges to the constitutional rights of Croats in BiH through accusations of Croatian interference in the internal affairs of BiH. On April 24, 2025, the NAP.ba portal publishes an original analysis by Rasim Belka entitled ["TRUTHS AND LIES ABOUT THE LJUBIĆ RULING How HDZ and the Troika manipulate facts, invent terms and deceive the public!"](#). In this text, the activities and initiatives of the institutions and officials of the Republic of Croatia aimed at protecting the constitutional position of Croats in BiH and the implementation of the Ljubić verdict are presented as colonialism.

Belko uses the debate on the BiH Election Law to attribute territorial imperialism to Croatian politics. He describes the activities of Zagreb diplomacy within the institutions of the European Union as "tentacles in Brussels". The text interprets the proposals that would ensure the legitimate representation of Croats as part of a project for the

annexation of part of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the revival of the "Banovina of Croatia". The term "*Latinluk (Latinism)*" *is also used*, which is used in certain Bosniak circles to describe the activities of political representatives of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the term is a repercussion on the Ottoman past of this region, and there have been cases in some Sarajevo media that Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina are called "Latins" with the aim of discrediting them).

"For too long, Bosnia and Herzegovina **has been struggling with the creation of political Latinism** packaged in the HDZ's **manifesto for the rights of BiH Croats**. That struggle is further complicated by **the active participation of the official Zagreb and their tentacles in Brussels**. Because Zagreb knows that if Sarajevo were to agree to the HDZ's manifesto at some point, **Croatia would have an open path to developing a plan for the annexation of parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and create a Banovina of Croatia.**"

On April 8, 2025, the Politički.ba portal reported a statement **from the Institute for the Research of Genocide Canada (IGC)** entitled "[*IGC calls for a boycott of Croatian products for supporting Dodik*](#)". When it comes to the aforementioned non-governmental organization (IGC's press releases are often reported by the media in Sarajevo) whose name may suggest an official connection with Canadian state institutions (it can probably lead an uninformed reader to the conclusion that it is an institution founded by Canada), one should look at its official website. For example, on the link that should lead to the list of members of the IGC Board of Directors (when the page is set on Bosnian language),

there is news from May 2014 entitled "ENGLISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION AGAINST KOLAROV AND NASTASIC DUE TO ULTRANATIONALIST SLOGAN".

The reason for the IGC's reaction was the statement by Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković that Croatia would not impose sanctions on Milorad Dodik. In the interpretation of this statement, this political move is interpreted as proof of Plenković's participation in the "coup d'état", whereby he is personally called out as the implementer of the great-state ideology. At the same time, Croatia is described as a state that has never renounced its territorial claims to Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus maintaining the discourse of permanent hostile intentions towards the neighboring state.

"Plenković participates in the breakup of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He stands behind the policy that established the so-called HR-HB. He is the leader of the Croatian greater-state ideology, which aims to create a Greater Croatia at the expense of the division and destruction of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (...) Croatia has never renounced its territorial claims to Bosnia and Herzegovina. We remind Plenković of the final verdicts of international and national courts proving Croatia's aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina. The IGC calls on all true citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, wherever they are, to a complete boycott of Croatian products."

Another example of how Croatia's full membership in the European Union is being presented as a mechanism of pressure on BiH is offered by the NAP.ba portal through an interview with Sarajevo **journalist Jahja Muhasilović (editor of the Stav portal)**. In the text published on May 19, 2025, under the title ["Muhasilović for NAP: Čović's Apartheid Election Law and the Hypocrisy of the European Union"](#), the effort of official Zagreb to affirm the issue of protecting the constitutional position of Croats in BiH in Brussels is interpreted as an aggressive imposition of "ethno-confederalism" and apartheid.

Muhasilović develops the thesis according to which the Republic of Croatia uses its position as a full member of the EU to impose certain attitudes on the European Union regarding the policies towards BiH which would benefit Croatia, while the demands for changes to the Election Law are characterized as an attack on the citizens (i.e., the majority people).

"But it's clear who is to blame. Namely, Croatia is an EU member and it actively lobbies and pushes these laws, pushes such a stance of the European Union within the European Union. Our country is not an EU member, and we are automatically handicapped because we cannot lobby more actively. The EU, with such a stance and by allowing Čović and Croatia to pursue such a policy towards BiH, clearly sends a signal that it is not interested in BiH becoming its full member as soon as possible... (...) All of this together is against European standards and European laws, so Čović is lying when he says he is pushing European laws, he is pushing an ethno-

confederalism that is contrary to European laws and standards, **and the EU is silent on this because Croatia actively lobbies in Brussels."**

An example of an analysis which interprets the influence of the Republic of Croatia on BiH as the coordination for its disintegration from the outside can be found in the original text **by Amina Čorbo-Zećo**, published on May 24, 2025, on the NAP.ba portal. The headline "*COMMAND IN ZAGREB*" suggests external management of the fate of BiH. The text entitled "[*Cyprusfication of BiH: A Three-Act Play – Domestic Silence, External Lobbies and the Quiet Dissolution of the State*](#)" presents a thesis that could also be called fiction or a conspiracy theory about the agreement on the division of the country into two influence spheres. According to the author, the Republic of Croatia uses "all sorts of machinations" to connect the Federation of BiH, the Bosniak-Croat entity in BiH, with Zagreb, while the "Serb part" is left for Belgrade. The text states that the key figure in this context, is the prominent American analyst Max Primorac, labeled as a person "close to Croatian politics", in charge of shaping American foreign policy in favor of the "Christian coalition".

Headline: "COMMAND IN ZAGREB" (...) " The plan, Patria's sources claim, is for **the Federation of BiH, with strong support from Croatia, to enter into a kind of alliance with Zagreb, while RS would remain in the sphere of Russian and Serbian influence.** (...) And Republika Srpska has continued precisely in this manner – following the well-trodden paths of war policy on the road to independence. **And**

accordingly, the Republic of Croatia has joined them, through lobbying and all sorts of machinations. (...) Financial support for these activities could come precisely through IRI from Belgrade, and possibly in cooperation with the American conservative foundation Heritage Foundation. Their influence in Washington is already well established and has long shaped foreign policy towards BiH."

The fact that the matrix of "interference in internal affairs" is regularly used is also evidenced by the guest appearance [of IFIMES director Zijad Bećirović](#) on Hayat TV (May 30, 2025). In the show "Seven Plus", he reduces Zagreb's support for Croats in BiH to regression (both for Zagreb and for Croats in BiH), while he defames the demands for the reform of the Election Law as an attempt to "determine the political representatives of Croats in BiH from Zagreb". And to devalue the struggle of Croats in BiH for equality, he reduces them to just HDZ BiH.

"Any support of Croatia to the HDZ BiH is a step backwards for Zagreb, but also for the Croats in BiH ... Their proposal for an election law means that representatives of the Croat people are being determined in Zagreb. The policies of Croatia and Serbia are not friendly given the history of relations with BiH."

The framework in which the West is accused of "tying the eyes and legs of Bosniaks" is visible in the text published on June 4, 2025, on NAP.ba entitled [*"EVERYTHING IS A LIE: Which 'friend' does not*](#)

allow us to be normal? Bosnia and Herzegovina between false allies and domestic sychopants!". In the text, the author **Rasim Belko** directly implies that Croatia is blocking the "normalization" of BiH, whereby in the context of this text this term means the transition of BiH into a unitary country dominated by the majority people. Andrej Plenković is highlighted as the commander of Christian Schmidt, who, according to the author, "learns by heart" what Zagreb requires.

"As if it is not known to anyone even slightly versed in Bosnian-Herzegovinian circumstances that Schmidt has learned by heart what Čović and Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković are demanding from him... (...) Over time, they have also loaded onto us, along with this tying of eyes and legs, the right wing of the European Union, so handicapped we have to jostle with Orbán and the like. And above all, these our Western allies continuously and in every way push Serbia and Croatia to the forefront as a kind of little tutor who carries out what the big one says. (...) Schmidt, Murphy, Reilly and the like are not here to create a functional, sovereign and legally regulated state, but to tailor its fate according to regional hegemonic interests and their own geopolitical games."

An example of how protocolar diplomatic meetings of representatives of the Croatian state turn into evidence of "blackmail" is visible in the report of the Politički.ba portal of June 5, 2025, entitled **"The British with Plenković: Zagreb is also using blackmail for the formation of a new coalition in BiH"**. The meeting of Croatian Prime Minister

Andrej Plenković with the British envoy to the Western Balkans, Karen Pierce, in which the need to reform the Election Law to achieve equality of Croats in BiH was mentioned, was characterized as a blockade of the formation of a new government in BiH. Namely, the meeting took place at a time when the PIC demanded the formation of a new government at the level of BiH (an attempt to expel the SNSD).

The title and then the editorial comment on the meeting: **"The British with Plenković: Zagreb is also using blackmail for the formation of a new coalition in BiH"**. (...) "However, it is obvious that there is an obstacle on this path in the form of **blackmail of the HDZ BiH, but also of official Zagreb by amending the Election Law** in favor of the policy they represent." (Politički.ba, 05.06.2025., <https://politicki.ba/vijesti/britanci-s-plenkovicem-i-zagreb-ucjenjuje-formiranje-nove-koalicije-u-bih/77916>)

The Klix portal has embarked on [the interpretation of the Dayton Peace Agreement](#), by distinguishing between Dayton guarantors and mere "Dayton signatories". In the analysis which discusses the manipulations of the Dayton Agreement, Klix explicitly claims that "the signatories are not guarantors" and elaborates on their position as follows:

- "One of the most frequently repeated manipulations, and the one that mostly comes from outside Bosnia and Herzegovina, is that Croatia and Serbia (as the legal successor of the FR Yugoslavia) are the 'guarantors' of the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement... However, the truth is far from these claims. Namely, the signatories of the Dayton Peace Agreement

were the then Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, FR Yugoslavia and Croatia... The goal of Zagreb and Belgrade, in this context, is to justify their interference in BiH's internal affairs, under the guise of being an alleged 'guarantor' of the Dayton Agreement, which they are certainly not. It is also worth pointing out that the role of 'guarantors', even for those countries that are, is not fully defined and it is not clear what their role would be if the provisions of the Dayton Agreement were violated.

The Klix portal (subtly) accused the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, Andrej Plenković, of interfering in the internal affairs of BiH, making serious accusations against Croatian politics. The title was – [Plenković constantly lobbies: At a meeting with the British, he demanded "a fair Election Law of BiH for Croats"](#), with the headline "The same goal for years", which imputes the long-standing so-called interference in the internal affairs of BiH. The text states:

- "Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković held a meeting with the United Kingdom's Special Envoy to the Western Balkans Karen Pierce in Zagreb last week, during which he conditioned the de-escalation of the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina with changes to the Election Law, which is a goal they have been trying to achieve for years."
- "The HDZ, by the way, has been standing firmly with the policy of the SNSD for months, despite the destructive character of their moves since Milorad Dodik was convicted in the first instance in the Court of BiH, and through (lack of) work in state institutions, they have shown that they will also use the Election

Law of BiH to save the SNSD, or, vice versa - that they will use the SNSD to obtain the Election Law of BiH according to their needs. They use every opportunity to lobby for changes to the BiH Election Law, and High Representative Christian Schmidt presented this issue as something that "needs to be addressed" after the PIC meeting. Let us remind you that Schmidt has already changed the Election Law of BiH precisely to remove unconstitutional provisions that Croats considered to be to their detriment, and then he clearly emphasized that the verdict of the Constitutional Court of BiH in the Ljubić case was thus executed. However, this is not enough for the HDZ, so they are now trying to present the constitutional provisions, signed in Dayton, as discrimination against one people in BiH."

The observation period of this research could not pass without unreasonably dramatic and unnecessarily panicky headlines, such as the one from Slobodna Bosna when Andrej Plenković initiated a discussion on the situation in Southeast Europe at the session of the European Council. The initiative was completely benign and well-intentioned, and Slobodna Bosna described it this way – [PLENKOVIĆ STIRRED UP SPIRITS IN BRUSSELS: "In terms of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the key issue is the adoption of..."](#). The title of the text, which creates a state of panic, restlessness, and an implied conspiratorial and ill-intentioned nature of Andrej Plenković, has absolutely nothing to do with the article itself, i.e., the content of the text. However, since the title itself mostly generates emotional stimuli in the readership and the already systematically prepared negative connotation that is reserved

for Croatian political actors, the intention of such a title is crystal clear – to antagonize the highest holders of power in the Republic of Croatia.

The same portal practically ridicules and ironizes Andrej Plenković's efforts to bring BiH closer to the European Union, Slobodna Bosna sarcastically addressed Plenković's statement that BiH is close to the start of negotiations with the EU, with the title – [WE ARE JUST ABOUT TO BE: Plenković said that BiH is 'very close' to the start of negotiations with the EU.](#)

Gordan Grlić Radman also found himself in the context of "interference", even on the topic of the operation of the Gračanica mine. Then Slobodna Bosna announced – [INTERFERING IN EVERYTHING AGAIN: Grlić Radman, worried about the expansion of mines in central Bosnia, says that it would endanger 1,000 Croats.](#)

The Faktor portal also implicitly alluded to interference in BiH's internal affairs when they shaped the news about the Plenković-Čović meeting in Zagreb in the following way – [Čović again with Plenković about the conditions for the progress of BiH, with the ironic title "who is talking about what?"](#). This example shows best that even when the content of the article is fair and without any controversy, the editorial board of the media tries to shed completely different light on the otherwise benign news with the usage of title and headline.

Not only are the Republic of Croatia and its representatives persistently bound to the myth of Karađorđevo, the Croatian-Serbian alliance to the

detriment of Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc., after the UN Security Council session, Faktor suggested that Croatia is tied to Russia, Serbia and China – [Croatia with Russia, Serbia and China in criticism of Schmidt, the representative of Serbia called the verdict against Dodik "political"](#):

"Croatian representative to the UN Hrvoje Ćurić Hrvatinović said at today's session of the Security Council, where the situation in BiH was discussed, that Croatia shares concerns about the "political" crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ćurić Hrvatinović joined Russia, China, and Serbia in criticizing Christian Schmidt, concluding that the High Representative did not have a "balanced view" on the issue of the Croat community, which, as he said, is the most vulnerable in BiH.

On the Faktor portal, one could also find other quite serious accusations against Croatia and Plenković. Thus, Faktor takes the statement of **Jahja Muhasilović**, who claims with certainty – [Muhasilović: HDZ, in cooperation with Plenković, tried to frame Bosniaks for an attack on Kordić](#). The article claims:

- "According to Muhasilović, HDZ BiH, with the support of official Zagreb and in cooperation with Andrej Plenković, tried to use the conflict for political manipulation and to create the impression that Bosniaks are responsible for the alleged attack on the mayor of Mostar, Mario Kordić."
- "Although Bosniaks have absolutely nothing to do with this incident, an attempt was made to artificially create an atmosphere of attack on Croats motivated by some non-existent

religious hatred. It is important to know that Croatian politics uses every opportunity to present Bosniaks as radical and anti-Christian in the eyes of the West and the world."

- "He points out that everything is being done for the sole purpose of justifying and gaining support in the centers of power for apartheid policies that would make Croats masters in BiH, especially in the FBiH. All this is for Zagreb to enslave Bosniaks and Bosnia and Herzegovina in a political sense. Therefore, Zagreb is trying to gain support of Europe, the United States, Russia, as well as Israel, Muhasilovic believes. The Croat influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina has long been as malignant as the Serbian one! And sometimes even more dangerous for BiH because Croatia is in the EU and NATO, and it uses these platforms to make life difficult for Bosniaks," he said.

It is evident that Muhasilović's accusations of Zagreb's "apartheid" policy, the "enslavement of Bosniaks and Bosnia and Herzegovina", Croatian influence being as malignant as Serbian, and sometimes more dangerous, make him a relevant speaker. Therefore, this is irrefutable proof that far-reaching and serious accusations against Croatia and Plenković have become *the mainstream* of the Bosniak media space.

In addition to the above accusations related to contemporary problems and constitutional and legal issues of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the position of the Croatian people within it, there is also an element of defamation and distortion of the role of the Republic of Croatia in the war in the 1990s. On the anniversary of the verdict of the so-called

Croatian Six, the Faktor portal publishes an article – [Although they are being released, the truth remains – war criminals, Herzeg-Bosnia was a JCE, Croatia committed aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina.](#)

The article states:

- "The Appeals Chamber of the Hague Tribunal confirmed that Croatia, i.e., its leadership at the time, committed aggression against BiH. Franjo Tuđman, Gojko Šušak and others were part of a joint criminal enterprise."

1.4. Unfounded and tendentious historical revisionism in the service of attempts to discredit the Republic of Croatia

As part of the interpretation of the events of the Homeland War that are used to criticize the policy of the Republic of Croatia, the observed media regularly actualize the theses about the "joint criminal enterprise" (JCE) and the "aggression of Croatia against BiH". An example of such a media narrative is offered **by the original text by Amina Čorbo-Zećo** published on April 1, 2025, on the NAP.ba portal under the title "[Who is truly threatening the stability of BiH: Anušić's statement in service of concealing territorial aspirations](#)".

Referring to the statement of the Croatian Minister of Defense Ivan Anušić on the security situation, the author accuses Zagreb of concealing permanent territorial pretensions and the latent threat of military aggression. Such a characterization of Croatia as an "aggressor" is contrary to the events from the final phase of the war,

when in 1995 the Bosniak political leadership officially requested military assistance from President Franjo Tuđman and the Croatian Armed Forces in liberating the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Serb forces, which was formalized by the Split Agreement⁸. Such a thesis consequently creates a paradox in which the party presenting itself as a victim of military aggression simultaneously calls on that same "aggressor" to intervene on its territory to defend them from a third party.

Contrary to these facts, the author accuses official Zagreb of providing shelter for war crime suspects to use them in some potential future conflicts.

However, if Anušić had followed historical facts and current political trends, a more accurate statement would have been: **If it weren't for the international community, Serbia and Croatia would again try to realize their territorial aspirations towards BiH, threatening its sovereignty and peace.'** (...) **Aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina would be carried out expressively."** (...) " During the nineties, international verdicts and historical evidence clearly show that Serbia and Croatia committed aggression against BiH. **First directly, and later through support to their political outposts in Republika Srpska and in territories where HDZ BiH reigns sovereignly."** (...) " And that instability also lies in the fact that war crime suspects in BiH, sought by Bosnia and Herzegovina, were present at this gathering, but Croatia does

not extradite them because they are its citizens. **Or they simply still think, let's keep them with us – just in case!"**

Historical revisionism and labeling Croatia as an aggressor continue through the original text by **Sifet Kukuruz**, published on April 10, 2025, on NAP.ba under the title *"Nikšić, Konaković and Forto would certainly agree to sign a Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia in Dayton"*. The author uses the Bosniak internal dispute to recycle the thesis of "Greater Croatia" and distorts legal and historical facts about the role of the Republic of Croatia in BiH. Sifet Kukuruz interprets Franjo Tuđman's signature on the Dayton Peace Agreement as direct legal evidence of Croatian aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina. This position conflicts with the fact that no international court has issued a verdict defining Croatia as an aggressor state against Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, as U.S. attorney Luka Mišetić points out⁹, given that in the period from 1992 to 1995 combat operations were carried out from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the territory of the Republic of Croatia, Croatia had the legal right to take military action to protect its own territory, as stated under Article 51 of The United Nations Charter as the right to self-defense. .

" If the leaders of the "Troika" parties had negotiated in Dayton instead of Alija Izetbegović, there is no doubt they would have signed Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia. (...) Despite this, Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia were not signed in Dayton, but rather the continuation of the existence of the internationally recognized state of BiH. (...) President Alija Izetbegović succeeded in ensuring that the signatures of the

Presidents of Serbia and Croatia on the Dayton Peace Agreement served as legal proof that it was an international armed conflict, not a civil war, which was later confirmed by numerous verdicts of the International Criminal Tribunal...".

The approach that the observed media seeks to strengthen the thesis about the Croatian aggression against BiH is to convey the statements and attitudes of former officials of the Republic of Croatia. Through their statements, they attempt to give additional legitimacy to such interpretations, positioning them as criticism coming from Croatia itself. Such an example can be found in the text of the Politički.ba portal of April 17, 2025, under the title "[*Vesna Pusić: Thompson spreads political mess, and the HDZ led the aggression against BiH*](#)".

In this broadcast of the interview of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Croatia for **Vida TV**, the thesis about the agreement between Tuđman and Milošević is again actualized, while the role of the then Croatian policy towards BiH is described as a "political crime". In addition, the interview questions the Declaration on the Homeland War, and a part of Croatian society is characterized as radical because of its support for singer Marko Perković Thompson. Such statements are often used in the Sarajevo media space to present accusations against Zagreb as objective "criticism from the inside", whereby such analyses usually omit the broader context of the military and humanitarian assistance that the Croatian Army provided to Bosniaks in BiH.

"This is no longer a question of my opinion, but a documented fact. Tudman made deals with Milošević and went to war with the Bosniaks at a time when Croatia was a victim of Serbian aggression and had moral dominance. He has brought shame to Croatia. This is a political crime against Croatia, but, of course, also against BiH. (...) The Declaration on the Homeland War is irrelevant, because you cannot vote for the truth with an absolute majority."

An example of media discrediting Croat political representatives in BiH was recorded on June 15, 2025, on Hayat television. In the [show "Istraga sedmice \(Investigation of the Week\)"](#), the columnist of the **Odgovor.ba** portal and former advisor to the Bosniak member of the Presidency of BiH, Šefik Džaferović, **Haris Imamović**, used the public space to connect Dragan Čović and the HDZ BiH with the "Ustasha" heritage from the period of the Independent State of Croatia. This statement came amid discussions about the cancellation of the Conference of European Rabbis in Sarajevo, when [Europe's chief rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, said in an interview with Deutsche Welle](#) that this was about "state anti-Semitism". In this context, Imamović commented on the criticism made against political Sarajevo by calling Croatian political leaders "pastors" and at the same time attributed them with the intentions directed against Bosniaks and the city of Sarajevo. Mentioning Jure Francetić Street as a link, he suggested that current Croatian politics in BiH shares intentions with the "Ustasha" regime. It is important to note that the streets of Mostar named after NDH

officials have been renamed, a fact completely ignored by the guest of the show "Investigation of the Week".

"Now we see the manipulation of these pastors from cities where there are no Jews at all. **What one man said: Dragan Čović reported from Jure Francetić Street. But that is a significant message. That is the message: If they could, they would prefer that neither us nor this city existed.** We know what they want, but the important thing is that they do not have the strength to do it now. We can restrain these desires with our strength. If we are ready and able to solve such situations in 24 hours, then we can deal with the bigger challenges that I think await us, Imamović is precise."

If the media, political, and even intellectual scene is ready to produce, observe, or even blindly watch, this mythopoetic narrative, then it is by no means surprising that history is constantly adapting to the nationalist point of view of political Sarajevo without any scientific or professional legitimacy. Political Sarajevo is extremely bothered by the fact that the Croats liberated their own territory and unblocked Bihać and surrounding Bosniak settlements. Therefore, during the commemoration of Operation Storm in the Republic of Croatia, a complete set of inverse narratives is orchestrated, according to which the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina played a key role in the unblocking and even liberation of parts of the territory of Croatia, and not vice versa.

Thus, the **Association of Generals of BiH**, without any evidence, presents one of the most well-known fabricated narratives about the Croats leaving Posavina, and at the same time presents an incredible lie that "[the ARBiH organized the defense](#)". Without any scruples, and regardless of the fact that it is known that the HVO was founded in Posavina before the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and held the defense of the remaining parts throughout the war, the subsequent wisdom packaged in the mythopoetic category is placed in the public by the generals of the Army of BiH. However, they do not stop there. They claim that: "*The final liberation actions on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina were carried out exclusively by units of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina*", and that the Army is responsible for the liberation of the territory of the Republic of Croatia because it tied 150 thousand Serb soldiers to itself. Finally, they do not fail to refer to the "suspicious" role of the Croatian army in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which resulted in the Hague verdicts.

"The Hague verdict on the JCE, led by General Praljak and others, remained as a lasting testimony to this shameful wartime engagement of Croatia in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Such a spread of fabricated facts and revised objective events is the result of a reaction to President Milanović's statements about new indictments against Croatian officers and his claim about the Croatian role in the liberation of Bihać, which the Army generals call "the fruit of fantasy". On the same track, the [current Minister of Defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zukan Helez](#), commenting on the statements of Croatian President Zoran Milanović, stated:

"What must be admitted is that the Army of the Republic of BiH ¹⁰ and the Croatian Army cooperated in the liberation of Krajina, but also the fact that **the Army of BiH played a key role in the liberation of parts of Croatia** during the military operation Storm. Almost all military analysts agree that **without the role of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Operation Storm would not have been possible.**"

In the same interview, he accuses the Croatian army of numerous crimes throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina (Vacuf-Uskoplje, Ahmići near Vitez, Mostar, Prozor-Rama, Kiseljak, Konjic, Kreševo, Zenica, Zavidovići), ironically stating that Bosniaks in these places and many other cities "know what it is like when the Croatian Army liberates." Therefore, even when there is need to mention the Croatian Army in a positive context, counterbalance must automatically be created by listing the execution sites of Bosniaks, thus annulling the military alliance and the objective merits of the Croatian Army. The most widely read Bosnian Herzegovinian portal **Klix.ba** is undoubtedly the most frequent propagator of this revisionist process by imputation of negative determinants to the Croatian Army, while at the same time glorifying and attributing merits to the Army that are not factually based. On the very anniversary of Operation Storm, the portal publishes the article ["The Day the 'Storm' Blew: The End of Two Parastates and the Crucial, but Often Left Out Role of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina"](#) in which it brings an incredible reinterpretation of military operations.

"Operation Storm, **although technically an operation of the Croatian Army and the HVO**, had a Bosnian Herzegovinian dimension from the very beginning. Shortly before its beginning, in July 1995, a joint attack of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Army was agreed in the wider area of Dinara, Livno and Glamoč – Operation 'Summer '95'. This breakthrough towards Drvar and Bosansko Grahovo was aimed at separating the Army of the Republika Srpska from the Republic of Serbian Krajina and putting pressure on the Serbian lines of defense. **In this context, the involvement of the ARBiH was crucial.** The offensive of the Fifth Corps of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, commanded by General Atif Dudaković, in the direction of Velika Kladuša and Bužim, was synchronized with the advance of the Croatian Army towards Knin. This led to a double effect: the collapse of the resistance of the Krajina Serbs, but also the definitive destruction of Abdić's para-state... That is why the anniversary of the "Storm" should not be viewed solely through the prism of one country. **It is also a Bosnian Herzegovinian story**, especially the story of the survival of Bihać, the collapse of Abdić's parastate, the new geopolitical map of the region and the end of the illusion of a 'Greater Serbia'."

Three days before the anniversary, the same portal published an article entitled "[How Bosniaks Saved Nearly 15,000 Croats in 1991: A Fact They Have Forgotten in Zagreb](#)". In it, they claim that BiH rescued

Croatian refugees in November 1991 and that they gave conscripts false documents with Muslim names so that they could pass through Serb territories more easily, without explaining why this made their transit easier. Furthermore, in the text they claim that the HVO forces "betrayed" the forces of the Fifth Corps of the Army in their joint actions, and they attribute such "sabotage" to nothing other than the agreement between Zagreb and Belgrade!

"During the decisive fights, the HVO forces that were guarding the flanks of the forces of the Fifth Corps, let the forces of the so-called People's Defense of Western Bosnia together with the Serb forces cross the Old Town in Velika Kladuša. **The coordination of this activity between Belgrade and Zagreb** is indicated by the fact that after the fall of Velika Kladuša, a contingent of buses arrived from Croatia through the occupied territory of SAO Krajina, which evacuated the Croatian population from the Croatian villages around Velika Kladuša to Karlovac."

- ...under the supervision of the State Security Service of Serbia and the Yugoslav Army, tried to defeat the Fifth Corps of the ARBiH and reinstall Fikret Abdić in Velika Kladuša.

Even when they must admit the inevitability of the facts, for example, regarding the Bosniak refugees accepted and protected by the Republic of Croatia, there are still arguments that everything was done out of interest, and not friendship between the two peoples at the time and without a true human empathy.

"However, the fact is that Croatia bought affection of part of the Arab world by accepting Bosniak refugees. By sending weapons

to the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina Arab world also armed the Croatian Army, whereby in the event of the fall of the Fifth Corps, the liberation of the occupied territory of the Republic of Croatia could not be realized."

So, not only did Croatia accept Bosniak refugees for solely out of interest, but it would not have been able to liberate its territory if it were not for that money, and at the same time the Fifth Corps, which, *nota bene*, was in complete isolation of the Serbian army.

However, the most malicious is the already mentioned **Jasmin Mujanović**, who is trying to revise, but also to create another element of controversy from the points of the common collective memory of Croats and Bosniaks. In an [article](#) on **the Politički.ba** in which he is presented as a "political analyst from the United States", he criticizes the narrative that Croatia saved Bihać, calling it "vulgar historical revisionism". According to a preconceived matrix, he puts the entire blame for the war and suffering on the mythical agreement between Tuđman and Milošević, where Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided. However, in his malicious insinuations, he goes a step further. In fact, he accuses Tuđman and Croatia of prolonging the war with their actions and of purposefully transferring combat actions to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All the war destruction and crimes committed by the Serbian army are, consequently, the result of Croatian calculations and insufficient assistance to the Army.

"... it was Tuđman's double game that prolonged both wars and contributed to the unnecessary death of tens of thousands of

people. He points out that, after the Sarajevo Agreement of January 1992, which stopped most of the fighting in Croatia until Operation Storm in August 1995, almost the entire war was transferred to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. it was precisely **because of the Croatian sabotage of the defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina that the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina** was prevented from breaking the sieges of Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Žepa and Goražde, and that the outcome of the war would have been significantly different if it had not been for Tuđman's policy."

The level of monstrosity of historical falsifications is shown by the aforementioned "analyst", for whom the Croatian Army is the sole culprit as to why the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not break through the siege of Sarajevo, at the same time that the exact Army thoroughly "cleans" the Croat areas in Central Bosnia. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who have found their refuge throughout Croatia are not a sign of friendship and help, but the author observes everything through the malicious lens of the "Greater Croatian conspiracy". [Mujanović further concludes](#), in an article entitled: "The Limp, Obsessive Colonialism of Andrej Plenković", that even the genocide in Srebrenica would have been prevented if it had not been for the actions of the Croatian army.

"If it had not been for the Croat raids into Bosnia and Herzegovina between October 1992 and March 1994, it is likely that the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina would have managed to break the siege of Sarajevo on its own.

If that had happened, the situation on the battlefield in eastern Bosnia would probably have changed significantly – **to the point that the genocide in Srebrenica might have never happened.** This is because Srebrenica, as well as Žepa and Goražde, would then have received help from the forces blocked in the capital."

How far historical revisionism can go when combined with a nationalist view of the past is also shown by the fact that **Muhamed Mahmutović** published an article on the Senzor.ba portal (30.4.2025) in which he claimed that the first Croatian flag was placed on the Knin fortress **by a Bosniak**, ¹¹[Jasmin Hodžić](#). In the same text, he claims that the Croats welcomed the Army of RBiH on the Korana River while stating that they had been waiting for the ARBiH for a long time, although there is a video that clearly testifies to the opposite. He also claims that **20,000 Bosniaks defended the Republic of Croatia**, two thousand died, and that today they are **a marginalized minority**, while the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who make up 10% of the population, control 60% of the government and are also looking for a third entity. It is interesting that this text was subsequently withdrawn from the mentioned portal and it is not possible to find it.

1.5. Discrediting Croatia and Croatian officials

In addition to the above-mentioned, conditionally speaking, large mythologemes that, through constant narrative use, are transformed into real codes of political reality in Bosnia and Herzegovina according

to which politicians and "ordinary people" are guided, there are also more banal elements of discrediting the Republic of Croatia and Croatian officials. One of the most important topics is the construction of a nuclear waste repository on Trgovska Gora, which has created a sort of media panic in BiH. In addition to certain experts who tried to explain the entire process of potential danger, politicians also got involved, creating an anti-Croat feeling among the inhabitants of BiH. For example, **after the adoption of the Law on Construction of the Radioactive Waste Management Center at Trgovska Gora**, the representative in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Šemsudin Mehmedović, [has further raised tensions](#):

"If they could, the Croats would build a nuclear waste repository in the center of Sarajevo... They tell us not to do what they are doing and what they think of doing. We will have to seek protection in the legal mechanisms of the EU and international law, because the one-sided arrogance of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and its officials is obvious. **Do not be surprised if BiH deposits chemical waste in its southern part, which could jeopardize the tourist potential of the Republic of Croatia.** This is not the end of this story, regardless of the inhuman and bad neighborly relationship of the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia."

One of the "favorite topics" of the Bosniak media is the "fascistization of Croatia". In the observed period, every situation in Croatia that would have a symbolic charge, especially towards the Serbian national minority, was highly emphasized as a certain reminiscence towards the

Independent State of Croatia as an exclusively Croatian ethnic project, and towards the contemporary tendencies towards the fascistization of Croatian society. It all started in August when **Patria.ba** published a very general headline "[Fascism Echoes through Croatia: War Veterans Interrupt festival in Benkovac with the Shouts of ZDS!](#)". In the turbulent month of November, certain portals very tendentiously reported on the fascistization of Croatia without deeper context or interpretation of individual events. Neither the details of the events nor the actors were analyzed, but the process of revitalization of fascism was emphasized in a very generic way. Klix.ba (author B.H.) were at the forefront of the aforementioned media process with its headlines "[Croatia shows that it is far from a role model: The savage attack on Serbs and the relativization of the Ustasha expose everything](#)" (4.8.2026) and "Croats in Serbia are having red paint thrown on their houses, and Serbs in Croatia cannot even hold an exhibition in peace". It should be noted that in these texts, a parallel was drawn with the Serbian regime embodied in the figure of Aleksandar Vučić, and a conclusion was drawn about similar processes of radicalization. From the texts it is possible to conclude that radicalization is state-sponsored or at least tacitly enabled, and that it has been normalized as a general norm in Croatia, and that referring to European values is merely ridicule and a fig leaf.

"A country in which the fascist salute is chanted in stadiums, in parliament and at concerts, in which minorities fear for their safety and in which the state systematically relativizes the criminal past, can hardly be a role model for anyone... If Croatia really wants to be a European state, it must start from the basics,

from facing its own past and breaking ties with fascist symbols that, under the guise of patriotism, have long ago crossed the line of civilized society. If this does not happen, any lesson about "European values" that Zagreb gives to others will remain empty and hypocritical."

An example of the media practice of labeling and dehumanizing Croatian officials was noted on June 2, 2025, with the publication of a text on **the Slobodna Bosna** portal (which was subsequently published by **the Istraga.ba** portal), written by **Senad Avdić**. Under the title *"Some providence wanted Bosnia and Herzegovina to be dealt with by a professional vulture Gordan Grlić Radman, he is a metaphor for the politics he represents"*, the author uses the specificity of the family business of the head of Croatian diplomacy as a metaphor to describe Croatian policy towards BiH as a "vulture" practice, waiting for the division of BiH. To reinforce the rhetorical impression of the text, the author uses the intermediate title "Ear, Grlić, Knife", the allusion of which is an extremely aggressive wordplay in domestic language. In addition to personal qualifications at the expense of Minister Grlić Radman, Avdić also attacks other people of Croatian origin in the text. Thus, the American analyst Max Primorac is accused that he was named after the Ustasha official Maks Luburić, which is an attempt to ideologically discredit his criticism of the OHR's activities in advance. In addition, the Croatian delegation at the Dayton conference is described as a "collective Milorad Dodik" who, according to his instructions, challenges the peace agreement, while Croatian demands

for reform of the election law are interpreted through the prism of "territorial appetite".

"Grlić Radman and his company do not enter the operational scene post festum, when the animals kick the bucket, *they help the sick (usually pigs) die with dignity and be adequately cared for in accordance with the prescribed hygienic and environmental standards* (...) And it will remain so until Grlić-Radman delivers the final **result of his vulture mission: a scorched Bosnia and Herzegovina**, previously properly excavated and fried according to the highest ecological (and European) standards. (...) **This is the essence of the vulture's 'approach' to the problem: to wait for the executioner to kill the victim and then parasitize on his remains.** (...) The Croatian delegation behaved as Dodik says, that is, as **a collective Milorad Dodik!** (...) In conclusion, Primorac (to whom his father, a political emigrant, **allegedly gave the name in honor and in memory of Maks Luburić**, (should we say – legitimate?) prominent official of 'political Sarajevo' from the time of the rule of the fascist NDH) sends a message to the American administration."

In addition to the highest state officials, Croatian members of the European Parliament, especially Željana Zovko, are also regularly on the radar of the monitored media. Her continued advocacy for the constitutional equality of Croats in BiH is being devalued through the prism of her political irrelevance. Such an example is the text published on May 10, 2025, on the NAP.ba portal, under the title ["Željana Zovko](#)

is not news in Croatia, she wouldn't exist without BiH media." The occasion referred to in the text was a conference in Split on the introduction of the "European model of federalism". With the intention of discrediting her, the editorial board claims that Zovko has a "non-existent" rating in the European Parliament and that she survives politically only thanks to the media from BiH that follow her work. However, these claims are in contradiction to the real data. In 2024, the independent research platform *EU Matrix* declared Željana Zovko, vice-chair of the EPP Group and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the 19th most influential MEP out of 705 and the most influential Croatian MEP.

" As of the publication of this text, none of the relevant media outlets in Croatia have reported on the conference, and 24 hours have already passed since its conclusion. The minor attendance in Split also speaks to the lack of interest in what Zovko has to say. Only about 20 people were present. (...) **Her rating in the European Parliament, I can't say non-existent, but insignificant. I think Željana Zovko lives off the media in BiH that report on her. And if you, as a branch, agreed not to report on her, she would politically cease to exist**" (part of an earlier statement by a member of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, Saša Magazinović, for Vijesti.ba recycled by NAP).

In a further media presentation of Željana Zovko's activities, the NAP.ba portal on May 20, 2025, reports a statement from the association "Circle 99" entitled "Circle 99: Željana Zovko promotes

dangerous theses harmful to BiH". In this text, her actions are characterized as a threat to the sovereignty of the state and are labeled as "right-wing extremism". In a statement from Circle 99, her demand for the application of a federalization model, which functions as a democratic model of multi-level governance in a number of complex states, is called a "great-nationalist project" and a dangerous ideology. This form of governance, which Zovko advocates, is described in the text as a "deviant form of democracy", in contrast to which they offer the concept of "real civic democracy". Accordingly, the advocacy of decentralization and constitutional equality in her statement is characterized by the phrase "imposition of cuckoo eggs". Below are the most important parts of the press release.

"According to Circle 99, the political identity of Željana Zovko has already been recognized as **part of right-wing extremism which, under the guise of European values, advocates models of federalization** and decentralization of BiH with the aim of achieving separatist and Greater-Nationalist projects. (...) The imposition of the 'cuckoo eggs' of federalization and the third entity is nothing more than **a masked attempt to undermine the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina.** (...) Enable a return to genuine civic democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and not, as they say, **"a deviant form of democracy tailored to Željana Zovko and related political ideologies."**

An example of an approach that interprets Croatian politics through the prism of destabilization of the region can be found in the press release

of the IFIMES International Institute, published on April 30, 2025 on the **Politicki.ba** portal entitled "[*Plenković's undermining of fragile peace in the Western Balkans*](#)". In this statement, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković is directly called out for the continuation of the joint criminal enterprise (JCE) and the deliberate dismantling of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The IFIMES statement states that Plenković's refusal to impose sanctions on Milorad Dodik represents "the strongest blow to BiH since December 1991" when, according to the authors, the JCE was formed in Zagreb. In addition, Croatia's military cooperation with Albania and Kosovo is described as a "salto mortale" through which Croatia, allegedly without the consent of the United States and NATO, is dragging the region into conflict. Such a claim goes against common practices within NATO, where strategic military alliances and decisions are not made without coordination with their leading members (primarily the United States). Furthermore, Plenković is defined in the text as a politician who "wants the division of BiH" and opposes the US administration.

"The statement of Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković (HDZ) that the Republic of Croatia will not impose sanctions on the President of the RS entity Milorad Dodik (SNSD) represents **the strongest blow to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) since December 1991, when the Joint Criminal Enterprise (JCE) was established in Zagreb (...) Plenković, by supporting Dodik and creating a military bloc with Albania and Kosovo, wants the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina and**

the long-term undermining of Serbia and Hungary. (...) **With a vile and behind-the-scenes policy, Plenković and Croatia are dragging NATO into a possible regional conflict.** (...) By forming a military bloc without the consent of the United States and NATO, Plenković **directly opposed the American plan for the simultaneous entry of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia under the auspices of NATO.**

Everything described so far actually serves a very practical goal, to discredit the Republic of Croatia as much as possible to create the illusion that it is hostile towards BiH, that it continuously undermines it, and that support for the demands of Croats in BiH becomes part of the same process of division. This is intended to discredit Croatia as a credible partner when it comes to the future of BiH and exclude it from all processes that could concern BiH. The whole bundle of goals can be reduced to the usual mantra of political Sarajevo "non-interference in the internal affairs of BiH".

Often, the above-mentioned process was channeled into personal defamation of certain Croatian officials. Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Gordan Grlić Radman and President Zoran Milanović are favorite targets of the Bosniak media. All three because their statements and actions expressed their support for the political representatives of the Croats and they advocated for Croats demands in international circles. This process was best represented [by the position of the former Reis Mustafa Cerić, who stated in the weekly STAV:](#)

"Well, gentlemen from Zagreb, and especially you, Minister Grlić Radman – if you want Bosnia and Herzegovina to 'listen' to you, then first tell it the truth. Say that you **have undermined it from within, divided it with maps, shelled schools. Say that you were a part of a joint criminal enterprise.** And then, if there is even an ounce of moral capital left, maybe – but just maybe – someone in Bosnia will stop to listen to you."

The entire text is enriched with the malicious title "He comes from Zagreb and wears a tie in the colors of the EU, with a garter of nostalgia for Herzeg-Bosnia. Minister Grlić Radman, Bosnia is not your province." [President Milanović](#) was discredited on a personal level, and he caused special dislike with his views that were interpreted as a form of betrayal of Bosnian views, because he once had very good relations with the SDP BiH and publicly supported Željko Komšić.

"Among his most notorious statements is the one "soap first, then perfume", with which he implied that Bosniaks, before they can even claim civil rights, should first 'cleanse themselves'. Milanović's transformation is not just a personal betrayal of former beliefs – it reflects a broader collapse of Croatian political discourse on Bosnia, which threatens to destroy decades of painstakingly built peace and regional cooperation."

[Prime Minister Plenković](#) was also seriously defamed. In addition to the already mentioned accusations of the so-called analysts for colonialism and the continuation of the great-state project, all the

positive things done for BiH were mostly unnoticed or treated in a neutral mode. Fuad Đidić, Ambassador of BiH to Australia, held a lecture organized by Circle 99 in which, among other actors, he also mentioned Prime Minister Plenković:

"This is, in fact, about buying a 'clean' past at the expense of putting the blame on the backs of Bosnia and Herzegovina or, quite specifically, Bosniaks. Domestic protagonists in the form of Čović, Dodik and Zovko are also involved in this work of putting the blame, and the most active external actors are Orban and **Plenković**."

On 15.04.2025, the public television service of the Federation of BiH – **Federal Television** – broadcast a report as part of the political magazine Mreža (Network). Despite the fact that the public television service should be recognizable for its neutral, impartial, and correct reporting and a reflection of equal treatment of all three constituent peoples and all citizens, Federal Television, and especially the political magazine Mreža, have over time established themselves as the leading platform for the spread of anti-Croatian hysteria and chauvinism.

[Journalist](#) Merila Dizdarević announced **the report on the official website of the Federal Television** with the following words:

- "Is the duplicitous and ultimate policy of Plenković and Čović saving Dodik? "Why are there always conditions and threats sent to Sarajevo, while a helping hand is offered to Banja Luka?"
- "Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, with his duplicitous policy and confusing attitudes, has clearly shown what kind of

attitude he has towards Sarajevo and what kind of attitude he has towards Banja Luka. Čović and Plenković, “brothers” in double games and attitudes without a clear attitude towards Dodik, a secessionist, a fugitive and a premeditated loser. Čović and Plenković have a clear, ultimate and blackmailing attitude towards the Troika in the biggest crisis. Election Law and the Southern Interconnection. Months of high pressure of the joint Croat-Serb alliance are testing the red lines of the Bosniak compromise", is the description of the video published in the Mreža and entitled "[The Protected Face of the Croatian Puzzle](#)" and also served as an introduction to the FTV journalist's report.

From the above, it is clear that Croatian political actors, Plenković and Čović, are explicitly labeled as "hypocritical" and "ultimate", i.e., negative connotations are categorically associated with them. The continuation of the construction is based on the established Bosniak, nationalist myth of the "joint Croatian-Serbian alliance" and the intention to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has its roots in Karađorđevo and insinuates such an intention to the political actors of the time, Tuđman and Milošević, and today Plenković, Čović and Dodik. Of course, in this construction, the role of the victim is intended exclusively for political Sarajevo and representatives of Bosniak politics, which is why there is a mention of "red lines of Bosniak compromise". Merila Dizdarević begins the report with the words: "... Dodik can count on two HDZs. **Polished pro-European faces in the service of the persons on the arrest warrant (Plenković and Čović)**... Croatia has found itself between the interests of the HDZ BiH, which does not renounce the SNSD, and the inglorious role of a

neighbor with bad neighborly intentions..." FTV chose **Safet Oručević, Armin Hodžić, Zijad Bećirević, Emir Hadžikadunić and Dragan Markovina as relevant interlocutors for the report.** Although (almost) all the interlocutors are extremely pro-Bosniak with greater or lesser intensity, Zijad Bećirević, director of IFIMES, has gone the furthest in his astonishing chauvinism and bizarre constructions, claiming in the report:

- "When Andrej Plenković says good day (have a good day), you must not believe that it is really a good day. So, in Brussels circles, they described him as a man who looks like Delon, and inside like a demon. And in fact, this is a demonic policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina (by) the Republic of Croatia, symbolized by Andrej Plenković, given that he is the executive power. Of course, there are others. Croatian President Zoran Milanović cannot be ruled out either. Simply, they are trying to achieve in Bosnia and Herzegovina what they did not achieve through the war."

Emir Hadžikadunić, a professor of international relations at the SSST, made sure that the policy of the Republic of Croatia was put on the same level as the Serbian and Russian policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina and labeled it as an anti-European policy, claiming:

- "That (Croatian politics) is a policy of creating spheres of influence. And this policy fits perfectly into, say, a policy or a position of the Russian Federation, which also wants to affirm the creation of a sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Just as Serbia wants to affirm the creation of a sphere of influence in the Western Balkans. **So, that Croatian world,**

and that Serbian world, and that Russian world, it is cooked in the same kitchen. One is brutal, the other two are still not, but it is the same ideology, the same matrix of behavior and it is against European values."

Dizdarević then continues:

- "Čović's alleged distancing from Dodik was publicly unmasked by Plenković who, while at the same time calling for respect for judicial institutions, agrees to Dodik's narrative that he should be negotiated with, aware that Dodik and his majority in the House of Peoples are a tool for the safe passage of the Election Law of BiH tailored to fit both HDZs, for which Plenković has been lobbying through the European Parliament for years. So, to use the constitutional and security crisis initiated by the RS to initiate the second crisis process – advocating for the Croat constituent unit. This is camouflaged as a threat to the Croatian people, whose survival, they claim, depends on resolving the election of a member of the Presidency from among the Croat people. It is a parallel maneuver of the political tandem Dodik-Čović, supported from Zagreb."

Despite the malicious and conspiratorial nature of the aforementioned constructions, they seem benign or well-intentioned when compared to the following shocking words presented in the report **by Zijad Bećirević**, which reaches the peak of anti-Croatian hysteria, mindless hatred and chauvinism:

- "When Andrej Plenković or Dragan Čović say that they promote European values, you have to know that they promote

the most negative European values, and they are in contact with fascism, Nazism, anti-Semitism, the Inquisition, colonialism and absolutely all other negative phenomena that have marked Europe and that Europe is sadly filled with."

The extend to which these commentators feel "at home" in front of the microphone of the Federal Television and to what extent FTV has become a Bosniak, nationalist media is best demonstrated by *the Freudian mistake of Safet Oručević*:

- "... **Our people** must know that these are double standards (of Croatian politics on both sides of the border), **our policy** must go a step forward. You cannot use this kind of segregation, such laws that are very illogical, after all, bad for your own people... make a kind of sacrifice to the international community. **We** have to make it clear that someone is playing with the entire international community, pretending that Croats are victims because a legitimate member of the Presidency was not elected."

After such a presentation, several logical questions naturally arise: who are "our people"? What is "our policy"? Who are the "we" that Safet Oručević is talking about? The only plausible answer to all the questions, especially after taking into account the way the journalist framed the report, the choice of interlocutors and the views expressed in the report, is that it is obviously a (pro)Bosniak media with (pro)Bosniak interlocutors who spread anti-Croat hysteria and chauvinism, and that the ultimate planned recipient of all messages is

the Bosniak people. This becomes crystal clear when we consider the fact that the main target of almost all verbal outbursts of hatred are Croatian political actors, especially the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Andrej Plenković and the Head of the Croatian National Assembly of BiH Dragan Čović. All this is absolutely unacceptable for a public television service that should report objectively and in the service of everyone, including the Croat people who, in the end, formed the entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in alliance with the Bosniak people.

Just before the end of the report, the FTV journalist continues about the policy of the Republic of Croatia towards BiH and in general about the attitude of the entirety of Croatian political actors towards BiH:

- "The actors have changed, but the policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina has never changed. From perfume and soap, *big shit*, a hotbed of radical Islamists in BiH, to unitarians as dangerous as separatists. **This is just a part of the good neighborly and friendly epithets that have been reproduced in European centers for years through the megaphone of Greater Croatian politics, which has not moved away from Tuđman's drawing a divided Bosnia and Herzegovina on a napkin.** Dodik's campaign against Bosnia and Herzegovina is a historic moment for them, how to negotiate the vote of the Election Law as a seal of its irreplaceability to the master of political processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the HDZ is now."

The question arises – if journalists as media workers, especially on the public service, openly defame the Republic of Croatia and disseminate nationalist, Bosniak myths and talk about "Greater Croatian politics" and perpetuate the myth of "Tuđman's drawing of a divided BiH on a napkin", then what can we expect from various commentators, analysts and "experts"? In the scandalous report, **Zijad Bećirević** was chosen as the last interlocutor, who imposes a conclusion to a wide audience regarding Croatian political actors:

- "Simply, they are trying to achieve in Bosnia and Herzegovina what they did not achieve through the war. And we know very well that Croatia is a participant of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are verdicts of the international court, the international court in The Hague, that it (Croatia) participated in a joint criminal enterprise. Now they want to go back to Franjo Tuđman's factory settings when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, that Croatia is the bulwark of Christianity and that they are supposedly defending Europe from the invasion of Muslims, and primarily Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

The report is particularly interesting if we consider that the Republic of Croatia is practically portrayed as an archenemy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the holders of power in the Republic of Croatia, as well as Croat political actors in BiH, are inherently malicious, hypocritical and ill-intentioned. Unfortunately, such a matrix is not isolated in the Bosniak media space but has become *the mainstream* in Bosniak media space for years, even decades. This claim does not need more proof than the aforementioned FTV report, because if such

reports are broadcast in *prime time* of a **public television service**, then it is almost illusory to expect a different treatment from private media houses and portals, which are often financed by Turkish or Iranian capital, etc.

So, very provisionally and without clearly indicated criteria, every actor who does not correspond to the Bosniak mainstream media-political corps is put into the same basket. The mainstream Bosniak media is often accompanied by the "desirable voices" of the Serbian opposition, who are frequent guests in the Sarajevo media sector. **Nebojša Vukanović**, an opposition member of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, as a guest on **Face TV**, [imputes](#): "Milorad Dodik is a ram used by **Čović and Plenković to hit the ramparts of BiH**, but they do not hit with his head, his head is a helmet deep in the basement and **he is guarded there by SOA, the intelligence agency of Croatia**, they are using Republika Srpska to hit the ramparts. He beats my head against the wall, so we would smash our heads and break BiH, so they can get a third entity."

In the observed period, Croatia was often accused of working on the destabilization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of not contributing to peace, although not a single element by which Croatia does it is mentioned anywhere. Usually, the state of BiH and the entire Bosniak people are automatically classified as supported by the United States and the West, while Croat officials are often classified as being under Russian influence, as well as Republika Srpska officials. Croatia remains a disruptive factor.

Here are a few examples:

Mustafa Cerić [states](#) the following on Avaz.tv: "People, wake up. The Americans are keeping the door open, the Turks are ready to help. **The only ones who are not doing what should be done – for peace in the world, especially here – is Croatia.**" Although it often prides itself as the flagship of Bosnian Herzegovinian journalism, N1 has worked very maliciously by incorrectly quoting the statements of Croatian officials in order to present them as being in disagreement with the rest of the EU. Thus, during the affair about the parade in Moscow for the Day of Anti-Fascist Struggle, the statements of the European Commissioner Kaja Kallas about the threats of secessionism in BiH and about going to the parade in Moscow as a potential danger were played, the reporter adds that there are those who have a different opinion and that they do not see Dodik's secessionism as a threat, but some completely different topics. After that, they played the statement of Gordan Grlić Radman, who emphasized the unresolved problem of legitimate representation as a problem of BiH. (N1, Novi dan, 15.4.2025.) Shortly after, at the session of the notorious Circle 99, the former rector of the University of Tuzla, Enver Halilović, addressed the audience as an introductory speaker, with a categorical claim that BiH is threatened **by a double danger: Russian-Chinese and Croatian**, the one that wants an ethno-territorial division of BiH through the election law (BHRT, News at 10 pm, 27.4.2025.) Of course, there is no plausible evidence to support these positions, but it echoes through the media scene when Croatia becomes, along with Russia and China, one of the two key geopolitical dangers for BiH.

On the international scene, the same narrative is repeated. [At the UN Security Council debate](#) on BiH, Ambassador **Zlatko Lagumdžija** called out Croatia and questioned its intentions towards BiH:

"Croatia's re-questioning of the legitimacy and legality of the BiH Presidency Chairman, with all due respect, counting voters' blood cells, is not only against human rights – it is contrary to the basic principles on which this institution is based." He emphasized that "the Chairman of the Presidency of BiH was elected by the citizens of BiH, in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the state, and not by the will of our neighbors who do not have good intentions towards Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Such a media narrative creates an impression of political Sarajevo and the Bosniak corps as a morally superior part of the Balkans that always holds a correct and morally superior position in every segment of the past, and especially in modern times.

The Slobodna Bosna portal and the DF envoy in the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dženan Đonlagić, took care of the direct discrediting of the Republic of Croatia and its Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, as they proverbially used the opportunity to repeatedly perpetuate the myth of Karađorđevo and the "unachieved war goals of the Republic of Croatia" – ĐONLAGIĆ, AFTER MESSAGES FROM BANJA LUKA: Established connections from Karađorđevo are still active today, It's time to....

In a statement for the portal Slobodna Bosna, Đonlagić claims:

- "Prime Minister Andrej Plenković has shown great disrespect and deliberate belittling of the institutions of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. And like he said, he did it on purpose! It is not possible to cross the border from one country to another at border crossings that are not officially open."
- "Another important message that the representatives of the HDZ from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina sent is that Milorad Dodik is still their strategic partner. Through Dodik, the HDZ continues its completely failed policy towards the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Established connections from Karadžević are still active today. It's time to tear them up. They imagined that with the failed and, judicially adjudicated policy 'Milošević-Tuđman', they would weaken the sovereignty of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They did not succeed with war means in the 90s, nor with political means today."

1.6. International corruption and Islamophobia in the EU

After the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg made a final decision rejecting Slaven Kovačević's request, a campaign was launched in the media that are the subject of this analysis to question the integrity of this international judicial institution. In [the show "Istraga sedmice \(Investigation of the Week\)" on Hayat TV](#) (September 28, 2025), Kovačević himself did not

comment on the outcome of the proceedings through the legal argumentation of the Court, but he presented theses about the direct, non-transparent and corrupt interference of the Republic of Croatia in the work of the ECHR.

Kovačević suggested that the donation of 100,000 Euros, which the Croatian government officially paid to the Court, had an impact on the final verdict. He called out Prime Minister Andrej Plenković for alleged meetings with the former president of the Court, while he described Croatia's legal representatives before the Court exclusively as "HDZ members from Herzegovina". His thesis was that the verdict was the result of synchronized actions of Zagreb and the OHR with the aim of affirming "consociational democracy", whereby he marks Croatia as the protector of the ethnic model of the state.

However, the legal argumentation set out in the full judgment of the Grand Chamber of the ECHR was based on entirely different grounds. The Court concluded by a majority vote (16 to 1) that Kovačević did not have the status of a victim and that the aim of his petition was not to protect individual rights, but to challenge the entire electoral and constitutional system of BiH. Moreover, the Court stated that States have a broad right to establish constituencies based on existing administrative boundaries or other criteria which they themselves prescribe. The Court also established the abuse of the right to an individual petition, specifically singling out Kovačević's behavior and public appearances towards judges, the OHR and representatives of the BiH Council of Ministers as "inappropriate, unfounded and malicious".

"I consider Mr. Plenković to be a smart actor, but the man clumsily revealed that they met at least twice with the previous president of the ECHR, Síofra O'Leary, in the presence of Marija Pejčinović Burić. (...) Consociational democracy is an extremely specific term. It is very rarely used in public space. Do you think it's a coincidence? (Kovačević states that the Croatian delegation submitted a statement of 12 pages, 10 of which are dedicated to this concept) (...) What does this have to do with Croatia? What does this have to do with the High Representative? Croatian delegation in Strasbourg consisted of two HDZ members from Herzegovina."

The thesis about the compromised Court and the controversial role of the financial donation in the public space continued to be promoted by the pro-Bosniak activist **Azra Zornić**. Zornić, who declares herself as a "Bosnian and Herzegovinian" by nationality and was previously an appellant before the Court in Strasbourg (within the group of cases "Sejdić and Finci"), published an original review on **the Istraga.ba** portal on October 2, 2025 entitled "[Azra Zornić's review of the Kovačević verdict: Bosnia and Herzegovina was represented in Strasbourg by the HDZ and SNSD. And no one else!](#)". In her text, Zornić interpretes the role of the Republic of Croatia in this process through the prism of undue influence on the ECHR. Building up on Slaven Kovačević's argumentation, she describes the donation of the Government of the Republic of Croatia in the amount of 100,000 Euros as a move that directly undermines the impartiality of the court and creates a perception of institutional influence on the outcome of the

verdict. Also, the activities of the OHR and the engagement of the British lawyer Timothy Otty were assessed in the text as representing the interests of official Zagreb and the HDZ BiH, which moves the responsibility for the epilogue of this case outside the framework of the judiciary.

Such analyses usually omit the review of the merits of the judgment of the Grand Chamber of the ECHR, which declared Kovačević's request inadmissible, and assessed his actions as an attempt to achieve political goals and change the Dayton system through the abuse of the right to an individual petition. The blame for the failure of the appeal is instead pointed to the diplomatic activities of the neighboring state.

"Timothy Otty not only represented interests that obviously go in favor of the Republic of Croatia and the HDZ BiH, but he was in a conflict of interest because he is a member of the Venice Commission. (...) The whole process was further compromised by the role of the Republic of Croatia and the HDZ BiH. The interference of the Republic of Croatia, which is not a party to the proceedings, but has clearly influenced the course of the case through various connections and financial contributions, constitutes a serious precedent and undermines the basic principle of impartiality. It is worth recalling that the Republic of Croatia donated 100,000 Euros to the Court immediately before the public hearing, which further strengthens the perception of political influence."

In the context of the delegitimization of European institutions and court decisions, part of the media reaches for the argument of Islamophobia. This is evidenced by the original text by the editor of the **Istraga.ba portal**, **Avdo Avdić**, published on June 26, 2025, with an indicative headline and title: *"Human Rights" for Muslims and Others / A Cry from the Strasbourg Grave: Slaven Kovačević vs. Croatia, Serbia, the Troika, Christian Schmidt and Islamophobia!"*. The text is accompanied by a photo from the meeting between Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and High Representative Christian Schmidt in Ban's Court (the seat of the Government of the Republic of Croatia).

The thesis implied through this text is that Europe and neighboring countries deny human and political rights to Bosniaks primarily because of their religious affiliation, i.e., belonging to Islam. The Republic of Croatia is characterized as a sponsor of separatism that uses "NATO and EU capacity" for its goals, while High Representative Christian Schmidt is claimed to act according to the instructions of "Zagreb mentors" to the detriment of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this analysis of the legal procedure, the court's conclusion that Kovačević abused the right to an individual petition is not considered. Instead, the epilogue from Strasbourg is exclusively interpreted as a political defeat of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a victory for the policies of the two neighboring countries, which are linked to the legacy of joint criminal enterprises in the text. Through such a view, legal and political processes are interpreted as the result of systematic European Islamophobia and a conspiracy of neighbors:

"He shot twice in Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Christian Schmidt, editor's note*). **Directly, as his mentors from Zagreb would say.** Firstly, he shot at Bosniaks as the most numerous people. Secondly, he shot at the civil state. (...) Because his trial before the European Court of Human Rights was very similar to Bosnia and Herzegovina in mid-1993. **Behind the separatist forces of the HDZ BiH, Zagreb stood firmly, for the entire time, with its NATO and EU capacity.** (...) Kovačević lost. Bosnia and Herzegovina did not win. **Serbia and Croatia, which do not want Bosnia and Herzegovina, won. Policies that honor the two JCEs and deny genocide have won."**

This attitude of a part of the media towards international institutions, which arose because of the judgment of the Grand Chamber of the ECHR, culminated on the same day (June 26, 2025) on the NAP.ba portal. In the original text by Rasim Belka, published under the headline "STOP EU!" and entitled "[*We reject your values old Brussels prostitute: Let's stop the path to the EU, it's a weapon for the disappearance of BiH!*](#)", Euro-Atlantic integration is sharply rejected. In the text, the European Union is characterized through the terms "corrupt prostitute" and "political brothel", and its activities are associated with the "fascist foundation". In such an interpretative framework, BiH's European path is not seen as a process of democratization, but as a "sophisticated means" and a tool in the hands of external actors based in Zagreb and Belgrade. Neighboring countries are accused of using the process of European integration exclusively as

a mechanism for weakening and dissolving the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the same time, political officials such as Dragan Čović are labeled in the text as "followers of fascism". Instead of a legal analysis of the court decision in which Kovačević's application was rejected for abuse of the right to an individual petition, the defeat of the applicant is interpreted in this text solely because of the fascist orientation of the European institutions themselves.

" Because what is called the European path today is nothing more than a sophisticated tool for weakening the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a tool in the hands of anti-state elements and their hegemonic outposts in Belgrade and Zagreb. That path is not a path of peace, equality, and prosperity, but a refined mechanism for the disintegration of sovereignty... (...) There are those who celebrate the Strasbourg injustice, so it's time to clarify to them too that the defeat of justice and the victory of discrimination over human rights is not a victory for HDZ, Dragan Čović, Christian Schmidt (...) It is only a battle in which the outcome directly depended on the fascist foundation of the Brussels prostitute and followers of fascism who currently influence processes in BiH."

On the trail of media interpretations about the alleged influence on the court verdict, there is also a presentation from the session of the **Circle 99 association** held on September 28, 2025. The report from that

session was carried by the Politicki.ba portal under the title "[Neither the High Representative nor the Croatian Government Wanted the 'Kovačević Case' to succeed](#)". During the panel discussion, British professor **Carole Hodge** presented a thesis on the role of the Republic of Croatia in the operations of the European Court of Human Rights.

The focus of her presentation was on a financial donation of 100,000 Euros made by the Croatian government to the ECHR, which was described as an "interesting coincidence" just before the hearing in the case in question. In this interpretation of the court decision, which declared Kovačević's request inadmissible, it is claimed that Croatia and the OHR acted in their capacity as "third parties" to preserve the existing system, which is characterized as "ethno-nationalist discrimination". Also, the presentation questions the legitimacy of the agents who represented Bosnia and Herzegovina before the Court, bringing their work into direct connection with the interests of the HDZ and SNSD.

"Both the High Representative and the Croatian government had an interest in the Kovačević case failing because the current system of ethno-nationalist discrimination, coupled with changes to the Election Law (...) further strengthened. These electoral changes have facilitated control over senior ministerial positions by the Croat ethno-nationalist HDZ party in the Federation of BiH. (...) And it is interesting that the Croatian government donated 100,000 Euros to the European Court of Human Rights just before the November appeal hearing."

1.7. Demonization of American analyst Max Primorac

Presentation of the prominent American analyst and former senior USAID official, Max Primorac, before the US Congress; in which he warned of discrimination against Croats in BiH by the majority Bosniak people and proposed the establishment of a third entity as a solution, caused strong reactions in part of Sarajevo's political and media circles. Instead of discussing the allegations he made (about the disruption of the Dayton architecture and the consequences of the State Department's previous policies), the focus of the part of the commentary is focused on the personal discrediting of Primorac.

A prime example of such an approach is the column by academician **Adamir Jerković**, originally published in **Oslobodenje** (and carried to **Hayat**) under the title *"The perverse game of a nationalists: Primorac supports Trump because he believes that by doing so he will convince the American president of his legal qualification"*. The text ignores Primorac's scientific and professional position as a senior associate of the Heritage Foundation and describes him primarily as a "Croatian right-winger" and a political actor closely associated with the decisions from Zagreb.

The column is not limited only on the criticism of Primorac but builds a broader picture in which the Republic of Croatia is presented as a key destabilizing factor in the region. Prime Minister Andrej Plenković is described as "the head of the smashing orchestra", while High Representative Christian Schmidt is said to be kept on a "political

leash" by Zagreb. The author then extends his criticism to Croatian MEP Željana Zovko, stating that as a former ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina, she "made a lot of money" from Bosnia and Herzegovina and that she is now helping Primorac in, as he claims, the "dissolution" of the state. In the same text, the question of the verdict in the "Kovačević" case is reopened, suggesting that this case is also a consequence of lobbying by official Zagreb.

"It is well known here that **the recent head of the smashing orchestra is in Zagreb and that his name is Andrej Plenković**. Zagreb celebrated when the High Representative, under direct pressure from the Banski dvori, imposed anti-liberal changes to the Election Law... **Plenković's government did not even hide the fact that Schmidt** , who worked diligently on the demands for the much-sought-after equality in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was kept on a political leash (...) What happened before the European Court of Human Rights is also tragic. **Is it all the result of lobbying by official Zagreb**, which has, as some claim, intensified diplomatic pressure and campaign using its advantages of being a member of Western military-political alliances? **Primorac is actively assisted by the former ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina Željana Zovko** (who made a lot of money from Bosnia and Herzegovina) ...".

The campaign of denial and demonization of Max Primorac in the Sarajevo media quickly took the form of speculation that may cause concern among those people who use these media as the source of

information. One example of such an approach was recorded during the guest appearance of a professor from the Sarajevo Faculty of Administration, **Amel Delić**, in the show "Vijesti u 7 (News at 7)" on Hayat TV on December 6, 2025, in a report entitled *"Delić: The EU is considering the introduction of a third entity, a Croatian lobbyist could replace Schmidt!"*.

In an effort to present the American analyst and his proposal on the third entity as an immediate political threat to political Sarajevo, Delić puts forward the thesis according to which the ground is allegedly being prepared within EU circles for the appointment of Primorac as the new High Representative in BiH. Such a statement is in direct conflict with the diplomatic practice and standards applied so far, according to which the position of the High Representative (OHR) is always performed by a European diplomat, while the position of his deputy is reserved for the diplomatic representative of the United States of America.

"For several months now, plans have been prepared to create a union with three republics. In the centers of EU power, there is a lot of discussion about the third entity and for Max to be the High Representative. (...) Unfortunately, we are still fighting with an unnatural constitutional structure and two political factors that work against BiH. (...) It should always be emphasized that Bosniaks did not commit genocide or JCE... (...) Croatian lobbyist, Max Primorac, spoke at the last hearing of the US Congress Foreign Policy Committee about the political situation in the Western Balkans."

In the interpretation of Max Primorac's statements, foreign analysts are also involved, whose views coincide with the promotion of the civic model of the state, such as the former American diplomat [Daniel Serwer](#) (who is a frequent guest of a part of the pro-Bosniak media and regularly appears at some public forums of organizations promoted by the media in question). The Odogovor.ba portal (December 3, 2025) reports his review of Primorac's testimony before the US Congress (titled [Serwer: Measures proposed by Primorac would lead BiH to a new war](#)), in which he talks about a possible war conflict in Central Bosnia.

The review omits the discussion of Primorac's statements related to demographic trends and the institutional position of Croats, while the idea of institutional equality and the closure of the OHR is characterized as secessionism. On the one hand, Serwer advocates "changes" in the form of "more individual rights" (which essentially represents a departure from the Dayton model of equality of constituent peoples in favor of a civil structure dominated by the majority people), while at the same time he interprets Primorac's proposals on the formation of a third entity as a destruction of the peace agreement and a geopolitical concession to Russia.

"Max Primorac of the Heritage Foundation advocated the abolition of the High Representative in Bosnia. He also wanted a 'third entity' for the Croats. The two measures would have undermined the Dayton Agreement and led to the secession of both the Serb and Croat entities, triggering a war with the vaguely defined Bosniak entity in central Bosnia. That is

obviously a bad idea. (...) Change should mean more individual rights in Bosnia, more sovereignty in Kosovo and less autocracy in Serbia."

After Primorac's testimony before the Europe Subcommittee of the US House of Representatives, various Sarajevo media and analytical circles published their opinions on the topic. Some then spoke of his political influence in Washington. **On December 4, 2025, the Stav portal published an article under the headline "*An important reminder*" and entitled "[Croatian lobbyist Max Primorac and the third entity: 'Our liaison with Donald Trump'](#)" in** which it reflects on Primorac's theses on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also on his work so far, presenting him as an important co-creator of American foreign policy in the current administration.

The text focuses on his connection between Croatian and American interests and labels him as a "mediator" and "Plenković's man for liaison with Trump", citing quotes from an article from [Jutarnji](#) list from the end of 2024. His work at the Heritage Foundation is used as proof that his theses (such as the need to abolish the OHR and reduce ideologically motivated US aid in other countries) are not isolated but represent part of international strategies that have a real impact on the politics and stability of the region.

He identified "Serbian separatism and Bosniak unitarianism" as key problems and proposed the formation of a third entity and the organization of the country as a federation of three ethnic republics. (...) Primorac particularly

emphasized the position of Croats in BiH, declaring that the international community, including the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and the State Department, **is wrongly mediating in the election of Croatian leaders, which leads to an unequal position** and a violation of democratic standards. In his opinion, the **solution lies in restoring the sovereignty of BiH (an agreement between Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs), closing the OHR, and allowing elected leaders to implement reforms on their own.** (...) The association with the Heritage Foundation gives his views relevance and legitimacy, as it indicates that they **are not just an opinion, but part of a broader conservative American strategy that shapes US foreign policy toward the Balkans, international aid, and global security issues.** Primorac thus appears as **a link between Croatian interests, American conservative policy, and international strategies that have a real impact on the politics and stability of the region.** "

Building on the thesis about Primorac as a mediator in the implementation of American conservative ideas, the next day (05.12.2025), the Stav portal published a statement from the Sarajevo-based Center for Geopolitical Studies (GEOPOL) entitled [*"Primorac and Zovko – Through Islamophobia to the Third Entity: They are Scaring Europe with 'Radical' Bosniaks"*](#) in which Primorac's testimony before Congress is reduced to "Christian extremism". Referring to the presentation of the failed state and the need for a Third Entity, GEOPOL's analysis reaches for discreditation on a personal level. This

Sarajevo-based institute called Primorac and Croatian MEP Željana Zovko "extremists". Also, they state that "Croats in BiH are not endangered".

"The statements of Croatian lobbyist Max Primorac at the hearing of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs **confirm that the growth of Christian extremism is conducive to the spread of Islamophobia and the creation of a narrative in which Bosniaks are presented as an undesirable factor in Europe.** (...) Proof of this is the moral and ethical attitude of Bosniak Muslims, who are **subject to segregation and dehumanization by extremists such as Primorac.** (...) **Max Primorac, Željana Zovko, and other extremists who are trying to impute radicalism to Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while perpetuating the unfounded thesis that Croats are endangered, neither mean well for Bosnia and Herzegovina,** nor for the Croats in it, because they are trying to turn them from a political factor into an endangered minority, which does not correspond to the facts."

Although Slobodna Bosna does not abound in original articles in which they give a review of their own editorial board or employees on important socio-political topics, they substitute this by publishing articles from other portals with the proverbially "creative" titles. Thus, they published another text about Max Primorac, this time from the Stav.ba portal and titled it – [MAX PRIMORAC AND ŽELJANA ZOVKO ON THE BULWARK OF CHRISTIANITY: Modern](#)

[Crusaders Dream of a Greater Croatia](#). Therefore, the editorial board of the Slobodna Bosna portal considers it appropriate and relevant to publish an article with two protagonists – an American of Croatian roots, Max Primorac, and a Croatian MEP, Željana Zovko – and to connect them to medieval motifs, calling them "modern crusaders" in combination with contemporary motifs that can often be heard from Bosniak nationalists, such as dreaming of a Greater Croatia. It remains unclear which of the relevant and irrelevant Croatian political actors has ever mentioned a Greater Croatia, or whether there is an elaborate, coherent conception of a Greater Croatia at all. However, when certain media function on the principle that the truth should be adapted to the nationalist narrative, and not vice versa, it is not surprising that such incredible theses can be read in the Bosniak media space.

Continuing the review of Max Primorac's presentation, the **Stav portal** published an interview on December 8, 2025, entitled [*"Bećirović on Primorac, Zovko, the Third Entity, the 'Failed State of BiH', 'Radical Bosniaks', Helez's Statements..."*](#) the speaker in the interview is **Zijad Bećirović**, director of the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies (**IFIMES**) from Ljubljana. Bećirović's performance represents a synthesis of all previous patterns. He accuses official policy of the Republic of Croatia, the presentations of Max Primorac and the actions of MEP Željana Zovko of destabilizing BiH and encouraging the "radical political right", while he reduces the idea of a third entity to a "revisionist narrative". Bećirović interprets the silence of Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić Radman on Primorac's theses as a "tacit approval of narratives" that endanger "the most

numerous people". Bećirović imperatively tells Croatia that "state policy must be clearly distanced from lobbying constructions". Bećirović equates the idea of equality of Croats (and Serbs) through the meetings of Dodik and Čović with the meetings of "Milošević and Tuđman in Karađorđevo" and "Karadžić and Boban in Graz", which again fits into the accentuation of the discourse on the "Belgrade-Zagreb axis against BiH".

"Such statements, namely the speech of Max Primorac (Heritage Foundation) in the US or the ongoing controversies of Željana Zovko (HDZ/EPP) in the European Parliament, do not contribute to stability or the European perspective of BiH. (...) In this context, the silence of Croatian diplomacy, including the absence of any reaction from the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, Gordan Grlić Radman, can be interpreted as tacit approval of such narratives. If Croatia wants to be considered as a sincere friend of BiH, it must clearly distance state policy from lobbying constructions that are contrary to the Dayton Agreement and European values, instead of carrying out activities that threaten the stability of BiH and the rights of its most numerous people. (...) The historical examples you mentioned - from the strategies of Milošević and Tuđman in Karađorđevo to Karadžić and Boban in Graz - show that such initiatives have both international dimensions and local allies. (...) In essence, the point is that neighboring countries are trying to compensate

for their own political and territorial interests through Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Untrue and unfounded historical revisionism is manifested in the column with the significant headline "*From Tuđman to Plenković*", published on 10.12.2025, titled "[*Max Primorac and Željana Zovko on the Bulwark of Christianity*](#)" on the **portal Stav**. In this review by Sead Omeragić, the current policy of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the statements of Max Primorac are equalized with the war legacy of the nineties and the "joint criminal enterprise".

The author disputes Primorac's theses about discrimination against Croats and a failed state, while MEP Željana Zovko is cited as "the last fighter against the Ottomans" with her "medieval rhetoric". In addition, the focus of criticism extends to the Croatian state leadership. Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković is accused of "serving brutal lies" in Washington to achieve in peace what, according to the author, Croatia failed to achieve in the war. The headline "*From Tuđman to Plenković*" has a clear function, to reduce the entire political engagement of today's Croatia to a continuation of the story of the "bulwark of Christianity" and thus further justify the thesis of systematic Islamophobia of Zagreb. Arguments about institutional (in)equality, the abolition of the OHR, or the formation of a third entity are correlated with war crimes, war camps, and ethnic cleansing.

"Max Primorac, an American politician, said at last week's congressional hearing that BiH is a failed state and demanded the abolition of the OHR. (...) **There is also Željana Zovko, an**

HDZ member of the European Parliament, in which she portrays herself as the last fighter against the Ottomans, so her rhetoric is also medieval. (...) Today, Plenković's government considers the Trump administration to be uninformed, to put it mildly, so it serves Washington brutal lies, trying to get what it failed to grab through Croatia's aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina through war, as ruled by the international court. (...) It will sound unbelievable, but today in Plenković's Croatia, the opposition is more silent than in the time of Tuđman. (...) The current rhetoric of Plenković's media is reminiscent of Tuđman's era on the eve of the conflict with Bosniaks. (...) In this time of Plenković, there is persistent silence about many of the worst crimes against Bosniaks, and more and more brutal lies are being told against Bosnia and Herzegovina."

As a direct reaction to the address in Congress, a series of texts in various media with negative connotations about Max Primorac reached a new dimension by abandoning the domain of political analysis and moving on to personal, family discrediting. On *December 10, 2025*, the *Odgovor.ba* portal publishes an article entitled ["Max Primorac, Croatian lobbyist, son of an Ustasha activist"](#).

The focus of the text is an attempt to declare Primorac's actions and affiliation with American conservatives as just a continuation of the family's ideological line. In doing so, the author uses biographical sketches of his father, Miško Primorac, which he takes from *Večernji list BiH* (from 2018). However, while *Večernji list* described Miško

Primorac as a "patriot" and a person who was "the first to call for reconciliation of the children of the Ustasha and the Partisans" at the First General Assembly of the HDZ, the *Odgovor* portal completely reinterprets the same facts. The concept of "reconciliation" is ignored, and his affiliation with the HOP in 1956 is put in the foreground, to attach the label of "extreme right-wing Croatian nationalism" to both father and son.

An identical pattern occurred when transferring the text from the *Odgovor.ba* portal, which deals with the biography of Max Primorac's father, and whose goal is to discredit Max Primorac and label him as no less than an Ustasha. This is intended to deprive Primorac of moral credibility and a minimum of personal integrity to speak out on the topic of Bosnia and Herzegovina at all. In a way, they want to *cancel* him by putting a label of Ustasha on him. The title of the mentioned article on the portal Slobodna Bosna is as follows – [APPLE DOES NOT FALL FAR FROM THE TREE: Max Primorac, Croatian lobbyist, is the son of an Ustasha emigrant and an associate of Franjo Tuđman!](#)

The goal of such a tendentious interpretation of the data from his biography is to devalue everything that Max Primorac said before the US Congress. His advocacy of the abolition of the OHR and the establishment of three federal units are thus not interpreted as the theses of a senior researcher at the Heritage Foundation but are presented to potential readers as part of an inherited, family plan directed predominantly against Bosniaks.

"The latest statements of Max Primorac in the US Congress, in which he described Bosnia and Herzegovina as a 'failed state', accused Bosniaks of endangering Croats, and cited a third entity as a solution, are not a surprise to those who have been following his actions for a longer time. They are just a continuation of the narrative that Primorac has been advocating for years, but also a continuation of family activities in favor of extreme right-wing Croatian nationalism. His father, Miško Primorac, was an active member of the Ustasha émigré in the United States... (...) Acting as a Croatian lobbyist in Washington, Max Primorac advocates the abolition of the OHR, the establishment of three federal units, accuses the international community of limiting 'local responsibility', and calls BiH a dysfunctional state.

The text by **Enes Heto**, which was published on the **Odgovor.ba** portal on December 17, 2025, under the title [*"Max Primorac works against both Bosnian and American interests"*](#), represents an attempt to discredit Primorac's theses through a geopolitical prism, turning the narrative in such a way that political Sarajevo is presented as the only protector of true Western interests, while Primorac is accused of working against the United States, that his attitudes are in compliance with Russian interests and that he is working against Croatia and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author recognizes the danger of the fact that Primorac raises the "narrative of the third entity" to the level of the US Congress, which is why he applies the already seen pattern of

deconstruction. Primorac's arguments about the demographic decline of Croats by 62 percent are consciously relativized, reducing it exclusively to economic migration to the EU, denying any possibility of political discrimination by the more numerous Bosniaks. In addition, Primorac's idea of shutting down the OHR and returning sovereignty to the constituent peoples is interpreted by Heto as a path to anarchy and the "deterritorialization" of the state.

The key part of this text is the thesis that advocating for the third entity and institutional equality of Croats distances Croatia from the United States and pushes it into "Russian politics". On the other hand, the author states that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) supports Western policies towards BiH, which, as he states, destroys Primorac's narrative of "unitarian Islamism".

"Primorac clearly emphasizes his basic intention: to mobilize the Western Christian world to stand up for the protection of Christian interests in BiH. Of course, the ethno-nationalist interests of Dragan Čović and his HDZ come first. (...) The culmination of malicious manipulation is Primorac's claim that "due to systematic discrimination by Bosniaks, the Croat population decreased by 62% in the period from 1991 to 2024." (...) Primorac presents himself as a promoter of 'Croatian interests'. However, his views distance Croatia from the United States, bringing it closer to Russia's policy towards BiH, strengthening Dodik's secessionist agenda and objectively harming Croatia's position in BiH. (...) Ultimately, Primorac advocates policies that are against the

interests of the United States, against the interests of NATO, against the interests of Croatia, against the interests of Croats in BiH and are absolutely destructive for BiH."

A similar line of argumentation continues in the text by **Mirnes Kovač**, published on December 25, 2025, on the **Preporod.info**. This detail is especially important for the analysis of the media and social narrative because it is the official gazette, i.e., the portal of the Islamic Information Newspaper "Preporod", published by the Riyasat of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The inclusion of the official journal of the Islamic Community in the discussion on American lobbying, the issue of the OHR and the constitutional restructuring (third entity) is symptomatic because many analysts who are interested in Bosnia and Herzegovina speak of the intertwining of the Islamic Community and the pro-Bosniak political options.

In the article titled "[*Will Primorac succeed in destroying the continuity of American policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina?*](#)", the author recognizes the political level of Max Primorac, citing his role in the first Trump administration and the abolition of USAID. The author attributes hatred to Primorac, calling his theses "insidious and passionate hatred towards Bosnia and Herzegovina" and accuses him of lying to Congress regarding the Southern Gas Interconnection project.

What is specific to this text is a direct acknowledgment of the inability of the author's political circles to adapt facing the "shocking changes" brought about by the new American administration. That is why

Primorac's advocacy for the closure of the OHR and the establishment of a third entity is being portrayed as the destruction of "the most successful peace project of the United States of America". In the end, Kovač uses this topic to criticize the so-called "pro-Bosnian bloc" itself, reproaching them for spending too much money on commemorations and too little on adequate foreign lobbying.

"As expected, his theses and recommendations were enthusiastically welcomed by the HDZ and SNSD circles, while parties, politicians and public figures of the so-called pro-Bosnian bloc strongly condemned Primorac's theses, calling them **dangerous and destabilizing propaganda**. And indeed, **almost the entire testimony of Primorac is filled with an insidious and passionate hatred towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially towards Bosniaks, whom he purposefully refers to as 'Muslims' in his statements.** (...) Of course, there is a continuity of policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina in the US legislative and executive institutions, in the public and among experts, **which has been established in the last three decades, but given the shocking changes that the new Trump administration announces in all fields, it is possible that this continuity will collapse and Primorac and his ilk are working tirelessly on this. This is the most dangerous aspect of his activity.** (...) Although it has been clear to the Americans themselves for several years that, for example, the Southern Gas Interconnection is blocked by Čović's policy, for which Primorac has been lobbying comprehensively and passionately, **he lied to the Congress**

Committee with no hesitation and stated that this energy project is blocked by 'Muslims in Sarajevo.' (...) This country is not poor in resources or friends in the world. The key is knowledge and tactics, that is, how to involve these resources and friends now, when a dirty lobbying and diplomatic offensive is being waged with the aim of destroying Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Klix.ba constantly repeats Bosniak nationalist myths about the "Croatian-Serbian alliance" aimed at dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, in May, Klix published a conspiratorial article entitled "[Game without a mask: HDZ and Croatia use Dodik's crisis to bring back the idea of three federal units](#)", with the headline "Perfect Synchronization". The article states:

- "While Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the greatest constitutional, political and security crisis due to the behavior of Milorad Dodik and the authorities of Republika Srpska, the HDZ and Dragan Čović, as well as the Republic of Croatia, have launched a political offensive with the aim of fulfilling the long-standing goals of complete ethno-territorialization of BiH."
- "According to the latest statements of Dragan Čović, Željana Zovko, but also Croatian lobbyist Max Primorac, 'Croatian' politics has decided to use the crisis caused by unconstitutional laws and the dismissal of the leadership of Republika Srpska to fulfill their final goals and fulfill the wishes of the HDZ regarding the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as broader constitutional changes."

- "Dragan Čović also took off his gloves, claiming that three federal units and federalism are the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but he also lashed out at High Representative Christian Schmidt, for whom he said that no one had elected him, thus fully aligning his rhetoric with the rhetoric of Milorad Dodik."

In addition to the above, the article also refers to an [article by Max Primorac published in The National Interest](#), for which they claim that he tried to "describe Čović's policy as a pro-Western bloc and thus play the card of Islamophobia in the United States". Therefore, not only is the myth of the Croatian-Serbian alliance on the issue of the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina perpetuated, the conspiratorial and impure intentions of Croatian (and Serbian) political actors are emphasized. The relevant decisions of the Constitutional Court of BiH are trivialized, describing them only as "the wishes of the HDZ regarding the Election Law of BiH, but also broader constitutional changes". It even goes to the extent that the recent engagement of Max Primorac, an American of Croatian roots, is labeled as nothing less than "playing the card of Islamophobia in the United States". If the most widely read BiH media, which has its headquarters in Sarajevo, took over the entire arsenal immanent to Bosniak nationalists and hegemonists, then one should not be surprised when the same or even more serious accusations are written on less read portals in the Bosniak media space.

It is noticeable that Max Primorac has become one of the biggest targets in the writings of Klix. Back in February 2025, a [text was](#)

[published](#) that compares Primorac with no less than – Radovan Karadžić in the title. The headline of the article states "Do We Have a “Whisperer” in the DC", which is obviously another *Freudian mistake* identical to that of Safet Oručević from the Mreža report. Although Klix presents itself as an independent and impartial media, among other things, it is evident from this headline that they position themselves as a media with pro-Bosniak views.

Confirmation of the thesis that Klix "targeted" Max Primorac and tried to defame him and his engagement, discredit him and put him in the framework of the "Croatian-Serbian alliance" came in May 2025, when Klix published an article entitled "[Croatian lobbyist in the US close to Trump wrote an article about the 'unsustainability of this kind of BiH': As if Dodik dictated to him](#)", with the headline "Incredible Attitudes". In the article, Klix deals with Primorac's text published in the National Interest, for which Klix categorically claims that it is a "sharp and above all ideologically colored criticism" and suggests to readers that Primorac sees "the ethnic key as an ideal" and that the final message is that Primorac sees "Trump as a hope for the dismantling of the statehood of BiH". There is no plausible elaboration for these claims, but only in the last two paragraphs does Klix offer a few general statements that dilute the whole story from a specific constitutional and legal topic to generalized phrases without any specific content:

- "The denial of civic identity, the relativization of the role of international institutions and the selective reading of the Dayton Agreement are textbook examples of an attempt to push a multi-ethnic state into a model of ethnic self-isolation. There is not a

single paragraph in his text that asks: what do the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina want as individuals? Where is their right not to be reduced to "their" political leaders? Where are the returnees, where are the young people, where are those who do not vote along ethnic lines?"

Max Primorac's analysis [*Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ending a Nation-Building Failure*](#) was the occasion for a new defamation by Klix, which in its interpretation shapes the title as follows – [Croatian lobbyist Primorac sends a message to Trump: Stop "Bosniak domination" and ties with Iran, divide BiH](#), with the headline **"Demands like Dodik's"** which repeatedly tries to maintain a pattern that openly and explicitly suggests to readers that this is a synchronized effort of the Croatian-Serbian alliance to divide BiH. Thus, in the introduction, the article states that *"Primorac proposes measures that largely reflect the demands of the political elites from Republika Srpska and the HDZ – the abolition of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the elimination of foreign judges from the Constitutional Court of BiH, the reorganization of the state into three ethnic units and the complete marginalization of the idea of a civic BiH."* According to the already established pattern, the article concludes: *"In essence, Primorac proposes a political reset that suits the interests of Zagreb and Banja Luka, while presenting Bosniaks as an obstacle to stability and integration into Western trends. Instead of a civic vision, a formula of permanent ethnic division is offered, with the Bosniak people pushed to the defensive."*

Then comes a series of articles in which Klix suggests to its readership that someone has or does not have credibility by using subtle details. For example, on the news that Max Primorac would be one of the speakers at the US Congress hearing on the Western Balkans, [Klix put "controversial person" in the headline](#), positioning him as a villain, thus undermining his credibility and integrity in advance. After the hearing, Klix published an article with a monstrous construction in which **Max** Primorac was again equalized with the convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić. The title of the article reads – [Max Primorac as a "hybrid" of Čović and Karadžić: Everything is the fault of Muslims, all problems are solved by a third entity](#), with the headline "**Scandalous Rhetoric**". Klix described Primorac's presentation in Congress as "Čović's and Dodik's ideas packed into the narrative of war criminals" and in the following words:

- **"When Primorac got the floor, two men spoke from him. One of them is a convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić,** through his rhetoric about 'Muslims oppressing Christians' and 'BiH as a failed state', while the other is Dragan Čović, president of the HDZ, through his story about the third entity and 'domination over Croats in BiH'."
- "Primorac thus spoke in front of other speakers, as well as numerous congressmen who are part of the Subcommittee on Europe within the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the US House of Representatives, in a way that was very reminiscent of the rhetoric from the time of aggression against BiH. In the manner of Karadžić, who spoke of "defending Christian Europe

from Islam," Primorac blamed "Muslims," as he calls Bosniaks, for all the bad things in Bosnia.

- "Of course, this is well expected from Primorac, who in his earlier texts emphasized almost identical positions, where all the problems in BiH, even the secessionist tensions of Milorad Dodik and his party, are the fault of political Sarajevo."

To put a final stamp on the connection between Primorac and Dodik, Klix soon published an article entitled – [Demonstration of the Dodik-Čović coupling: SNSD president heartily defended Max Primorac, Sarajevo again targeted](#), with the headline "Destabilizing Messages". In that article, Klix reaches for new theses, accusing Primorac of challenging the constitutional order of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and qualifying his rhetoric as dangerous and contrary to the official policy of the United States:

- "Primorac did not provoke reactions because he thought differently, but because he openly advocated a third entity, relativized the Dayton Agreement and challenged the constitutional order of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is precisely this narrative that the Embassy of BiH in the United States and several American congressmen have labeled as dangerous and contrary to the official policy of the United States of America."
- "Dodik's defense of Max Primorac takes on an additional dimension. Primorac's views on the third entity and the 'failed state-building experiment' fit perfectly into **the common political matrix of the SNSD and HDZ BiH, in which Bosnia and Herzegovina is a problem**, not a framework for solutions.

That is why Dodik does not attack the content of Primorac's messages but disqualifies those who reacted to them."

It is worth mentioning another article in the observed period in which Klix no longer hides its open animosity and contempt for Max Primorac, since the title itself characterizes him as **scandalous**. With such an explicit description, it becomes clear that this is neither independent nor impartial medium, but a medium in the service of Bosniak nationalism or hegemonism. The title of the mentioned article reads – [Scandalous Max Primorac: The only solution for Croats to survive in BiH is the third entity, they are the only pro-Western ones](#), with the headline "Controversial Attitudes".

Klix's article was carried by the portal Slobodna Bosna. Otherwise, *the modus operandi* of Slobodna Bosna is such that they quite correctly carry (agency) news about certain events or socio-political topics. However, they demonstrate activism and the spread of propaganda in the title itself, where readers are subtly led to certain, desirable conclusions from the perspective of Bosniak nationalism. For example, this time they carried Klix's article with the title – [SCANDALOUS MAX PRIMORAC SPREADS HATRED: "The only solution for Croats to survive in BiH is the third entity, they are the only pro-Western ones"](#). Therefore, the content of the article is almost always transmitted on this portal in its original form, whether it is an agency news or an original article from another portal, but it is important to emphasize the fact that political activism on this portal is carried out through the title itself.

On the issue of eugenics discourse and biological political discrediting, the Minister of Defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zukan Helez, went the furthest when he used the rhetoric of “inherited guilt”, and explicitly accused Max Primorac and Željana Zovko of being carriers of Ustasha genes. Slobodna Bosna describes such a monstrous statement only as a "fierce reaction", through which they once again unequivocally position themselves as a medium on the side of Bosniak nationalism or in this case chauvinism – [FIERCE REACTION OF MINISTER HELEZ: "Zovko and Primorac are carriers of Ustasha genes"](#).

Probably the biggest escapade of Slobodna Bosna and their bizarre headlines occurred when they published the text from the Politicki.ba portal. Namely, in this title, Slobodna Bosna describes Max Primorac as a mythical creature – a dragon – and with such strong symbolism they try to provoke antagonism in their readers – [MAX PRIMORAC CONTINUES TO SPIT FIRE: "Trump is listening to me, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a broken state"](#).

On the portal **Faktor.ba** one could also find disparaging articles about Max Primorac. A statement from the Sarajevo group Troika (SDP, NiP, Naša stranka) was carried, which describes Primorac by using extreme labels – [Troika MPs: Max Primorac is an extreme chauvinist, he threatens the Southern Interconnection project](#). The article states:

- "This extreme chauvinist and nationalist is trying to perfidiously pack the story of the so-called 'third entity' into a wafer, although he knows that this idea is impossible to realize, while

the essential intention is to stop the last political agreements on the Southern Interconnection project, according to the directive of the principals."

As for the portal of the Federal Television and the Zagreb conference on the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement, it is noticeable that the mentioned portal reports agency news about the event in a proper manner. However, even this could not pass without a certain comment, in the most prominent place of every article today – the title. Thus, federalna.ba correctly conveys the article, but the title is shaped as follows – [Max Primorac expressed controversial views in Zagreb: The only solution is the third entity](#). It is evident that the title itself is trying to suggest to readers that this is a suspicious person with questionable credibility, so the rest of the article loses its credibility after such a title.

A dramatic description of the Zagreb conference "30 Years After Dayton: Leading the Way With Local Solutions" was published on the portal Slobodna Bosna, which carried an article from Preporod.info. This is how Slobodna Bosna reports [A BIG ALARM FOR BiH: The Zagreb Conference introduced a new language for the silent destruction of the state](#). In the introduction to the article, it is stated that "the Zagreb Conference served as a training ground for legitimizing the gradual and silent reorganization of BiH", while later the article states:

- "The recently held Zagreb conference, dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement, served as a controlled 'training ground' for legitimizing the gradual and unannounced reorganization of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its real

significance was not in declarative phrases, but in assessing a politically acceptable framework for confederalization without official proclamation, where the sovereignty of the state is quietly fragmented and international surveillance is withdrawn in a controlled manner.

- "The conceptual turn is articulated through the argumentation of Max Primorac, an analyst close to conservative circles of American foreign policy. His thesis that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a failed state, but a 'failed international experiment in building a civil nation', represents an epistemological shift with far-reaching political implications.
- "Croatia's role in this process takes place on at least three levels. The first one is declarative – Zagreb remains a strong advocate of BiH's European perspective. The second one is normative, where Croatia is increasingly actively involved in shaping the framework in which the Bosnian Herzegovinian crisis is interpreted through the insistence on "legitimate representatives" and an ethnically defined political balance. The third one is operational silence: the absence of systematic attention to the position of Croats in the entity of Republika Srpska and Posavina. Minister Gordan Grlić Radman's statement that the aim of the conference was to bring together "legitimate representatives of the three constituent peoples" was a precise political intervention."

The federalna.ba portal, reporting on Max Primorac, added one [paragraph](#) that purposefully undermines Primorac's views, although the article was impeccably correct until that paragraph. Namely, an

interlocutor who proverbially propagates pro-Bosniak views was carefully chosen to comment on the hearing in Congress, and that paragraph reads:

- "**Davor Gjenero**, a political scientist and **independent analyst**, is of the opinion that, in a situation where Dodik systematically threatens the territorial integrity of BiH, one should not pay attention to those (**Max Primorac, op.a.**) who are trying to aggravate relations between Bosniaks and Croats."

The federalna.ba portal [once again](#) dealt with the discrediting of Max Primorac through its interlocutor, and Max Primorac, Dragan Čović, Croatian MEP Željana Zovko and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia Andrej Plenković are linked together in that article. It is symptomatic that the very title recycles the pattern of the Croatian Serbian alliance and imputes compatibility with the views of Milorad Dodik to Primorac. The title reads – **Ivica Puljić: Dodik's dangerous narrative spreads towards people close to Trump**. The portal's interlocutor explains:

- "He adds that there are two analysts in that story - Max Primorac and James Carafano, who wrote two analyses in which they present the statements about the defense of Christianity, but also the need to create a third entity, and they sent them to some addresses in the American administration. Based on this, he explains, new analyses and information are created that are being sent to higher instances."
- "It should be said that Max Primorac from the Heritage Foundation is a man close to Dragan Čović, through Željana Zovko, a member of the European Parliament, and Croatian

Prime Minister Andrej Plenković met with Primorac and the people at Heritage in May this year."

- Puljić says that Bosnia and Herzegovina must prevent the spread of lies that can be harmful to it. Everyone can have a position on entities and a third entity, but lies cannot be used to justify it, as Max Primorac and James Carafano do, Puljić concludes.

1.8. IFIMES – Association from Ljubljana, Slovenia

During the implementation of [the Athens project](#) (the fight against intentionally placed untruths in the Croatian and international public information space in the field of defense, security and foreign policy), a citizens' association from Ljubljana, known by the abbreviation IFIMES, stood out. In this analysis, this institute and its founder Zijad Bećirević have already been mentioned several times. One of the loudest and most malicious actors in propaganda against the Republic of Croatia is the Institute from Ljubljana IFIMES, headed by Zijad Bećirović with open Bosniak nationalist views. Given the frequency of their appearance in the media in BiH and the targeted flooding of the public information space with numerous untruths and the imposition of negative prejudices about both the Republic of Croatia and Croatian political officials, it is important to analyze them in the scope of this study in a separate chapter.

Oslobođenje.ba published an analysis of the obscure IFIMES institute: "The statement of Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković (HDZ) that the Republic of Croatia will not impose sanctions on the President

of the Republika Srpska entity, Milorad Dodik (SNSD), represents **the strongest blow to BiH since December 1991, when the Joint Criminal Enterprise (JCE) against Bosnia and Herzegovina** was established in Zagreb with the aim of creating the entity of the Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosna (HR-HB) as a future constituent part of the Republic of Croatia."

- "Plenković, by supporting Dodik and creating a military bloc with Albania and Kosovo, wants the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the long-term undermining of Serbia and Hungary."
- "Plenković's smashing move, to undermine three countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Hungary, with two blows (military alliance and support for Dodik), has met with resistance and condemnation, not only in NATO, but also in the EU, and in the circles of the US administration, which has detected Plenković as an ally of Donald Trump's opponents in Washington."
- "All countries that believe they can implement greater-state concepts should look at the fate of Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman and how their policies fared in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Jutarnji list, on the same date, May 2, 2025, at 1:46 p.m. (initials L.G.), completely reproduces the article from Oslobođenje without verifying its veracity and credibility.

[Zijad Bećirović](#) states: "The Republic of Croatia sees every international attack on Dodik's policy as an attack on its own interests, and this is disastrous even for broader geopolitical realignments."

- "If the Republic of Croatia sincerely wanted BiH to be part of NATO and the EU, then it would solve the problems for which they are mostly to blame, because they signed the dissolution of the 'HR-HB', not someone else. As an expression of friendly intentions towards BiH, Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković should send the Tuđman-Izetbegović agreement on borders, which has been waiting for ratification for almost three decades, to the Croatian Parliament for ratification. Nothing will come of it!"

[Zijad Bećirović](#): "The whole job was done by the **Republic of Croatia and the HDZ in both countries** with the help of **radical right-wing circles in Europe**. Croatia has seriously contaminated the European Court of Human Rights, and this will have to be taken into account within the ECHR."

One of the most significant appearances for this analysis was recorded on June 26, 2025, on Hayat Television, where [the director of IFIMES, Zijad Bećirović](#), describes the overturning of the Kovačević verdict in Strasbourg as the result of the intelligence "Operation Kula (Tower)". In this construct, Zagreb is presented as an enemy of BiH and an implementer of the Islamophobic agenda of the European radical right. He also states that Tuđman's idea of a "bulwark of Christianity" and defense against Bosniaks is now being completed by Andrej Plenković. At the same time, the Croatian prime minister is labeled as the principal

who successfully realizes this task through Dragan Čović and Christian Schmidt.

"We have already spoken several times about how the web around Bosnia and Herzegovina is being weaved, and how radical right-wing elements from Europe led a special operation 'Kula' from Budapest, all in order to protect 'Christian Europe'. **Of course, it is also known who the protector is and who is in the bulwark of Christianity. This, of course, is the old thesis of Franjo Tuđman and the HDZ, and now it has been successfully implemented by Andrej Plenković through academician Dragan Čović and High Representative Christian Schmidt...** This is the success of the European radical right, which scares Europe with Muslims, Bosniaks. It is really disgusting to listen to what Croat representatives say against their fellow Bosniaks who are predominantly Islamic..."

1.9. Avdo Avdić – ban on entering Croatia

The case of journalist Avdo Avdić is significant in the context of the analysis of the relationship of these media towards the Republic of Croatia and its institutions. This example illustrates how Sarajevo media and political space use mechanisms to interpret the security measure of another state as a first-class diplomatic incident. Through a series of [six texts](#) and [reactions, published](#) on the [NAP.ba portal](#) in the period from November 12 to 15, 2025, one can see how [the decision of Croatian institutions to ban Avdić entry is](#) used to harshly criticize Zagreb. Persons whose media publications have previously been the

subject of court disputes related to the activities of the intelligence apparatus in BiH, as well as two members of the Presidency of BiH, **Željko Komšić** and **Denis Bećirović**, were also included in the public defense of Avdić.

They assess the decision to ban Avdić entry as "an attack on relations between the two countries" and "an attack on the citizens of BiH". With the argument of endangering journalistic freedoms, certain journalists' associations and MEP **Tineke Strik** (a frequent guest of the pro-Bosniak media) joins the discussion, seeking international condemnation of such actions by the Republic of Croatia. The situation also took on a diplomatic dimension when members of the BiH Presidency invited Croatian Ambassador Ivan Sabolić for consultations, expecting a statement on the security decision of the Croatian state bodies. The observed media interpret the Ambassador's failure to respond to such an invitation as an expression of disrespect for the institutions and the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"Komšić: Avdić's entry ban is a blow to relations between the two countries, the ambassador must explain the Croatian authorities' actions. (...) Bećirović: Denying journalistic rights and freedoms to Avdo Avdić is unacceptable. (...) IGNORING Sabolić did not respond to consultations at the Presidency, did not reply to Konaković's letter! (...) Croatian diplomats in Bosnia and Herzegovina obviously believe that they are not obliged to respect BiH institutions, even in Bosnia and Herzegovina."



2. Analysis of the media portrayal of the Republic of Croatia in the media of the Republika Srpska

This paper analyzes the media content in the Republic of Srpska related to the Republic of Croatia with the aim of identifying the dominant patterns of state representation, political actors, and socio-political processes. The starting point is that certain media content does not serve exclusively to convey information, but function as active participants in the construction of social and political reality. Special emphasis is put on the ways in which the image of the Republic of Croatia as a state is shaped through media discourse, relations towards the Serb community on both sides of the state borders, the operation of political institutions, and the interpretation of broader historical and identity contexts. In this framework, [the Cemeteries Act in the](#)

[Republic of Croatia](#) is used as a study example that provides insight into the transformation of legal and administrative issues into political and identity narratives. By observing the ways this law is interpreted in the media of Republika Srpska, it is possible to identify broader discursive patterns that go beyond the specific case and point to established models of interpretation of political decisions and interstate relations.

It is important to emphasize that the paper does not start with the assessment of the validity of the claims made in the analyzed media content, but from the analysis of the way they are constructed, interpreted, and distributed within the media space. This focuses the research on the discursive mechanisms through which perceptions are formed, rather than on the normative evaluation of events or political decisions.

2.1. Research methodology

The paper is based on a qualitative analysis of media content with the application of elements of discourse analysis, aiming to identify patterns in the way the media of the Republika Srpska represent the Republic of Croatia. The chosen methodological approach enables a deeper understanding of meanings, interpretations, and narrative structures that go beyond the level of surface reporting. The sample includes media reports published between April and May and from September to November 2025 on the platforms of relevant media in Republika Srpska, including **RTRS and ATV, the SRNA news**

agency, as well as the daily newspapers Glas Srpske and Nezavisne novine. The selection of these media is based on their relevance and influence in the public space of Republika Srpska, as well as their role in shaping the dominant media discourse.

The analysis includes news reports, newspaper articles, and statements by political and social actors, with particular attention paid to the way these contents are structured and interpreted. The focus of the research is on identifying dominant narratives, analyzing the way political actors and institutions are presented, recognizing rhetorical and argumentative patterns, and determining the role of historical references in shaping discourse. In this context, special attention is put on the construction of the perception of the vulnerability of the Serbian community as one of the key interpretative frameworks. The methodological approach involves analyzing not only explicit content, but also implicit meanings, symbolic patterns, and contextual references that contribute to shaping the discourse. Therefore, the research seeks to identify framing patterns, securitization processes, and mechanisms of construction of the "other", all of which combined shape the way the Republic of Croatia is represented in the analyzed media space.

The research is limited to the media space of the Republika Srpska and does not include an analysis of audience reception or a comparative approach.

2.3. Theoretical framework

The analysis relies on the concept of media framing, according to which the media selectively emphasize certain aspects of reality and thus shape the way the audience interprets events and social processes. In this sense, the same phenomenon can be presented as a technical-administrative issue or as a political and identity problem, depending on the way the media frames it. In addition, the paper includes the concept of the construction of the "other", which arises from the broader theoretical framework of identity and discourse studies. This concept implies a process in which certain social groups, states or actors are portrayed as different, opposing or potentially threatening, thus simultaneously constructing, and consolidating the identity of "us". In the analyzed context, the Republic of Croatia and its political actors in certain media portrayals are positioned as "others", i.e., as actors whose actions deviate from the interests and values of the Serbian community. This establishes the binary opposition "us" - "them", which plays an important role in shaping collective identity and political perception.

The analysis also uses the concept of securitization which is defined by marking some issues as an existential threat to elevate them to higher political and social level. In that context, the media play a key role because through selection of topics, rhetorical patterns and interpretative frameworks they take part in the transformation of everyday political or legal issues into security problems.

By combining these theoretical approaches, the paper seeks to identify the ways in which the dominant narratives about the Republic of Croatia are shaped through media discourse, with special attention paid to the overlapping of framing and the construction of the "other". Such an analytical framework allows for a deeper understanding not only of the content of media messages, but also of their social and political implications.

2.4. The Cemeteries Act as a Case Study

The new Cemeteries Act in the Republic of Croatia, adopted on 30 April 2025, represents a comprehensive legal framework for the management of cemeteries and monuments. Although it does not formally target a specific national group or any other minority group, the analyzed media content in Republika Srpska shows that this law is interpreted through a highly politicized identity framework. In this way, a specific legal and administrative measure becomes the starting point for broader discursive constructions.

An example of media framing is visible in the [reports of SRNA](#) and RTRS, which interpret the law as a threat to the Serbian cultural and historical presence in the Republic of Croatia. SRNA states that the law provides for the removal of monuments erected after May 30, 1990, and non-compliance with the law is penalized by a fine of up to 5,000 Euros. The media assess this move as a "reckoning with the dead" and an attempt to symbolically erase the Serbian identity on the territory of Croatia. This is a clear example of framing in which a legal regulation

is reinterpreted as a political and identity act, thus changing its public perception.

An additional dimension of discourse is the strong reliance on historical analogies and symbolic language. **Metropolitan Fotije of Zvornik-Tuzla** [describes the](#) law as "the latest underground Storm", connecting it to the liberation military-police operation Storm, "whose goal is to throw Serbian bones out of their graves", with the assessment that this is "currently a reality in Croatia". This interpretation illustrates the process of securitization, whereby the law is discursively transformed from an administrative issue into an existential threat to a collective identity, further reinforced by references to war events and traumatic memories.

The reactions of political and social actors show further politicization of the law, contributing to the consolidation of the narrative of endangerment. [Nikola Puzigaća](#) points out that the law "discriminates against the few remaining Serbs" and prevents them from returning or staying, while the European Union "silently observes its member". Similarly, [Savo Štrbac of the Documentation and Information Center "Veritas"](#) states that the law represents "a neo-Ustasha law against dead Serbs, that needs to be confirmed no later than the thirtieth anniversary of 'Storm'. Such statements show how an individual legal act fits into a broader discursive pattern in which contemporary political decisions are interpreted through the prism of historical continuity and collective trauma.

[Media content](#) further emphasizes the continuity of historical narratives, portraying decisions such as the Law on Cemeteries as being a part of a wider series of events that symbolize the long-term threat to the Serb people. In this context, the reference is put on military operations such as Flash and Storm, as well as the events of 1991, including the "Zadar Crystal Night". Such a connection between past and present events represents a key discursive mechanism by which current political processes are placed in a broader narrative of historical injustice and continuity of conflict.

In conclusion, the analysis of the Cemeteries Act, as a study example shows how media framing, the construction of the "other" and the processes of securitization act complementarily in shaping the dominant discourse. Through the selection of information, the use of symbolic language and reliance on historical analogies, the media transform the legal and administrative act into a political and identity problem, therefore, they are not only interpreting reality but actively participating in its construction.

2.5. Media Narratives, Historical Context and Perception of Endangerment

The analysis of media content in Republika Srpska indicates the existence of several dominant narratives through which the Republic of Croatia is interpreted, especially in the context of the Law on Cemeteries, the commemoration of events from the 1990s, and contemporary environmental and political issues. These narratives do

not operate in isolation but complement and overlap each other, creating a coherent discursive framework within which the perception of political and identity reality is formed. The media discourse in Republika Srpska continuously participates in the construction of the perception of the threat to the Serbian people through several interconnected interpretative patterns. An analysis of the reports, statements by political actors and institutional sources shows how past traumas, current legal disputes, environmental threats, and international factors are integrated into a complex narrative that shapes public opinion and at the same time legitimizes political and diplomatic demands. In this sense, discourse does not only reflect reality but actively participates in its interpretation and structuring. For the purposes of the analysis, the identified discourse patterns can be systematized into six main narratives: political-legal, historical, the narrative of the rights of the displaced, ecological, and territorial, cultural and identity, the narrative of internationalization and military-strategic threats. Such a classification enables analytical separation of thematic units but also provides an insight into their interconnection and functional complementarity.

2.6. Political-legal narrative of endangerment of Serbs

The interpretations of certain events and processes that we mention here further radicalize the discourse, shifting it towards predicting future threats and potential escalations. In conclusion, the political-legal narrative in the analyzed media is characterized by a high level of coherence and repetition of key discursive patterns: securitization of legal issues, emotionalization of discourse, generalization of individual

incidents, and personalization of political responsibility. Such a discursive construction not only shapes the perception of the Republic of Croatia as a politically and institutionally threatening actor but also contributes to the strengthening of internal identity cohesion and the legitimization of political, diplomatic and legal reactions.

Commenting on the testimony before the War Crimes Department of the Higher Court in Belgrade in the continuation of the trial in absentia of four Croatian war pilots accused of rocketing a refugee column during Operation Storm, [Savo Štrbac points out](#) that "only someone with a heart of stone would not cry listening to today's shocking testimonies of Spaso Rajić and Jovanka Vuković about the suffering of their children on Petrovac Road". The political and legal narrative is further strengthened through [the interpretations of Miodrag Linta](#), who assesses that the goal of the Law on Cemeteries is "a reckoning with deceased Serbs", including the removal of monuments and the change of the spelling of the names of the deceased from Cyrillic to Latin. Linta stresses the need for an active response from the Serbian side, including the establishment of a service in the National Assembly of Serbia to monitor ethnically motivated incidents, the desecration of cemeteries, churches, and monuments, and, as he states, the revision of history. He points out that continuous reporting to international organizations could lead to reactions from institutions such as the European Parliament, which would point to discrimination and violence against Serbs. In this way, discourse moves from the interpretive to the normative level, generating concrete political demands.

Cultural incidents in Croatia further illustrate the perception of the threat and legitimize political reactions. The cancellation of the Folklore Festival in Ogulin and the interruption of events in Split and Zagreb are examples in which media and political discourse interpret cultural events as an indicator of danger to the Serbian community. [Media in Republika Srpska](#) report that SDSS President and Member of the Croatian Parliament **Milorad Pupovac** emphasizes that "all events and institutions of the Serb community in Croatia are under police protection" and that "children of 14 or 15 years old are being manipulated as to create the illusion that they are the new defenders of Croatia".

Other political actors follow a similar interpretative line in their statements. Serbian Foreign Minister **Marko Đurić** [assessed](#) the events as "another in a series of attempts to intimidate the Serb community", while media content further generalizes individual incidents. For example, the events in Rijeka [are interpreted](#) through claims such as: "That Serbs are not welcome in Croatia was clearly seen in the previous days in Split and Zagreb... Croatia is increasingly becoming a country of insecurity." The process of generalization is visible here, whereby individual events acquire the status of a general social pattern, which is a characteristic of the securitization discourse.

The legal and political framework of endangerment of Serbs [is additionally manifested](#) through the reactions of the authorities to cultural events and public space. It is stated that the mayor of Vukovar, Marijan Pavliček, called on the organizers of the exhibition "Serbian

Woman, Heroine of the Great War" to postpone the opening, warning that "they will bear responsibility for everything that could possibly happen at the opening of the exhibition". Furthermore, the media also point out the statement of the Vukovar-Srijem County Prefect Ivan Bosančić: "If, someone was asked for something to be postponed a little, I don't think the world will collapse", with the claim that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Ivan Anušić emphasized that the postponement of the exhibition should not be a problem. In [an interview with SRNA](#), the president of the Association of Serbian Refugees, **Mile Bosnić**, assessed the frequent bans and attacks on cultural events of Serbs as "preparation for the last phase of erasing Serb traces in Croatia, including the confiscation of land".

These examples show how the political and legal narrative of Serbs in Croatia and Republika Srpska encompasses legal decisions, cultural incidents, judicial processes, and civic activism, connecting them into an integral discourse of endangerment. The narrative is based on the perception of an institutional, political, and cultural threat, and media and political actors continuously use emotional, symbolic, and legal arguments to shape public opinion and justify diplomatic, political, and legal reactions.

One of the central media narratives in Republika Srpska is constructed around the perception of political and legal threats to the Serb community, especially through interpretations of the Cemeteries Act and other legislative decisions of the Republic of Croatia. In this context, the media discourse systematically connects formal legal

decisions with a sense of political insecurity and regional instability, using emotional and symbolically strong patterns of representation. This approach points to the presence of securitization mechanisms; whereby legal issues are reinterpreted as existential threats to collective identity. An example of such discursive framing is visible in the [statements of political and institutional actors](#) that are carried and amplified by the media. Appearing on the RTRS Morning Program, Acting Director of the Republic Center for Research of War, War Crimes and Search for Missing Persons, **Viktor Nuždić**, points out that "the only goal is to erase the existence of Serbs in this region" and that "efforts should be made to ensure that future generations do not know that Serbs ever lived in this area." Such a statement is a typical example of a securitization discourse in which legislative and political decisions are interpreted as a threat to the survival of the community, thus raising the level of political and social urgency.

A similar narrative pattern is present in the [statements](#) of political actors from Serbia, which the media in Republika Srpska integrate into their own discursive framework. In a post on the social network X, which was carried by numerous media, **Miloš Vučević** states that "they are interested in everything that can cause a certain type of political instability because they are bothered by a strong Serbia, which is the leader of the region", with the assessment that the Republic of Croatia is "in the third league of the region". Such statements further personalize the political conflict and move it from the domain of concrete policies to a broader framework of geopolitical competition and identity opposition.

The emotional dimension of the discourse is further intensified through the media reporting on testimonies of war suffering, thus connecting current political processes with traumatic experiences from the past. The usage of emotionally strong narratives further legitimizes the perception of permanent threat, whereby individual testimonies acquire a broader symbolic meaning.

2.7. Historical narrative

The media discourse in Republika Srpska establishes a significantly strong connection between contemporary political and social events and war events from the 1990s, including military operations Flash and Storm, as well as the suffering from the period of World War II. Such a temporal link contributes to additional legitimation of the perception of the long-term and continuous threat to the Serbian people. In this context, **Miodrag Linta** attributes the [Operation Flash to be](#) criminal, emphasizing that "we must not forget the fact that most of the Serbs from Western Slavonia were banished by the end of 1991... No indictments have been made, let alone that someone has been convicted", which further emphasizes the perception of continuous impunity and institutional injustice. The historical narrative also includes the period of the Independent State of Croatia and the Jasenovac camp, which is used in media discourse as a key symbol of collective memory and permanent threat.

The symbolic dimension of historical suffering is intensely linked to contemporary events. RTRS publishes [Savo Štrbac's](#) **interview** for the

SRNA agency, in which he points out that Marko Perković Thompson's concerts, at which the song "Bojna Čavoglave" is performed, which begins with the cry "Za dom spremni! (For the Homeland. Ready!", represent a continuation of ideological indoctrination and affirmation of the heritage of the Independent State of Croatia, which perpetuates the symbolic and cultural threat to Serbs in the Republic of Croatia. Štrbac highlights that "the scale of indoctrination, especially against Serbs"... "is evidenced by the fact that half a million people in Croatia gather and together with Thompson sing and shout the Ustasha cry "Za dom spremni!", adding that "the Croatian Prime Minister comes with his children to pay homage to him, and not even the president of the country was strict in his assessment of the concert and songs".

Contemporary incidents further confirm the transfer of symbolic endangerment from the historical to the contemporary context. The events in Split and Zagreb in 2025, when masked groups interrupted the "Days of Serbian Culture" programs, are interpreted in the Republika Srpska media as a continuation of patterns of hostility. In this sense, **Milorad Pupovac** [points out](#) that "people who manipulate young people, fans, who gathered in Zagreb and Split, abuse the horrors of war and maintain an atmosphere in which people cannot live fully", which further emphasizes the continuity of symbolic insecurity.

The narrative of selective justice represents another important dimension of historical discourse. According to [the Veritas Centre](#), about 4,000 persons have been prosecuted for war crimes in the Republic of Croatia, only 3% of which are Croats, while investigations

for crimes against Serbs, especially in the context of Operation Flash and Operation Storm, have not been as thorough. At the same time, individual events, such as Operation Swath 10 or the defense of Kozarska Dubica, function as symbols of identity cohesion and political mobilization in media discourse.

By linking past traumas with contemporary political and social processes, the historical narrative produces the impression of continuity of suffering that is reproduced through media content. In this context, **Savo Štrbac** [states](#): "The state narrative in Croatia is that the Serbs are to blame for the war in the nineties. They are tolerant of others, unless you are a Serb Orthodox." while **Miodrag Linta** additionally [emphasizes](#): "The ban on holding the photo exhibition 'Serbian Woman, Heroine of the Great War' is one of the many proofs of the fascistization of Croatia that has been going on for 35 years...".

Events such as the round table in the Croatian Parliament on Jasenovac and the concerts by Marko Perković Thompson illustrate the way in which historical memories and symbols of war trauma actively shape the contemporary perception of threat. In this sense, **Štrbac** further [points out](#): "Public display of the Ustasha salute is hate speech and an insult to all survivors of the Holocaust, genocide and crimes." Historical narratives remain strongly symbolically burdened, which is also manifested in cases such as the exhibition "Serbian Woman, Heroine of the Great War" in Vukovar, with its opening being postponed due to social and political tensions. Such examples illustrate how memories of World War II and the war of the 1990s continue to

have a significant impact on contemporary political decisions and social reactions. In this context, [the media discourse](#) also includes claims that Jasenovac "was not a death camp, but a labor camp", which points to the existence of revisionist interpretations that relativize or diminish the scale of crimes committed against Serbs. In one of the central dailies of RTRS, the question arises "are Zagreb and Brussels turning a blind eye to the vampire like Ustasha movement?", emphasizing that the memory of the Serbian victims and the symbolic significance of the monument are continuously exposed to attacks.

In addition, the president of the Union of Serbs, **Miodrag Linta**, [points out](#): "In Croatia, mass crimes against Serbs in Vukovar are denied because by raising this issue, the false myth of the 'Homeland War' would be unmasked." In conclusion, the historical narrative in the media of Republika Srpska, through a combination of selective legal interpretation, symbolic representation, and reinterpretation of historical events, strongly reinforces the perception of the long-term threat to the Serbian people. By linking past traumas with contemporary political and social processes, a coherent collective memory is constructed that legitimizes political, cultural and identity reactions within the media and wider political discourse.

2.8. The Narrative of the Rights of Exiled Serbs

The media discourse in Republika Srpska systematically highlights the long-term violation of the rights of exiled Serbs in the Republic of Croatia, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo and Metohija, with special emphasis on housing, property, and legal issues.

In this context, Miodrag Linta [emphasizes](#): "There are more than 9,000 exiled families who still have the status of tenants or live in inhumane conditions," thus articulating the continuous institutional injustice and social marginalization of the Serbian population. This narrative connects contemporary problems with historical discrimination, pointing to a long-standing deficit of political and institutional protection of the rights of the Serb community.

The symbolic dimension of endangerment within the narrative of the rights of the exiled is especially manifested through cultural and commemorative activities. An example of this is the incident in Vukovar, when members of the Association of Homeland War Veterans and Anti-Fascists VeDRA from Split tried to lay a wreath in the Danube in memory of the Serbs killed in 1991, but were prevented from doing so by about fifty members of the Vukovar HVIDRA. **Ranko Britvić** commented [on this event](#): "I thought it was difficult to be a living Serb in Croatia, but obviously it is not easy to be a dead Serb either." The media also reports that the mayor of Vukovar, Marijan Pavliček, characterized the incident as a provocation, which further emphasizes the political and symbolic dimension of the rights of the exiled people.

The issue of missing persons further strengthens the narrative of the rights of exiled Serbs. Linta points out: "For the Croatian government, the issue of missing persons is not a humanitarian and civilizational issue, but primarily a political one. For years, without any arguments, Croatia has been accusing Serbia of blocking the resolution of missing

persons with the transparent aim of diverting attention from its own responsibility and justifying the false narrative of Greater Serbian aggression." Linta [states](#) that more than nine hundred exhumed remains of Serbs have still not been identified due to obstruction by Croatian authorities, while the opening of archives and access to documentation of mass crimes are continuously delayed. Furthermore, he adds: "Croatia is blocking the resolution of the issue of missing persons in an effort to hide the truth that Serbs make up the largest number of missing persons in the civil war in that country."

The narrative of the rights of exiled Serbs encompasses multiple dimensions: legal and housing injustices, symbolic and cultural threats, the issue of missing persons, and the continuous perception of institutional and social discrimination. All these elements construct a coherent discourse in which past injustices are linked to contemporary events, thus strengthening collective memory and encouraging the political mobilization of the Serbian community in the region.

2.9. Ecological and territorial narrative

The media and political discourse in Republika Srpska systematically emphasize the environmental threats associated with the planned construction of a nuclear waste repository at Trgovska Gora. They perceive this location not only as an environmental issue, but also as a strategic and territorial threat. The media emphasize that Trgovska Gora is "a pressing problem of the Republic of Srpska", the construction of which, according to [the director of the](#) Public Institution National Park Una **Vujadin Pilipović**, "would endanger the

complete biodiversity of this area", thus the ecological narrative goes beyond technical and scientific issues and becomes an integral element of political discourse, because the potential danger directly links environmental protection with national interests and the security of the region.

The political dimension of the problem has been particularly emphasized by senior officials of Republika Srpska. Minister of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology **Bojan Vipotnik** [points out](#): "Croatia no longer hides clear and insidious intentions when it comes to the construction of a nuclear facility on Trgovska Gora... all previous statements by Croatia that it is a temporary disposal facility are really not something that can be believed." A similar criticism is expressed by **Miroslav Drljača**, who [warns](#) that Croatia does not take into account the population on the Bosnian-Herzegovinian side of the border and that the plans are published mainly through the media, with continuous changes in the modalities of waste storage: "It is also unacceptable that Croatia simply does not take into account that there is a population on this side of the border... Previously, storage in containers was mentioned, now in barrels... We still do not have official data on what is planned in the center for the management of radioactive waste."

The ecological narrative is further linked to territorial and political aspects. The construction of the facility on Trgovska Gora is a symbolical challenge because it potentially threatens not only the environment, but also the stability and security of the wider region. **Mario Crnković**, president of the Association "Green Team" Novi

Grad, [points out](#): "The whole process is forced in such a way that the experts they hire must justify the politically made decision, which aims to transfer the risk to BiH, away from the benefits that they, together with Slovenia, had from the operation of the nuclear power plant." He also [notes](#) that the Trgovska Gora case is already the subject of international disputes, including the proceedings before the Secretariat of the ESPOO Convention and the engagement of the academic community and several ministries in the Government of Republika Srpska: "It is already more than clear that the Trgovska Gora case will be the subject of not just one, but several international disputes."

The ecological narrative in Republika Srpska is therefore not perceived in isolation, but as an extension of political disagreements and a symbol of strategic threat. The media and political actors continuously [emphasize](#) the proximity of the disposal facility to the municipality of Novi Grad – "The distance of the Municipal Building of Novi Grad is about 2.5 kilometers away... From the very beginning, this location was unacceptable to us", further reinforcing the perception of an imminent threat. This narrative connects local and international dimensions: from the protection of biodiversity and the security of population to the activation of legal procedures and diplomatic efforts. The government's bill envisages a spatial planning determination of the location of the disposal center in Čerkezovac, including an environmental impact assessment, but critics in Republika Srpska believe that this is a political decision that threatens the interests of BiH and the population on the other side of the border.

The ecological and territorial narrative therefore articulate environmental threats as a symbolic extension of political disagreements, linking environmental, territorial, and security challenges to national interests. The planned construction of the disposal facility on Trgovska Gora represents a multi-layered threat – environmental, strategic and political – which further strengthens the perception of long-term threat and justifies the need for collective protection of the territory and the environment in the eyes of the media and political actors of Republika Srpska.

2.10. Cultural and identity narrative

The cultural and religious activities of Serbs in the Republic of Croatia, such as the renovation of temples and the organization of congresses, play a key role in strengthening collective identity and institutional presence. **Patriarch Porfirije**, in the context of the restoration of the Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity in Pakrac, [points out](#): "The restored Cathedral Church of the Holy Trinity testifies that God's love is stronger than any war and destruction." The exhibition opened in Zagreb on the 80th anniversary of the first congress of Serbs in Croatia has a similar symbolic function. [It is pointed out](#) that over 30,000 participants gathered in Zagreb in September 1945 "to confirm the national equality of Serbs and Croats, to elect the bodies of autonomy of Serbs in Croatia and to support the movement that carried out the liberation of the country."

The media [discourse](#) in Republika Srpska also emphasizes the symbolic threat through the public glorification of the Independent State of

Croatia and the presence of Ustasha symbols in Croatia. Situations such as the cancellation of the exhibition "Serbian Woman, Heroine of the Great War" in Vukovar or the interruption of the "Days of Serbian Culture" in Split and Zagreb are interpreted by the media as a continuous attack on the cultural identity of Serbs, while the reactions of local authorities further legitimize the feeling of permanent threat. The cultural narrative includes both sports and public space. Almost all media in Republika Srpska published the news that during the match between Montenegro and Croatia in Podgorica, Croatian fans chanted "Kill the Serb" and "Whoever doesn't jump is Orthodox". These events illustrate how the cultural identity of Serbs remains endangered even outside of Croatia, reflecting a broader regional pattern. The Montenegrin political party New Serb Democracy [said](#) that "hatred towards Serbs has already won even before the match was over" and that the shouts of Croatian fans are "just a continuation of the expansion of neo-Ustasha and "Serbophobia" in the Western Balkans".

The media [discourse](#) connects contemporary incidents with memories of the war of the 1990s and the symbolic perception of heroism. An example are the members of the Intervention Platoon of the Special Police Units of Kozarska Dubica, who are described in the media as "a permanent symbol of loyalty, heroism and love for the homeland", which serves for political mobilization and strengthening of cohesion of identity. Media representations, cultural events and public reactions, confirm the permanent conflict between the affirmation of Serbian identity and the presence of, as they are called, neo-Ustasha nationalist symbols in society. The cultural and identity narrative, therefore,

encompasses the symbolic struggle for survival, visibility and legitimacy of the Serbian community in Croatia.

2.11. Internationalization and military-strategic narratives

Media discourse in Republika Srpska often interprets regional military, diplomatic and economic decisions of neighboring countries as a potential threat to Serbia and Serbs in the region. These narratives include several key components:

- [Military alliances and exercises](#) – Alliances of Croatia and Slovenia, as well as multinational NATO exercises, including activities in the field of cyber security and rescue, are interpreted as a test of military capabilities directed against Serbia and Serbs in Republika Srpska. Kosovo's agreements with NATO and international decisions are interpreted as a violation of the 1996 sub-regional agreements and UN Security Council Resolution 1244
- [Economic decisions](#) and [strategic interests](#) – The acquisition of strategic companies and control over energy systems is viewed through the prism of political and economic competition. An example is the assignment of a job to the Croatian company "Končar" for the reconstruction of public lighting in Banja Luka, which carries a symbolic and strategic dimension. The decision is [interpreted](#) in the context of the 1990s: "During the 1990s, the company 'Končar' worked for the needs of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia, producing

military equipment and electronic components that were used in the war against the Serbian people in the Republic of Serbian Krajina and the Republika Srpska."

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić has repeatedly [emphasized](#) the need for patience, economic caution, and military readiness: "We have to be smarter than we were in the nineties, not to rush into wars and to protect our children, our country, stability...". Analysts further [clarify](#) the strategic implications: "They are trying to put pressure on Serbia thus causing additional security threats... Although Serbia has declared military neutrality, it is obvious that these others think that it should be done differently." The combination of military, diplomatic, economic and symbolic narratives strengthen the perception of the strategic vulnerability and vulnerability of Serbs in Republika Srpska and Serbia, integrating historical traumas, contemporary geopolitical events and media interpretation into a coherent narrative of vulnerability.

2.12. Rhetorical and media strategies

The analyzed media content in Republika Srpska uses different strategies to construct and strengthen the narrative of the long-term vulnerability of Serbs. Key strategies include:

- *Selective framing* – the media highlight controversial aspects of legal and political decisions, while at the same time ignoring their legitimate legal and administrative functions. This way, they create a perception that the laws or decisions of Croatia and international institutions are always harmful or unfair to Serbs.

- *Emotional historical analogies* – contemporary legal regulations and incidents are compared to the traumas of the wartime 1990s, including Operation Flash and Operation Storm. This connection between past and present events creates a dramatization of the threat and strengthens the sense of continuity of injustice.
- *Dramatization and personalization* – statements by political and religious actors are used to emotionally engage the audience and emphasize the perception of threat, discrimination, and symbols of threat. Examples include statements by Miodrag Linta and Savo Štrbac about unprosecuted war crimes and symbolic attacks on Serbian identity.
- *Internationalization of the problem* – the EU, NATO, and international institutions, including the Office of the High Representative (OHR), are presented as silent observers or active destabilizers. This extends the perception of local vulnerability to the international dimension, which further legitimizes the narrative of justice and the protection of collective rights.

2.13. Internationalization and delegitimization of international actors

The analyzed media content expands the narrative of international actors through critical framing of the role of the OHR and Western political structures. For example, [an interview by](#) Max Primorac (The Heritage Foundation) for Večernji list, carried in the media of Republika Srpska, points out: "How about ending this senseless nation-

building, regaining the sovereignty of BiH and allowing the people of BiH to solve their own problems?....This discredits, among other things, the public European commitment to democracy, but also violates all European and American norms and standards." This statement is used to further legitimize the narrative of Bosnia and Herzegovina's eroded sovereignty, highlighting the perception of international pressure and the legal dimension of the conflict. Primorac's statement is conveyed in a similar tone: "It is time for the OHR to be closed... Foreign bureaucrats have usurped the sovereignty of BiH." Media discourse therefore presents international institutions as: undemocratic actors ("unelected bureaucrats"), factors of political destabilization, and instruments that disturb the balance between constituent peoples.

In addition, the introduction of a narrative about the endangerment of Croats in BiH further complicates the interpretation of regional relations, where Croatia is implicitly positioned as a protector of the rights of Croats, while criticism is redirected towards internal and external actors. Such media framing has multiple functions: it relativizes the responsibility of local political actors, shifts the focus from internal problems to external factors, and strengthens the narrative about the need for political autonomy and the protection of collective rights. In this way, international actors become an integral part of a broader discourse on vulnerability, further complicating the picture of political and identity relations in the region.

2.14. Media coverage of Croatian political actors

Media coverage in Republika Srpska of Croatian political actors is shaped by two dominant narratives: the personalization of responsibility for decisions perceived as threats to Serbs in the region and differentiation in the style of running the state. These narratives not only shape the political image of Croatia but also reflect the broader political discourse in relations between Croatia and Serbia and the general dynamics in the Balkans.

2.14.1. Andrej Plenković – Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia

Andrej Plenković is often portrayed in the Republika Srpska media as a key executor of Croatian policies whose decisions directly threaten the Serb community in the region. In this context, Plenković is personalized, and his political role is shown through the prism of antagonism and threats to the stability of the Balkans, especially when it comes to Serbian interests. The media in RS often use a securitization narrative, according to which Plenković's policies pose security threats. [They portray](#) him as a politician whose decisions and statements can destabilize the region, which further contributes to his negative perception. This picture is illustrated by **the statement of Miloš Vučević**: "In Croatia, an attitude of hatred towards Serbia and the Serbian people is systematically built, and Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković is 'one of the leaders of such a policy'."

In addition, **Vučević** [points out](#) that Plenković sets regional destabilization as a priority, claiming that he is bothered by a strong Serbia, which is the leader of the region: "Andrej Plenković is either bothered by Serbia's successes, or he wishes us a civil war... They are interested in anything that can cause a kind of political instability because they are bothered by a strong Serbia, which is the leader of the region." Despite this negative portrayal, the media also reported Plenković's [statements](#) pointing to his diplomacy and efforts to calm tensions, especially regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina. Plenković said that Croatia will not impose sanctions on Republika Srpska officials, as this would further increase tensions and slow down BiH's European path: "We are the first neighbors, Banja Luka is literally an hour and a half from Zagreb and we want to send reassuring messages that will encourage dialogue...". Also, in the context of Croatia's relations with BiH, Plenković stressed that the EU will not impose sanctions against RS officials, which seeks to mitigate the perception that Croatia supports the destabilization of the region: "It seems to me that the initiative to adopt sanctions at the EU level will not pass. After monitoring the positions of the member states, this does not seem realistic...".

Advisor to the Serb member of the BiH Presidency, **Saša Aulić**, [emphasizes](#) that Plenković does not favor Bosniak interests against Republika Srpska, which further strengthens the perception of his neutrality in the regional conflict: "Bosniaks are supposedly collectively disappointed because Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković will not take their side against Republika Srpska...". The

media portrayal of Andrej Plenković in Republika Srpska is shaped through a dual narrative: on the one hand, his policy is personalized and portrayed as a threat to Serbs and regional stability, while on the other hand, one can recognize his function in calming tensions and neutrally balancing interests in BiH. This dual narrative allows the RS media to articulate concerns about Serbia's position, but also legitimately follow Croatia's diplomatic initiatives that seek to stabilize the region.

2.14.2. Zoran Milanović – President of the Republic of Croatia

Unlike Plenković, Zoran Milanović is not portrayed in the Republika Srpska media as a threat to regional stability. He is often portrayed as a pragmatic and analytical leader, balancing between the national interest of Croatia and realpolitik, especially in the context of BiH. Milanović's rhetoric is not emotionally charged, and he is often portrayed as a politician who practices realpolitik, without excessive antagonism towards Serbia. One of Milanović's key positions in the RS media is the protection of the rights of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is considered as his primary political agenda. The media often portray Milanović as a politician who supports the legal and constitutional rights of Croats in BiH, and his claim is particularly [highlighted](#) : "This people must get their rights to elect their representatives. The problem is that they are clearly defined, but they are stolen, taken and seized."

His policy towards the region also hinges on respecting the Dayton Agreement and the rights of all constituent peoples in BiH. This further [reinforces](#) his image in Republika Srpska media as a politician focused

on preserving the political framework in BiH, not on causing instability. "We stand up against the undermining of peace in BiH. We demand full recognition of the constituent composition of the three peoples. Everyone in the UN must respect the Dayton Agreement and the right of all peoples to be represented at all levels." Milanović's political discourse in RS is often seen as a call for peaceful coexistence and balance, especially in BiH, which distinguishes him from Plenković, whose decisions evoke stronger emotions and controversy. Milanović is not perceived as a source of destabilization but as a politician who seeks the preservation of international standards and the rights of minorities.

2.15. Conclusion

The analysis shows how the Republic of Croatia is systematically presented in the media of the Republika Srpska through a political, identity and historical framework. The example of the Cemeteries Act clearly illustrates the way in which an individual political decision is transformed into a broader narrative about the collective threat to the Serb community. Through the selection of topics, the choice of sources, and interpretation, the media actively shape the perception of Croatia as a politically opposed and potentially threatening state, strengthening the sense of insecurity and solidifying identity boundaries. Discourse does not only reflect reality but actively constructs it, shaping interpretative frameworks through which the audience understands political relations, history, and contemporary social processes.

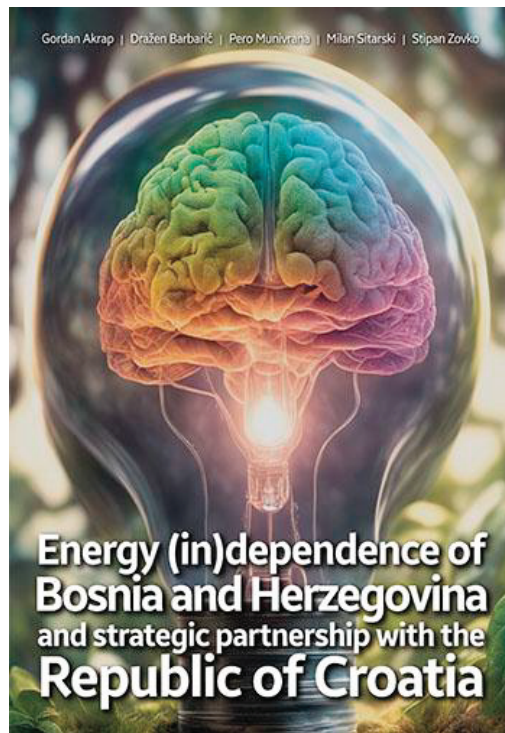
The media portrayal of Croatia's political actors shows a differentiated strategy. Andrej Plenković is often portrayed as a practical executor of Croatian policies, whose decisions, according to the media's interpretation, directly threaten the Serb community and regional stability, while at the same time his pragmatic actions, such as his stance on not imposing sanctions on Republika Srpska officials, are presented as an attempt to balance interests and calm tensions. Zoran Milanović, on the other hand, is presented as an analytical leader ready for compromise, balancing between the national interest of Croatia and *realpolitik*, especially in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasizing respect for international frameworks and the rights of constituent peoples.

Such framing enhances the dramatization, personalization of responsibility, and abuse of contemporary political issues, linking them to historical traumas, identity symbols, and legal issues of exiled Serbs. In this way, the media in Republika Srpska shape a complex narrative of long-term threat, which combines historical, cultural, ecological, territorial, and international dimensions, and further strengthens the political and identity mobilization of the Serb community in the region.

3. Information operations related to the written Study on energy (in)dependence of BiH

During 2022, 2023 and 2024, the Hybrid Warfare Research Institute, together with IDPI from Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, worked on a project to prepare a study called **Energy (In)dependence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Strategic Partnership with the Republic of Croatia**. The results of the project represent a quality and reliable source of data and relevant conclusions necessary to define

energy policies in BiH and the Republic of Croatia, both at the individual and joint international level. The intention of the project was for it to serve as a basis for long-term planning of development and industrial policies in BiH, which are always based on reliable approaches from affordable energy sources. The project objectively (without lobbying or interest influence) shaped the most realistic solution and the way of its implementation with the aim of achieving energy independence and energy sovereignty of BiH in relation to Russian energy sources and highlighting the necessity of connecting with Croatia and the EU energy infrastructure.



Given the numerous open questions about the possibilities in getting rid of harmful influences, the project pointed to an existing example from the good practice of EU/NATO member states in the process of annulling Moldova's (complete) energy dependence of Russia and resolving the issue of the breakaway (occupied) part of the territory of Moldova by Russian and pro-Russian groups. The project aimed to facilitate potential private investors a perception of the investment in the "southern interconnection" (administrative prerequisites, costs, expected dynamics, market, trends and competition, market profitability, etc.) and a more comprehensive approach to achieve long-term profitability of the project.

The study, created as a result of this project, was publicly presented in Mostar and Zagreb, distributed to various professional and political circles in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and abroad. It has successfully, as is evident from the media publications, contributed to a true and complete understanding of the process it describes and enabled the change of the existing one. For instance, the withdrawal of the proposed ones and the development of a new legislative framework for the energy policy of BiH. The study pointed out open issues in the management of existing energy capacities with an emphasis on the gas sector, which subsequently proved to be correct.

For the purposes of this study, we made an analysis of media publications primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina and then in the Republic of Croatia. We were interested in how media interpreted this study, what positions they took, whether they stuck to the facts or were

part of different political and economic interest groups around energy policies in BiH, and whether there may have been some changes in attitudes.

Therefore, we asked for a narrative analysis from artificial intelligence used by a company specializing in monitoring media releases (Content Intelligence Report of April 29, 2026). In the period from February 1, 2024, to April 24, 2026, 938 different publications about media coverage and interpretation of the above study and the narrative about the southern gas interconnection were analyzed. This analysis included 82% of posts from web portals, 10% TV reports, 5% from print media and 3% of posts on social networks.

The narratives are separated according to recurring patterns of framing the topic: security-energy, sovereigntist-legal, geopolitical, and territorial-distributive. An attitude was assigned solely if a clear and unambiguous link could be established between that attitude and the study, its authors, the southern gas interconnection, or the core theses presented, drawing from the synthesized information and citations. The synthesis shows the attitude towards these topics on five levels: support, conditional support, neutral attitude, opposition, and tactical distancing.

Most of the supporting or opposing narratives have been published on web portals. They are dominated by and act as the main space for increased polarization and personalization of the topic by highlighting the people who participated in its creation, thus trying to shift the

attention of the general public away from the content of the study. This is, as is known in practice, a method of trying to de-contextualize content and impose a wrong narrative with the aim of inaccurately informing the reading audience. The publications on web portals were primarily polarizing in nature as the main promoter of confronting the theses of the study. Television more often maintains a professional or institutional tone, especially when it broadcasts the topic through guest appearances and official statements. The press provides a longer political and geopolitical framework, while the radio program played a secondary role in the available corpus. Social networks are not separately documented as an information channel in this analysis.

In the first media offensive associated with the published study, the study authors were correct in assuming that the content of the study would be pushed aside as secondary. Namely, the authors expected, according to the established pattern of a significant part of the media in BiH, an attack on the main author of the study, Gordan Akrap. The results of this analysis confirm this. Namely, G. Akrap was the most exposed to personalized attacks in the BH media after the publication of the study. The analysis confirmed ten separate discrediting patterns. The pattern of the attack is clear and visible: the content of the study is pushed into the background, and G. Akrap is emphatically described by his professional biography as a representative of the Croatian intelligence community during the Homeland War. Therefore, he is politically labeled and described as a part of a bigger pattern of repeated foreign (Croatian) malicious actions towards BiH and in the territory of BiH. In the first media wave of 2024. Mr. Akrap appears as

a co-author and the main public voice of the study, with a clearly affirmative attitude towards the southern interconnection as a tool for BiH's energy independence and partnership with Croatia. At the same time, he becomes the main object of personalized discrediting, which makes him the most relevant individual target of media conflict. Over time, the topic slowly moved from a personal to a legislative and implementation phase. Thus, there was a change in the pattern of media activity. Attention was shifted from the authors of the study to other targets, i.e., to different political actors, the state-legal framework of action and to the company BH Gas. This suggests that personal attacks were primarily a tool in an attempt to early delegitimize the authors/sources of the study, and not a permanent pattern that dominates in all phases of media appearance. In the following phases, political and media actors take over the substantive theses stated in the Study without constantly citing the source. The greatest resistance from opponents of the southern gas interconnection is directed towards a model that includes a private American investor in the construction of the pipeline, the possible marginalization of BH Gas and a stronger reliance on the Croatian direction of management.

In the observed period (February 2024 – April 2026), the dominant framework of the topic was shaped by the following narrative: **From an expert study to a political-legal dispute on project management.** The topic developed not only as a single story, but as a positioning space in which individual actors took on clear roles: some of them openly supported the content of the study and its emphases, some actively opposed it, while the third group took a cautious, conditional

or tactically neutral stance. This distribution of attitudes explains why the same event produces different narratives, why alliance blocks are created, and why communicative pressure often does not spread linearly but through conflicting interpretations. The analyzed texts show an extremely high (84%) level of polarization of attitudes.

The Study itself functions as the main carrier of the claim that BiH needs an alternative gas route and a strategic partnership with the Republic of Croatia in the early media reports. In the later stages, its name disappears from focus, but its core content moves to the political and media mainstream. Thus, the study maintains a high content impact with a decrease in attribution visibility. The results of the study were supported by its authors and some ministers from the Government of the Federation of BiH. This narrative portrays the southern interconnection as a necessary alternative supply route that takes BiH out of its unilateral dependence on Russian gas through Serbia. At an early stage, the narrative is carried by the study. Governments, ministers and parts of the mainstream media assume this narrative. It is often supported by Mirza Ustamujić. This narrative is present in about 34% of the articles analyzed.

The study and its conclusions were strongly opposed by portal istraga.ba (Almir Bećarević and articles signed as editorial text), the Party for BiH, the Aarhus Center in BiH (Denis Žiško), CEE Bankwatch Network (Pippa Gallop), InfoMedia Balkan (Borislav Radovanović), slobodnabosna.ba (Hazim Bašić). The narrative of this group has not always disputed the need for an alternative route of gas

supply, but it strongly rejects the legislative model that, according to them, brings investor non-transparency and a plausible weakening of BiH's sovereignty. This framework is dominated by legal, environmental and sovereigntist objections. This narrative claims that the project becomes problematic when it removes BH Gas from the process of direct management as well as ownership, embeds the investor directly into the legal framework, and raises issues of state property, jurisdiction, and interstate border. This shifts the debate from energy to the constitutional and institutional level. The Aarhus Center opens an environmental-legal and transparency front for criticizing this project, demands the withdrawal of the law from the urgent procedure and the preparation of a new feasibility study. In their statements, the project is associated with non-transparent investor favoring and long-term financial risk. Their position is highly critical of the concrete implementation model. CEE Bankwatch Network challenges the project from the perspective of fossil dependence, investor ambiguity, and inconsistency with the European energy direction. In this context the southern interconnection is not a developmental undertaking, but a long-term risky venture. Their attitude is consistently negative. In the late-stage sample, Stav.ba is highly critical of the implementation of the project, with emphasis on "shaky foundations", political haste and unresolved legal issues. At the same time, in the earlier stages, part of this media field also participated in the delegitimization of the study and the authors. Through a critical framework this narrative is consistently opposed to the project. This narrative is dominant in about 29% of the articles analyzed. Additionally, critics argue that getting out of Russia's dependence is being replaced by U.S. political and private

investment dependence. In this framework, the interconnection is not an emancipation, but a colonization project that leaves BiH without full control over the infrastructure. Authors such as Zijad Bećirović (IFIMES, Ljubljana) also stand out in this view. The narrative is present in 21% of the articles analyzed.

According to the analysis, a group of so-called "the hesitant ones" accepts the need to diversify supply routes, but opposes the way it is planned, raises the question of ownership, and tries to maintain the monopoly of BH Gas. They point out that they are in favor of the project, but not at all costs. Media such as Euronews.ba and Raport.ba and the company BH Gas stand out in proclaiming this perspective. Conditional support for the southern interconnection project is also used to encourage internal divisions. Namely, by pointing out that the construction of the southern interconnection neglects the so-called western and northern interconnection (which the Russian Gazprom tried to impose), they are covertly trying to reintroduce the interests of Russian companies. Klix.ba appears in the synthesized corpus as a procedure-oriented channel that records the conflict, quotes the statements and transmits the arguments of different parties. It does not build a strong unified value framework, but functions as a main place for the public circulation of opposing claims. That is why it is classified as a neutral entity.

Over time, the main idea of the study became legitimate. The emphasis of the conflicting parties shifted when it was realized that the process of planning the construction of the southern gas pipeline was nearing

completion, to issues related to the control, legality, and political ownership of the gas pipeline construction project. As a result, the study was less disputed in terms of content, while its theses were reshaped through new political frameworks. On February 2, 2024, the US administration (James O'Brien) reintroduced this topic into the public life of BiH. On February 20, 2024, the results of the study were publicly presented, which is the main topic of this part of the analysis. A debate has begun about the legitimacy of the authors, and the study is declared to be a political pamphlet. On 22 November 2024, the public consultation moves from the thematic space of discussion on the study to the discussion on the necessity of establishing the project. On December 15, 2025, American investors enter the topic, and a new governance model is proposed. On April 6, a new polarization occurs after the adopted legal changes in BiH.

In terms of communication and information, the central battlefield has ceased to be a need to prove the necessity of diversification. The topics of proving the credibility of different management models were imposed. Communication conflict therefore goes less through the discussion of principles and professional facts, and more through issues of legislative procedures, issues related to ownership and management, and possible legal consequences (both real and imaginary).

The topic of strategic partnership with the Republic of Croatia is one of the key points of controversy in the entire media activity. In the affirmative media and political appearances, it is presented as a natural and necessary framework for BiH's energy security, while opponents

see it as a channel of Croatian political influence and infrastructural domination. Thus, this term has become stable in terms of content, but normatively it causes deep divisions.

Matrica stavova prema temi

Središnji blok za prikaz kako su se pojedini entiteti pozicionirali prema temi: podrška, protivljenje, neutralnost, uvjetna podrška ili taktičko ogradjivanje.

ENTITET	TIP	STAV PREMA TEMI	INTENZITET	DOMINANTNI ARGUMENT	POVEZANI NARATIV	DOKAZ / CITAT
Gordan Akrap	osoba	Podrška	Visok	U sintetiziranom ranom korpusu nastupa kao suautor i glavni javni glas teze da je južna interkonekcija dio energetske neovisnosti BiH i strateškog partnerstva s Republikom Hrvatskom.	Sigurnosna i energetska diverzifikacija	Sintezni nalaz korpusa: Akrap je detektiran kao suautor i javni glas studije te kao najizloženiji ciljani entitet u ranom valu 2024.
studija o južnoj interkonekciji	dokument	Podrška	Visok	Studija artikulira argument da je za BiH nužna energetska neovisnost kroz partnerstvo s Republikom Hrvatskom i alternativni dobavni pravac.	Sigurnosna i energetska diverzifikacija	Sinteza navodi da je puni naslov studije jasno prisutan u ranijoj fazi 2024., a njezine temeljne teze ostaju sadržajno prisutne i kad se naslov više ne navodi.
BH Gas	institucija	Uvjetna podrška	Srednji	BH Gas podržava projekt kao takav, ali inzistira na postojećem institucionalnom okviru i vlastitoj ulozi u provedbi.	Pravni presedan i suverenitet BiH	novikonic.ba, 29.12.2025.: „BH Gas je kompanija koja je do sada osmislila sve vezano za ovaj projekt...”
Stranka za BiH	politička stranka	Protivljenje	Visok	Stranka projekt u zakonskom obliku vidi kao institucionalno štetan zbog eliminacije BH Gasa, derogacije Dayton, privatne kompanije i pravnog presedana.	Pravni presedan i suverenitet BiH	nap.ba, 08.04.2026. u sintezi: „eliminacija BH-Gasa, derogacija Dejtona, privatna kompanija i pravni presedan”
Klix.ba	medij	Neutralan	Nizak	Portal uglavnom prenosi proceduralne i parlamentarne aspekte sukoba te daje prostor različitim stranama bez snažne uredničke normativne atribucije.	Od stručne studije prema političko-pravnom sporu o upravljanju projektom	Sinteza navodi Klix.ba kao proceduralno neutralan medij koji dokumentira kritike i dvojbe oko državne imovine i sjeverne interkonekcije.

An interesting analysis is the one of changes in attitudes of certain key actors in the media space:

AKTER	POČETNI STAV	NOVI STAV	DATUM POMAKA	POVOD PROMJENE	CITAT ILI DOKAZ
Medijski fokus teme	Usmjerenost na studiju i autora	Usmjerenost na zakon, investitora i međudržavni sporazum	2026-04-15	Usvajanje zakonskih izmjena i ulazak američkog investitora u fokus	naslovi dominantno govore o izmjenama zakona, američkom investitoru i sporazumu s Hrvatskom
Fokus kritike	Osporavanje Akrapa i same studije	Osporavanje modela upravljanja, BH Gasa, državne imovine i pravnog predsjedana	2026-04-21	Objava zakona i konkretizacija provedbenog modela	danas su središnje teme BH Gas, državna imovina i pravni predsjedan
Nermin Nikšić	Tvrđi politički otpor HDZ-ovu modelu	Pragmatičniji odnos prema dogovoru i provedbi projekta	2025.	Potreba za deblokadom provedbe i političkim dogovorom	djelomičan pomak prema pragmatičnijem odnosu prema HDZ-u i provedbi projekta
Elmedin Konaković	Tvrde pozicioniranje prema hrvatskom okviru	Priznanje da bez HDZ-a i Hrvatske nema potpune realizacije	2025.	Politička realnost međudržavnog i entitetskog dogovora	od tvrdog pozicioniranja prema priznanju da bez HDZ-a i Hrvatske nema potpune realizacije
Dragan Čović	Blokadni odnos prema modelu s BH Gasom	Afirmacija modela koji osnažuje njegov politički okvir	2025.	Pojava novog upravljačkog modela i američkog posredovanja	od blokadnog odnosa prema modelu s BH Gasom prema afirmaciji modela koji osnažuje njegov politički okvir
Oslobodenje	Rani prostor za institucionalni spor	Funkcionalno pozitivan ton o investitorskom signalu	2026-04-16	Usvajanje zakonskih izmjena i investicijsko uokvirivanje	projekt opisuje kao „signal investorima“

Eurnews.ba	Šire polemičko izvještavanje	Uravnoteženije praćenje zakona uz zadržavanje dilema	2026-04-15	Parlamentarna faza i potreba za informativnim balansiranjem	prema uravnoteženijem praćenju zakona uz uvažavanje dilema o državnoj imovini
Kritičko probosansko medijsko polje	Personalizirani napadi na Akrapa	Depersonalizirana kritika zakonskih i institucionalnih rješenja	2026-04	Nestanak autora iz fokusa i prelazak teme u zakonodavnu fazu	od personaliziranih napada na Akrapa u ranijem valu prema depersonaliziranoj kritici zakonskih i institucionalnih rješenja u 2026.
Američki faktor	Implicitni vanjski poticaj i pritisak	Eksplicitni investitorski i upravljački čimbenik	2026-04-15	UKljučivanje američkog investitora u zakonski okvir	od implicitnog vanjskog pritiska prema eksplicitnom statusu investitora u samom zakonskom okviru 2026.
Strateško partnerstvo s Republikom Hrvatskom	Osporavana normativna teza studije	Operativni korak prema međudržavnom sporazumu	2026-04-16	Najava potpisivanja sporazuma na samitu Inicijative triju mora	od normativne i osporavane teze studije prema faktičnom idućem koraku: potpisivanju međudržavnog sporazuma
Regionalna agenda Krajine	Periferno pitanje	Zaseban medijski val o zapadnoj interkonekciji i zaobilazaženju Krajine	2026-04-15	Rast vidljivosti neravnomjerne plinske budućnosti BiH	od perifernog pitanja prema zasebnom medijskom mini-valu o zapadnoj interkonekciji u travnju 2026.
Federalni mainstream mediji	Politički konfliktno izvještavanje	Tehničko-proceduralno praćenje usvajanja zakona	2026-04-15	Ulazak projekta u završnu parlamentarnu i provedbenu fazu	od politički konfliktnog izvještavanja prema tehničko-proceduralnom praćenju usvajanja zakona

Overview of media reports in the first media wave:

1. <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/svijet/juzna-plinska-interkonekcija-minimizira-ruski-utjecaj-u-bih--11387828>
2. <https://www.vecernji.ba/vijesti/plinovodom-iz-hrvatske-treba-upravljati-kompanija-koja-je-pod-kisobranom-eu-a-i-nato-saveza-1749720>
3. https://youtu.be/QBiwpfwDkUM?si=uEvn5CC_TnPNHHUe
4. <https://rtv-hb.com/vijesti-bosna-i-hercegovina/strateski-vazno-plinsko-povezivanje-bih-s-rh>
5. <https://hms.ba/akrap-juznom-plinskom-interkonekcijom-treba-upravljati-kompanija-koja-je-pod-utjecajem-nato-i-eu-Circlea/>
6. <https://bljesak.info/industrija/industrija/u-mostaru-o-energetskoj-neovisnosti-bih-osigurati-alternativu-plinu-iz-srbije/447450>
7. <https://www.hkv.hr/razgovori/43281-kako-postici-energetsku-neovisnost-bih.html>
8. <https://twitter.com/istragab/status/1764599519079956919?s=48&t=tT4hc02wTUWK2rOKVJBYzg>
9. <https://istraga.ba/studija-placena-novcem-vlade-rh-grlic-radman-izdvojio-65-hiljada-eura-za-izradu-studije-u-kojoj-je-navedeno-da-bh-gas-ne-smije-upravljati-juznom-interkonekcijom-jer-je-to-prijetnja-da-bih-ostane-pod/>
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4. Information environment in Montenegro

4.1. Introduction

Starting from the observation that the Montenegrin media scene, as a reflection of political divisions, is polarized around the issue of national identity, attitude towards Serbia and the assessments of political elites on current relations with the Republic of Croatia, this review seeks to point out those thoughts and public appearances that lead to even deeper divisions and disruptions of interstate relations. These statements are essentially seen as a tool of the propaganda machine of political groups and are quite distant from the ethics of objective informing. However, disinformation, subjectivity, unprofessionalism,

cannot be viewed exclusively as content that seeks reaction to correct the distractions that are thus introduced into the public space. One should understand that a part of the Montenegrin population perceives Croatia in such a way as its immediate neighbor, i.e., as a destructive actor when it comes to general relations.

The review concentrates on things aimed at moving away from successful negotiations with the European Union, as well as on the anti-Croatian discourse in one part of the media. Both phenomena are related since the discrediting of the Republic of Croatia is often in the context of relativizing and antagonizing everything related to Montenegro's accession to the EU. Analyzing the approach of such oriented media, certain patterns are observed that we could classify as follows: when it comes to topics from contemporary Croatian history and the period of the Homeland War, a deconstructive approach is applied. All historical facts are refuted by untrue claims, and by various reinterpretations with no basis in verifiable sources or those based on unreliable ones. There is a noticeable reliance on one opinion or a very limited number of opinions to present the "real truth". When it comes to the institutions of the Republic of Croatia, there is a dominant defamatory approach of identical methodology, using an insufficient number of journalistic sources or opinions of the other side, fabrication and inconsistent commentary. There are no significant differences in approach when talking about Croatian politicians individually or those Montenegrin politicians who hold the positions of alliance and good relations with the Republic of Croatia.

The EU is portrayed as an integration that relies on mere political pragmatism without a common system of values, and with constant violations of the rule of law. In such a view, Croatia has the role of a destabilizer of the political and security situation in Montenegro. Well-known media strategies are resorted to – emotionally charged shocking headlines, genre boundaries are erased as news and comments are mixed, only one source is referred to without an adequate alternative perspective, sources are often anonymous or unreliable, there is a lack of verifiable data, suggestive (manipulative) photographs. A simplified division into "us" and "them" is forced as a relationship within which there is no room for convergence of attitudes. It is important, however, to emphasize that this classification has an overlapping character. Value systems do not appear in their pure form, but all three approaches are mixed within just one.

4.2. Deconstruction of history in the service of affirmation of Pro-Serbian Politics

The logic of functioning of the Montenegrin media, whose editorial policy represents pro-Serbian views, is usually based on predominantly two ways of deconstructing¹² contemporary history in the former Yugoslavia. The first refers to the period of disintegration, aggression of the Yugoslav People's Army and Serbian and Montenegrin paramilitary units against the republics of the common state, the second to the historical events of the World War II, whose factual credibility is not necessarily problematic and thematizes the Ustasha crimes against the Serb population. However, if we want a comprehensive insight into media strategies, it is necessary to put seemingly scant information in

the context of material for the construction of theses which are used to accuse the Republic of Croatia (even when it is not explicitly claimed) as the ideological successor of the former Independent State of Croatia, from which the Croatian authorities have not clearly distanced themselves, but consider it a historical part of the very essence of Croatian independence in 1990.

An example of one piece of information: "On this day in 1942, Ustashas from Podravska Slatina and other parts of Slavonia killed 200 Serbian men from the village of Kometnik and the neighboring hamlet of Dobrić, near Voćin, on January 13 and 14." After the basic information, it is claimed that this is a massacre from the spectrum of the first mass ethnically motivated crimes of Ustasha units against the entire population of a village in Slavonia.¹³ In the further part, the data is presented on the number of civilian victims and detailed descriptions of torturous and brutal executions (determining the accuracy is the duty of historians, author's note), which undoubtedly leads primarily to the creation of an emotional charge, while the information about the event stays in the background. The illustration accompanying the news does not correspond at all to the specific event, but goes back even further into history, to the time of World War I. It is a photograph entitled – Captured Serbian boys in 1915 in Trštenik, which was taken in the autumn of that year when the great offensive of the Central Powers on Serbia began, after which the army began to retreat through Albania towards the Adriatic.

The event is also figuratively called the Albanian Golgotha. In short, many Serbian soldiers were captured or killed, and among them were a large number of children, war orphans or simply underage companions of the retreating army. In the spirit of editorial policy, only a reminder of historical events is seemingly given, and the reader's attention is "quietly" shifted to mythical narratives about Serbia as a heroic nation that constantly suffers injustice, and neighboring Croatia, whose struggle for independence from the 90s is only a slightly more modern version of Pavelić's Independent State of Croatia.

These historical reminiscences with hidden symbolism of a mythical character are complemented by the convenient "strong" attitudes of individual politicians. Thus, the president of the Movement for Changes, Nebojša Medojević, commenting on the incident in Split when a group of thugs interrupted the celebration of the Days of Serbian Culture event, cites an arbitrary number of "about 50 people dressed in black" and claims that "Modern Croatia was built on the foundations of the genocidal state of the Independent State of Croatia. Any state built on hatred and genocide is doomed to fail. It is only a matter of time," says Medojević. He concludes, "he who sows Thompson, he reaps the Independent State of Croatia. A state based on hatred cannot survive."¹⁴ Immediately after this unpleasant event, Croatian representatives of the government and the opposition distanced themselves and condemned this hooligan outburst, which Medojević fails to mention, and which was nevertheless reported by some local portals.¹⁵

The extent to which individual observations mix events and discursively overlap is shown by the example of reporting from the protest rally in Morinj, a location of an aggressor camp for Croats from the Dubrovnik area after the occupation of Croatian territories during the Homeland War. The event was attended by the leader of the Democratic People's Party of Montenegro, Milan Knežević, who said: "I am especially against this shameful inscription and this plaque put up by Ranko Krivokapić and Raško Konjević, by which they embarrassed Montenegro. I believe that this protest should be a warning to the Government and executive authorities to remove this shameful plaque and thus wash away the stain from the Montenegrin and Serbian people." The inscription on the plaque represents the message of Montenegro's efforts to overcome the past in a cultured and empathetic way, reminiscent of the 1990s wartime camp. It expresses regret for the suffering of the detainees, stressing that such crimes must not be repeated.¹⁶ However, Knežević has the opposite opinion and adds that the plaque was not removed because Montenegro suffers from an "aggressive and pretentious campaign from Croatia". He expresses a position of fear of the Montenegrin authorities to take down the plaque because "the reaction of Grlić, Radman, Plenković or some of the right-wing associations from that country would immediately follow". He further states: "This speaks best of the subordinate position in which Montenegro finds itself today." Although he does not explicitly claim this, Knežević implies that pro-fascist sentiments are publicly affirmed in the Republic of Croatia under the protection of the Government and adds that their entire policy is anti-Montenegrin, i.e., anti-Serbian,¹⁷ aimed at undermining Montenegro's path to the EU. He claims that he

expects blackmail and blockades throughout negotiations, without questioning the ability and readiness of the current ruling party to introduce Montenegro into full membership of the EU.¹⁸

When the pro-Serb media in Montenegro are not exclusively and literally focused on state institutions, officials of the Republic of Croatia and the democratic order, they intonate certain social events in a negative way. Texts dealing with these topics are methodologically inconsistent, superficial, and subjective. Thus, for example, when talking about the education system that should instill a certain value system in the younger population, among other things, not "just brief information about the existence of the Independent State of Croatia", the pro-Serbian Montenegrin media choose interlocutors whose statements support the thesis of the generally benevolent attitude of the younger population towards the historical fascist creation, which is of course the "merit" of the authorities that approve such curricula¹⁹. The thesis is problematic, since it is an extraordinarily complex topic of the relationship of the younger population to the complete set of values they represent today. When claims are made about the lack of interest or a certain neutrality of young people toward the issues of the World War II and the role of the Independent State of Croatia in that period, they are interpreted as an affirmative position²⁰, which is tendentious and scientifically problematic. Neutrality does not necessarily mean affirmation, and in addition, the observed Montenegrin media do not refer to any relevant research, but very superficially present certain opinions. In some instances they refer to some shorter excerpts of the research from which they only extract those parts that support the thesis

of "passivity of the system that offers only scarce data on the topic, without a clear value stance". Thus, to claim that students who "define an exemplary citizen as one who respects the Constitution and laws of their country are in the minority and are clearly separated from those whose national identity is based on blood and origin, tradition, religion and symbols of Croatian statehood", represents a poorly nuanced opinion that, according to established media strategies, identifies the contemporary Croatian state, a full member of international organizations and integration with the historically failed and totalitarian state creations.

In a part of the Montenegrin media, the religious and cultural atmosphere in the Republic of Croatia is also interpreted in a simplified and tendentious way. The Days of St. Sava in Croatia, which are held on January 27, and are dedicated to an important figure of the Serbian Orthodox tradition, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the patron saint of education and culture of Serbs also cause controversy. Thus, there is talk of "a scandalous message from Croatia that shows that for a part of the political scene in that country, neither the religious, cultural nor historical identity of Serbs is acceptable."²¹ The extended information refers to a statement of the Homeland Movement of Šibenik-Knin County in which it expresses objection to the holding of the Academy of St. Sava in Knin, organized by the Dalmatian Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The addition to the information claims that "it is particularly worrying that the statement does not attack a particular political stance or event, but directly disqualifies the entire religious and cultural identity, which is

declared a threat to the state without any discussion." In addition, it is emphasized that the attack on St. Sava in Knin "is not an isolated incident, but part of a broader context of presenting the Serbian religious and cultural tradition as a problem, and not as a right of the community to preserve identity."

The Montenegrin portal sees this as a Croatian political deviation, that is, "for years there has been no clear and consistent confrontation with the Ustasha legacy and crimes committed in the Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška camps, which further reinforces the impression of deep double standards." In this news-commentary, there is a complete lack of understanding or review of the fact that a part of the Croatian public (quite understandably) sees this celebration as a politically sensitive issue, and not exclusively a religious and cultural manifestation. However, the reality, which does not find an adequate interlocutor in the text, testifies to the fact that there is no dispute in the Republic of Croatia about the right to cultural and religious expression, including the aforementioned manifestation, but, again, quite understandably, the need for a clear separation of religion and state is advocated and attention is drawn to the sensitivity of the historical context. However, if we put aside the issue of how the public in the Republic of Croatia perceives this event (Croatia is a plural society and heterogeneity of attitudes is understandable and inevitable), the Government of the Republic of Croatia primarily relies on the Constitution and laws on the rights of national minorities, as well as on international obligations arising from European standards on the protection of minorities. Support for the right of the Serb community to celebrate holidays,

including activities related to the Serbian Orthodox Church and cultural institutions such as the Serb National Council, has never been an issue. In other words – the Republic of Croatia treats the event of Days of St. Sava as a legitimate cultural and minority right.

And here we see how a topic is easily moved from the socio-cultural environment into a historical-political context with deconstructive ambitions and without the need for possible additional explanations, without trying to find a relevant interlocutor (or several) who would comment on the topic from several angles, taking into account the controversies that accompany or may accompany the event. There is no reliance on the basic rules of the journalistic profession.

Problematic historical theses from the spectrum of so-called religious-cultural topics can have a disturbing and therefore harmful connotation²². Thus, the ban on entering the Republic of Croatia for the priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Mijajil Backović, was characterized as a consequence of "the Ustasha as an elaborate institutional scenario". It is claimed that the Croatian authorities are reviving the "monstrous idea" of establishing the Croatian Orthodox Church, the legacy of Ante Pavelić from the time of the Independent State of Croatia, all in order to continue with the "seizure of the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the expulsion of the Serb population from the Republic of Croatia". In this case, Backović's statement (while relativizing the victims of the Mornj camp during the Homeland War) in which he denies the nationality of the Croats of Boka by claiming that by the end of World War II, they declared

themselves as Serbs or simply as Boka people, has justifiably provoked a reaction from Croatian institutions. After that, Backović softened the tone of his statement, stating that everyone has the right to a national determination, but in this case, he still refers to it as a "project", continuing to challenge the identity continuity of Boka Croats. The public in the Republic of Croatia was undivided about Backović's performance, which is not just a fiery speech by a priest, but it is an opinion of the Serbian Orthodox Church that is often placed in the public as a political position on Croatian historical revisionism. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights in Podgorica, however, finally condemned his statements, characterizing them as "harmful to interethnic relations", while the local Ombudsman initiated a procedure, which is not even mentioned in the information. There is no indication in the information about the desire for possible additional explanations, about the reasons for the ban on entering the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

The Bay of Kotor is becoming a problem of identity questioning and Croatian politics in a different context, which causes controversy in part of the Montenegrin media. Usually with reference to Croatian historical oaths for Montenegrin territory. The issue of the return of the property confiscated in 1990 to the Croatian community in Tivat and in the area of Dobrota (51 families requested the return by court) thus becomes almost the cornerstone of the Croatian policy towards Montenegro's European path. There is speculation about the likely obstructions of Zagreb. Namely, the diplomatic note that was sent to Podgorica as an appeal to finally resolve the issue of confiscated

property is presented as a Croatian expansionist policy that is aimed at no less but the annexation of the Bay of Kotor.²³ The author wonders "whether Zagreb's diplomatic note is just a formal issue of property or the first step towards taking over the Bay of Kotor", adding that it is "a test of Montenegrin sovereignty and how far it is willing to go in this geopolitical maneuver in the Adriatic". In support of these constructions about the "Bay of Saints, as they call Boka", the visit of the Minister of Croatian Veterans' Affairs, Tomo Medved, to the Cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor, is cited when he quoted Alojzije Stepinac, a controversial priest from the time of the Independent State of Croatia, who claimed that every stone in Boka speaks Croatian". The Republic of Croatia is marked as one of the EU countries that will link this issue with Chapter 23 on fundamental human rights, which Montenegro will not close unless Zagreb obtains concessions, in which the author(s) of course see the legacy of the Independent State of Croatia.

The same things occur when one is writing and talking about sports and entertainment. Referring to the successes of the Croatian national handball team at the recent European Championship, it is again claimed in the form of news-commentary: "The Croatian and world public has once again received confirmation that behind sporting successes and seemingly harmless celebrations, the real ideological matrix that has been permeating part of the political and social scene in Croatia for decades is becoming more evident. The celebration of the Croatian national handball team's placement in the semi-finals of the European Championship turned into an open political and ideological

demonstration – with a song that unequivocally celebrates the Ustasha narrative."²⁴ "In the locker room, after the match, the handball players sang the song "Bijeli golubovi (White pigeons)" by Marko Perković Thompson, a composition that has long been recognized by the public as a symbolic homage to the Ustasha liquidated after World War II near Bleiburg. It is a song in which, through the religious and pathetic symbolism of white pigeons, a white cross and a sacrifice for the home, members of the defeated Ustasha army are directly rehabilitated."

According to the well-established pattern, the rule of second opinion is circumvented in order for the interpretation to be framed by more subjective information about the controversies associated with the popular Croatian performer. In no part of this hybrid of news-commentary is there an attempt to offer or find an interlocutor who would interpret the song in categories such as patriotic enthusiasm in which white pigeons symbolize innocent victims in the Homeland War, and that the motif of the dove in the Christian tradition emphasizes peace, innocence, spirituality. Why can't the main messages be about honor, sadness, loss, hope, faith and simply patriotism? However, for the authors, there is no dilemma that the rehabilitation of the Ustasha and the Independent State of Croatia is at work again through a combat march. There are no indications that the song could be marked as emotional and memorial, and that there are no reflections on mobilization in it. The messages are clear – the continuity of attitudes towards the Independent State of Croatia, that is, the current government approves and encourages this narrative.

If we move away from the interpretations of pop performances and the interpretation of the meaning of Thompson's songs, it is certainly worth reviewing the treatment of some subcultural phenomena such as the behavior of fan groups. The match between the football teams of Montenegro and Croatia as part of the qualifications for the upcoming World Cup, i.e., the behavior of Croatian fans, was the subject of numerous media reactions and analyses.

Socialist People's Party (SNP) MP Slađana Kaluđerović said she strongly condemns "the fascist messages and Ustasha chants of some Croatian fans, which occurred during the match in Montenegro".²⁵ She believes that these are "premeditated acts of hatred that go beyond the sports environment and represent a serious warning to society." According to her categorical statement, the message was not only addressed to football players or fans, but to all citizens of Montenegro: "This is a message addressed to the people of Montenegro and that is why we must protect our national dignity and the values on which our society rests.

The EU did not fare better in the comments. It is pointed out that Croatian fans staged scandalous and shameful scenes at the Podgorica City Stadium. About 550 visiting fans, who arrived in Podgorica, openly chanted "Kill the Serb", and then continued with the insults, singing "Whoever doesn't jump is Orthodox".²⁶ "This kind of hate speech, inciting national and religious intolerance and brutal provocation of the domestic audience took place in front of thousands of people, in live broadcast, in front of cameras and official

representatives of UEFA. And as so many times before, without a single public condemnation from Brussels." This statement's completion is reinforced by the suggestion of double standards of the Union, "Because when even the slightest incident occurs in Montenegro, when someone sings the wrong song or an "undesirable" flag is flown – half of Europe reacts. But when thousands of fans from a European Union member state in the center of Podgorica chant "Kill the Serb" and insult the Orthodox, then all the institutions that normally care about hate speech and European norms suddenly fall silent."

Although the comment of the Borba portal refers to a real incident, it is formulated in a propagandist and selective way. During the match between Montenegro and Croatia in Podgorica in 2025, part of the Croatian fans really chanted "Kill the Serb" and "Whoever doesn't jump is Orthodox", which was reported by numerous media. However, according to official statements, the Montenegrin police launched an investigation in cooperation with the Croatian authorities in order to identify those responsible. Therefore, it is not true that "all institutions fall silent" or that "no one reacted". There were reactions from the state and part of the public. It is justified to claim that this is a generalization of the behavior of some of the more extreme fans to "thousands of fans from the EU", as well as the "coordinated silence of half of Europe", without concrete evidence. The commentary avoids indicating the distinction between an incident of hate speech (serious and deserving of condemnation) and the claim that there is an organized European double standard. This is an unobjective and biased political interpretation, without relying on verifiable facts. The claim of

"hypocrisy of Europe" therefore belongs to the arsenal of political spins.

How deep and in what way a fan incident can slip into history is shown by the example of the comments of Spasoje Tomić, a Montenegrin political activist and commentator who publicly declares himself as a "Serbian politician from Montenegro", affiliated with the parties of the Serbian national bloc in Montenegro, especially with the New Serb Democracy, and later with the Free Montenegro movement. He says "when I hear what Croatian fans are chanting in the stands, from primitive curses to that poor "Kill the Serb", one thought immediately comes to mind: who is so afraid of the Serbian name and why should he have to shout with all his might, as if it would cover all his fears and complexes."²⁷

Then he continues, "we Serbs have survived a lot throughout history — camps, prosecutions and attacks by the great and powerful. But what our people experienced in Jasenovac was not football, but a death factory, there was no cheering, but screaming. And when I hear some young heads playing with fire today, spreading chauvinism and hatred and thinking that this is some kind of heroism, I just think, poor country that teaches young people to celebrate crime instead of condemning it." In the next sentence, he builds on the "Lora case" by stating that it is "a place where people were tortured in the nineties just because they were Serbs. And still, someone shouts that they are the victims, and we are the aggressors. But we are used to it. We are used to not being loved. We are used to being blamed. But they are not yet used to not being

able to break us. Because it is well known, when Serbs cheer, they cheer for their own, not for someone else's. When we sing, we sing out of spite, but also out of love," Tomić concludes.

First, it should be pointed out, and what Tomić is bypassing, Croatian courts have sentenced members of the military police who were participants in these terrible events in Lora. In addition, Tomić's rhetoric is an emotional-political speech aimed at strengthening the sense of group identity and resistance, and it is difficult to escape the impression that it is aimed at emphasizing interethnic tensions. It is not illegitimate to recall the crimes against Serbs, but it is extremely fraudulent to build evidence that "everyone is against the Serbs" based on this, or that other nations were less victims. Historically, Serbia and the Yugoslav People's Army played a key role in the wars of the 1990s, and numerous crimes related to Serb forces were judged internationally.

Montenegrin media whose editorial policy prefers attitudes favorable to the current policy of official Belgrade, do not perceive the Republic of Croatia as a pro-European, good-neighborly state oriented towards diplomatic resolution of open issues. Instead, wherever possible, the media forces an ideological connection with the Independent State of Croatia from the time of the World War II, the obstruction of official Zagreb when it comes to the European path of Montenegro or active participation in the destabilization of political conditions in neighboring countries. In the journalistic sense, the writings are completely indefinite in terms of genre, there are no formats - news, report,

commentary or reportage, but most of the writings are a mixture of everything within these postulates. There is no need for a second opinion, and often the texts are marked by factual implausibility. There is no informative character and the concentration on the propaganda promotion of anti-Croatian attitudes is quite evident.

4.3. Institutions of Croatia as promoters of the Ustasha movement and destabilization of political and security conditions in neighboring countries

In one text by Savo Štrbac, which in terms of genre belongs to the commentary²⁸, he talks about the political scene of the Republic of Croatia, more precisely about the time after the last parliamentary elections when the HDZ formed a ruling majority with the Homeland Movement (DP), a party that presents its policies as patriotic-right-conservative. Štrbac begins the text by recalling the holding of a round table entitled "A Scientific Approach to the Research of Jasenovac Victims" in the Croatian Parliament, organized by the Domino Party's parliamentary group. The main message of Štrbac's comment treats "philo-Ustasha" (Ustasha loving) as attitudes immanent to the HDZ party, which distances itself from Pavelić's regime using mimicry. It is built into its value system, which can be seen from the way the parliamentary majority was formed in the current convocation. "HDZ and DP, as true Balkan brothers, argued fiercely, cursed and insulted each other. Plenković was the most frequent target of DP members, who, among other things, they reproached for being a child of communism and for not spending a single day in the Homeland War, which is true. Plenković responded equally," writes Štrbac and

continues, "However, honor is honor, and power is power, so, when Plenković did not have the hands to form a parliamentary majority, he reconciled with his renegade brothers and formed a parliamentary majority and a government with them, in return giving them three ministries, a dozen state secretaries and two vice-presidential posts, and because of their love expelled Serbs from the SDSS. who held his majority in the previous two mandates, reduced subsidies to the weekly "Novosti" of Pupovac's Serb National Council (SNV), agreeing to the adoption of a new Cemeteries Act, which will enable the removal of undesirable tombstones from Croatian soil and the establishment of a museum of the victims of communism."

From his commentary, he implies that this would only be possible if the Prime Minister was not bound by a kind of party code according to which there is no political damage if the government is formed (moreover, it is desirable) with those parties and politicians who consider it completely legitimate to refer to the Independent State of Croatia and call for a revisionist approach to that period of contemporary Croatian history, while denying the crimes that were committed. In addition, Štrbac says, the Croatian state abundantly finances all "scientific" research that diminishes or denies the victims of Jasenovac, even though the preamble of the Croatian constitution says that the state is founded on anti-fascism. Therefore, the only thing left for the Serbs to do is to fight against such quasi-scientific research with "real science", papers and doctorates from Belgrade. Once again, we see the metaphor of an international conspiracy and the prevention of the fight against neo-fascists in the neighborhood, which is now, as

he points out, "in the hands of young objective Serbian scientists". However, given that these are comments expressing well-known views that do not bring anything new and original, they should be left to the right of one's own opinion, whatever it may be, although it must not be forgotten that these comments can significantly shape public opinion in the direction of deterioration of international relations.

Certainly, much more attention is drawn when a text with analytical-informative pretensions begins with the sentence "The foreign policy of official Zagreb has only one goal – the state weakening of the Republic of Serbia and keeping the Serbian people in a permanent subordinate position". The text is continued: "The achievement of this goal also conditions Croatia's overall diplomacy, defining international partners and instigating certain national and political communities from the region against official Belgrade and the Serbian people as a whole. This was the case from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, through Nazi Germany to NATO. The main partners in this dishonest business today are Sarajevo and Pristina, whose hatred and complexes towards Serbia cannot and will not be hidden," says an anonymous author hidden behind an editorial signature.²⁹ In the further part of the "analysis", former Montenegrin President Milo Đukanović is marked as a key figure who, in conjunction with Zagreb, destabilized the Montenegrin political being and turned Podgorica towards Western integrations and organizations, all with the aim of annulling Serbian national sentiment. This is a common stereotypical observation that does not problematize the responsibility of the Serbian political leadership in the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and, of

course, the analysis does not offer any tangible argumentation, except for discrediting Đukanović on the basis of excerpts from one of his interviews on HRT (Croatian Radio Television). The text ends with a review of the unveiling of the already mentioned memorial plaque in Morinje, but only as an occasion for a completely mundane defamation of Gordan Grlić Radman and Tomo Medved, the Croatian head of diplomacy and minister of veterans.³⁰

Croatian policy is presented as if it were directed against Serbia in a geostrategic manner. Albania and Kosovo have a significant role in this alliance, so the Borba portal quotes Milorad Stupar, a retired major general of the Yugoslav Army and the Armed Forces of Serbia and Montenegro, one of the founders and the first commander of the 72nd Special Operations Brigade.³¹ Namely, Stupar considers the agreements on military cooperation between Croatia, Albania and Kosovo as something that has a "public and covert dimension". He points out that Croatia and Albania are full members of NATO, and that their connection with Pristina, at least through joint exercises and security agreements, has a broader political meaning. "It is problematic that two members of the Alliance recognize the so-called Kosovo Army, although it does not exist in the formal and legal sense even according to the documents adopted by the institutions in Pristina," Stupar said. He points out that through the intensification of joint activities and the conduct of military exercises according to NATO standards, attempts are being made to "gradually integrate Kosovo's security structures into the Euro-Atlantic framework, without formal membership. All exercises are conducted according to NATO procedures and standards,

which speaks of the direction in which things are going." The retired general assesses, "such messages further complicate the security situation in the Western Balkans, where every initiative in the field of defense and military cooperation has broader geopolitical implications and is inevitably viewed through the prism of great power relations and regional tensions."

However, despite his claim that in international relations almost every military agreement has several levels: public (training, interoperability, stability), but also an implicit political signal, is not entirely problematic, Stupar fails to add that this does not inherently mean a secret military alliance or a plan against a third party. The comment appeals to a part of the public in Serbia who see it as pressure or strategic encompassment of Serbia. Stupar's statement is more of a geopolitical interpretation from a Serbian security perspective than an impartial analysis.

The IN4S portal, through an article published by the Zagreb-based Jutarnji list from the pages of Deutsche Welle radio, also "interprets" the security and geopolitical situation in the Western Balkans.³² Montenegrin portal under the title "Another German-Croatian offensive against Serbia" points out that Jutarnji list titled the article "Serbia could burn this Saturday", which "once again shows the coordinated German-Croatian partnership in media efforts to weaken Serbia and create an image of alleged destabilization in the region,". The commentary is not signed, and the interlocutor is not named. Given that the text mentions the words "last chance" and "now or never", and the

subtitle emphasizes that all eyes are on Novi Sad, the author believes that "such language is not accidental: it is a carefully constructed media narrative that fits into a broader pattern of political and psychological pressure on Serbia". It goes on to say, "such media appearances are reminiscent of some dark historical parallels. The old allies from the time of Hitler and Pavelić are once again on a joint mission against the Serbs and Serbia." The conclusion follows, "the influence of the German media, which often takes on a more aggressive, propaganda form through Croatian channels, clearly shows that a strategic alliance aimed at weakening the Serbian state and its national interests continues to be nurtured. The goal is clear — to present Serbia as a source of instability, in order to justify pressure and impose foreign policy decisions."

This article does not consider the plurality of the media. The Croatian media space, as already emphasized, is not unique. There are pro-Western, national-conservative, liberal and regionally oriented media, often with mutually contradictory narratives about Serbia. Based on the title of an article of a newspaper, the claim that there is a coordinated "strategic alliance aimed at weakening the Serbian state" would require at least one or two expert reviews by competent interlocutors, to be able to speak of media correctness instead of inept and banal manipulation. Justified criticism of the authorities in Serbia often comes due to specific issues: relations with Kosovo, ties with Russia, the state of democracy, media freedom, or regional politics.

The Borba portal also reports the observations of another Đukanović, lawyer Vladimir, who assures people on social networks that the student protests in Serbia are managed by the Croatian intelligence system. He presents, *"observations regarding the reasons why the accounts of fake students in the blockade were registered on X applications that were downloaded from the Croatian Apple store and how the Croatian intelligence structure was engaged to create total chaos in the country through social networks."* He believes that "Croats have been working on these projects for years and it is a huge problem that our state is not doing anything in this field, both to protect itself and to be more offensive towards those who do evil to us through the networks," Đukanović wrote.³³ So, it is the usual media manipulation where a short statement is presented in graphically lavish equipment with a large picture of the author and a link to a wider conversation published on social networks. The institutions of the national security system of the Republic of Croatia are accused of destabilizing the security and political situation in Serbia.

The Borba portal also dedicated a whole series of posts in which the Montenegrin public suggests that there is no doubt that the student protests in neighboring Serbia fit into the official Croatian policy of destabilizing the neighborhood and violating Belgrade's digital sovereignty. In an article by an unsigned author entitled, *Fake student profiles are being checked in Serbia – the spread of misinformation comes from the region?*³⁴ "So far, there is no official confirmation, but interlocutors warn that this is another in a series of operations that use social networks to create a false impression of a mass student

*movement or a coordinated rebellion, although it later turns out that the accounts were run from different centers in the region. The institutions are analyzing digital traces and communication patterns to determine who is behind these digital platforms and whether they are being used for the organized spread of disinformation in Serbia. Only a day later, the headline followed, Shocking Discovery: Regional Network from Croatia Coordinated Accounts to Destabilize Serbia!.*³⁵ "The discovery that multiple accounts posing as student organizations in Serbia are technically connected through the Croatia App Store, has opened up a whole new dimension to the story of blockades, protests and attempts to destabilize Serbia. This discovery, which is visible in the "About this account" section on Platform X, shows that accounts that claimed to be the voice of Serbian students may actually be run from another country."

Everything that mentioned in this text can be boiled down to three conclusions: *"That Serbia is exposed to organized digital operations from the region, that social networks have become the greatest risk to internal stability and that Serbia's security system is forced to react."* It is almost superfluous to note that these conclusions are not followed by any comment or interlocutor whose references would indicate the relevance of such claims.

In the presented examples, Croatian official policy is discredited through the so-called third party, but the Borba portal also deals with the internal political situation in Montenegro as a medium for discrediting official Zagreb. Thus, on the day of the commemoration of

the military police operation Storm, Radan Nikolić, director of the Montenegrin Association of War Veterans of 90s, posted on that portal, who states that he *"strongly condemns the Croatian criminal military-political action of ethnic cleansing of Storm, carried out against the Krajina Serbs in 1995"*. He condemns *"any form of participation of official Montenegro in the celebration of this event in Croatia, which also happened this year with the participation of the Montenegrin representative (August 5, 2025)"*. However, he considers it commendable that there were no representatives of Montenegrin military structures at the mentioned celebration of the 30th anniversary of Operation Storm.³⁶ According to him, this was followed by a protest note from the Republic of Croatia to Montenegro over the decision of the Montenegrin Ministry of Defense to make badges with the image of the training ship Jadran with the announcement of a "detailed analysis of the overall military succession", according to which Montenegro allegedly owes Croatia more than two billion US dollars". Furthermore, moving away from succession, Nikolić also refers to the 2006 Agreement on Cooperation and Prosecution of Perpetrators of War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide by the Montenegrin Military State Prosecutor's Office and the State Attorney's Office of Croatia, signed by state prosecutors Vesna Medenica and Mladen Bajić, i.e., on amendments to that agreement. *"We believe that this agreement is not only discriminatory because it does not include Montenegrin citizens – victims of war crimes committed by Croatian citizens, but it is also a criminal offense of complicity of the signatories of the agreement in the cover-up of war crimes and, above all, a national disgrace,"* Nikolić said.

Namely, with the remark that *"Croatia will not easily give up on the subjugation of Montenegro, which is the achievement of the policies of the former government of Milo Đukanović, but also the inaction of the current government, which is evident by the obstruction of changes to the agreement"*. He reminds that *"on the initiative of the Association of War Veterans of 90s to amend the said agreement, the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro (the Ombudsman), in his opinion No. 698/22 of 1 October 2024, recommended that the VDT (state attorney) proceed with the amendment of the agreement without delay, in such a way that it will "ensure that the provisions of the agreement also apply to Montenegrin citizens against whom war crimes were committed by Croatian citizens, and that within 30 days from the date of receipt of the opinion, the VDT submits to the Ombudsman a report on the actions and measures taken in order to implement the recommendations."*

Therefore, it is noticeable that the pro-Serbian media in Montenegro most often present Croatian policy towards the countries of the Western Balkans through established stereotypes. The most common interpretation is that the Republic of Croatia uses its membership in the EU and NATO to achieve political influence in the region and impose its own interpretation of the wars of the 1990s. These media often claim that Zagreb acts as a "mentor" towards the countries of the region, especially towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. Another common motive is the claim that Croatian diplomacy is trying to: isolate Serbia internationally, increase pressure on the issue of war responsibility, strengthen pro-Western and anti-Russian policies in the

region, limit Belgrade's political influence in neighboring countries. Well-founded criticism of Belgrade is often interpreted as part of a broader "anti-Serb policy", rather than as standard diplomatic conflicts or simply differences in interests. When it comes to journalistic treatments of these narratives, one may notice a large dose of unprofessionalism and bias, as well as genre inconsistency. This is the reason a large part of the content can be counted as manipulative pamphlets, and by no means a serious treatment of certain sensitive topics.

4.4. Personal discrediting of Croatian and Montenegrin politicians who act from different positions

The meaning of personal name-calling and discrediting is always a part of the wider context already described, and in their sense, they do not differ too much from the previous examples. Direct attacks on a person from political life are more in function of, one could say, a sort of added value in strengthening the views represented by a certain medium. A short post by Ana Brnabić on social networks is reported by the portal Borba³⁷ entitled, "Brnabić: Picula finally admitted that he supports blockades because they pursue an anti-Serbian policy", firstly deals with opposition leader Borko Stefanović, claiming that President Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) are pursuing a policy of national interests and adds: *"Your Tonino Picula has finally admitted that Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and the SNS are to blame because we are pursuing a pro-Serbian policy. We knew before, but now it's official – all of you blockers are supported by the same Picula because you pursue a different, anti-Serbian policy. Thank you very*

much, goodbye," Brnabić wrote on the X network, and the editors of the portal lavishly furnished the text. Thus, the equipment of this conveyed thought of the Speaker of the Assembly of Serbia, the title, the photograph, the graphic highlighting and the emotionally intoned frames shows that the editorial processing is not informative but intensifying, the goal was not only to convey the statement, but to enhance its emotional and political effect. From a value point of view, such equipping means implicit agreement with the narrative, a sensationalist approach, intensification of conflicts and identity divisions. Thus, it can be noted that the distance between the editorial board and political propaganda is decreasing.

And as for Ana Brnabić's statement itself, it is a model example of political-polarizing rhetoric. Political dissidents are portrayed as "anti-Serbian" and thus introduced into the space of questioning national loyalty. The purpose is to delegitimize them because if someone is labelled as "anti-Serbian", his arguments should no longer be seriously considered. Picula was assigned the role of "external enemy" or "external confirmation". The message implies that even a Croatian politician admits that the opposition is against Serbia. This serves to mobilize domestic audiences and reinforce the narrative that protests or "blockades" are linked to external centers of power. In addition, "your Tonino Picula" is an ironic expression that symbolically connects the interlocutors with the "other side", as it can be in everyday communication "thank you very much, goodbye", as an ending is a kind of mockery.

Picula's political activities are also the subject of the IN4S portal, which creates an analysis of some of his public observations on the current political situation in Serbia.³⁸ It is stated that "at a time when the political scene in Europe is once again in turmoil, Croatian MP Tonino Picula has once again used the opportunity to, in his recognizable style, send harsh and not at all well-intentioned messages to the detriment of Serbia. Under the guise of "analytics" and "European values", Picula builds an image of a politician who almost never misses an opportunity to criticize Belgrade. Furthermore, the unsigned author says "Picula has expressed similar views on several occasions before: Serbia is "simulating" the European path, the government in Belgrade acts through the control of the media and institutions, there is a need for more pressure from the European Union. In his speeches, he often insists on the thesis that financial pressure is the only language that the Serbian leadership understands. Such rhetoric, however, is increasingly more like a political template than an objective analysis."

At the end of the analysis, it is concluded, "in this sense, Picula's statements seem to be part of a broader political approach in which Serbia is viewed through the prism of the problem, and not as a partner — which certainly does not contribute to the stability of the region, nor to the dialogue that is often declaratively advocated. In the end, the impression remains that the Croatian MEP, instead of participating in a constructive debate, continues to play an already familiar role — the role of a vocal critic who, it seems, can't wait for a new reason to put Serbia in a negative context."

This text is somewhat more moderate and sophisticated than the banal confrontational statements of Ana Brnabić, but it is still extremely value colored. With a diplomatic tone, it tries to present the political judgement as more credible, but as "a loud critic who can't wait for a new reason to put Serbia in a negative context", Picula's work is taken out of the analytical discourse and attributed a malicious motive and political character to it. From a value point of view, the text personalizes the political conflict, suggests that critical thinking about the current situation in Serbia is ideologically motivated and thus delegitimizes the critical position. In terms of the media, this is an example of the commentator's shaping of perception as a neutral analysis, but in fact it directs the reader towards a certain political conclusion about Tonino Picula and the relations between Croatia and Serbia.

The Montenegrin media are also inspired by the Croatian MEP Tomislav Sokol. Under the title *Sokol calls for a "cordon sanitaire" around Serbia: Croatia's new attack on the entire Serbian people*, IN4S comments on his statements with accompanying remarks, usually by an unnamed author.³⁹ *"When a European official, Tomislav Sokol, says without hesitation that a "cordon sanitaire" should be created around Serbia in order to limit religious Serbian politics, then it is clear that this is an open call for the isolation of the entire nation and state. Such vocabulary, which is reminiscent of some dark times of European history, hardly has anything to do with the values that these same politicians often refer to,"* the text stresses. It follows, *"it is even more problematic that it does not stop at the political level, but also the state*

and the whole society are put on the same level. When it is said that the entire Serbian society is a problem, it is no longer a criticism of the government – it is a stigmatization of the people." In conclusion, *"And herein lies the point: when such rhetoric is repeated long enough, it ceases to be a scandal and becomes an accepted pattern. That is why such statements should not be seen as isolated outbursts, but as part of a broader political and media environment in which the anti-Serb narrative has long been normalized."*

The author's strategy is quite clear - an engaged commentary on the normalization of discriminatory discourse. The problem arises when the focus expands from individual statement to social context. An anti-Serbian narrative is being re-established, which does not belong to an individual case, but is an element of a broader culture of communication. This implies that the problem is not only in the individuals who express certain views, but in the media and political space that tolerates or reproduces them, which again contains a "conspiracy code" without questioning the validity of the criticism. Given that this is an analytical commentary, it would be advisable for the public to know who stands behind the article, and if this is not already the case, it would be advisable to have an appointed expert interlocutor, which is also missing here.

Personal discredits also reach into the field of culture. *"After the announcement that the Government of Montenegro will allocate 17 million in compensation for Croatian prisoners who were imprisoned in the Montenegrin camp Morinj, the question of what happened with*

the prisoners of the notorious Lora in Split has been reopened in the public. Montenegro has forgotten about them, but they are the ones who still remember everything they survived and experienced there. This is what Veselin Bojović, the only surviving detainee of Lora from the Nikšić-Šavnica group, whose other fourteen members died, says about this. The topic has been raised, but immediately following is: "Bojović, in his testimonies and memories of the notorious Lora, states that one woman was especially brutal to the prisoners. Her name is also mentioned in more than 20 other testimonies of Lora prisoners from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. And all of them, in the testimonies they gave before the Croatian prosecutor's office, mark a woman they called a monster, and who actively participated in their exhaustive and daily torture. Her name is Tanja Belobrajdić, during the period of Lora camp, from 1992, named Tanja Dujić, a journalist who was a member of the Croatian military police, married to Tomislav Dujić, the commander of the Lora camp, from whom she later divorced and retrieved her maiden name Belobrajdić.⁴⁰ The text meticulously presents the statements of witnesses under the full name and surname that Belobrajdić was not only not held responsible for her actions, but was also the winner of a literary award, and it is especially emphasized that "the Croatian Prosecutor's Office is conducting an investigation against her, but it is not yet known at what stage this procedure is". The text is written in a condemning tone. A few quotes should be added that would make this text more complete and objective.

According to publicly available information, there are no indications that Tanja Belobrajdić is being investigated or prosecuted by the Croatian judiciary. What is indisputable is that over the years there have been media accusations and polemics related to war crimes in the Lora military prison, including the claims of individual witnesses and journalistic articles. However, according to available reports, the State Attorney's Office had previously dismissed the criminal charges against her, which was mentioned by the media back in 2016. On the other hand, she has repeatedly sued the media for articles that linked her to the crimes in Lora, and in some cases, she has won lawsuits against publishers such as H-Alter and Novosti.

Montenegrin politicians from the top of the government can also be placed on the "blacklist". Speaking about the case of the request for the return of confiscated Croatian property⁴¹, it is said: "Croatia is once again demonstrating its colonial attitude towards Montenegro. According to Večernji list, Zagreb has sent a new diplomatic note to Podgorica in which it demands "resolving the issue of the returning the property to the Croatian community". In other words, Montenegro should obey and fulfill everything that Croatia demands, even if it is against its own interests and laws."

The culprit has been clearly detected: *"What is particularly worrying and what stands against common sense is the fact of complete silence in Podgorica. Neither the Prime Minister, Milojko Spajić, nor the President of the State, Jakov Milatović, nor the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ervin Ibrahimović, have the strength to reject Zagreb's*

blackmail clearly and decisively. This comes as just another of the many demands of the Republic of Croatia, which were raised, extremely interestingly, almost immediately after the vote on the Resolution on the genocides in Jasenovac, Dachau, and Mauthausen. In this way, Montenegro acts as a spineless state, ready to remain silent while its neighbors dictate its terms," the information concludes.

The term "colonial relationship" implies this is not about a diplomatic dispute, but a value judgment that claims that Croatia is acting towards Montenegro from a position of supremacy or tutelage. An ordinary bilateral dispute over the property of the Croatian community in the Bay of Kotor is raised to the symbolic level of the relationship of power and national dignity. Furthermore, from the perspective of Croatian foreign policy, which undoubtedly wants to work and promote good neighborly and friendly relations with Montenegro, such a note is a standard issue of the protection of minority rights and property restitution, which should be a common topic among the countries that emerged from the breakup of Yugoslavia, as in the spirit of diplomatic practices.

4.5. Conclusion

The review presents some of the most characteristic Montenegrin media coverage of certain political and social topics in relation to the Republic of Croatia. The analysis was made of ideological discourse of the media close to the politics of official Belgrade which express various doubts about Montenegrin statehood and national identity. In the media that thematize the domestic political scene (as well as relations with Croatia), numerous professional mistakes are shown,

such as mixing journalistic genres, unsigned texts with analytical ambitions and distorted, or simply inaccurate and unverified information.

This review analytically examines the role of the media in shaping political relations and public perception between Montenegro and Croatia. It tries not to look at media content in isolation but puts it in a broader ideological and political context, emphasizing the connection of a part of the Montenegrin media with narratives close to official Belgrade. It points to the fact that the media are not only informative but are also instruments of political influence and identity disputes.

It draws attention to the problem of professional standards in certain media. The mixing of journalistic genres, anonymous texts with a pronounced interpretative or propaganda tone, and the publication of unverified information seriously undermine the credibility of the media and the quality of public debate. Such patterns are particularly problematic when it comes to sensitive interstate relations and national identity topics, as they can further deepen political tensions and social divisions.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize the critical distance and the avoidance of generalization of the entire Montenegrin media scene. In addition to the media that act ideologically biased, there are undoubtedly professional journalists and editors in Montenegro that strive to maintain standards of objective and responsible reporting. That is why the analysis of media content should be argumentative,

methodologically clear and focused on concrete examples, to avoid becoming part of the politically colored discourse that it criticizes. This review is a reminder of how crucial media accountability, fact checking and a clear separation of facts and comments are for democratic culture and stable regional relations.

Certain patterns have been detected; topics are from contemporary Croatian history and the period of the Homeland War, where the deconstructionist approach dominates. All historical facts are refuted by untrue claims, various reinterpretations without any basis in verifiable sources or based on unreliable ones. Only one opinion or a very limited number of so-called supporters were put forward to present the "real truth". When it comes to the institutions of the Republic of Croatia, a defamatory approach is dominant using identical methodology, an insufficient number of journalistic sources or opinions of the other side, fabrication, and inconsistent commentary. There are no significant differences in approach when talking about Croatian politicians individually or those Montenegrin politicians and public officials who stand in the positions of alliance and good relations with the Republic of Croatia. This classification has an overlapping character because value constructions and attitudes do not appear in their pure form, but all three approaches are often mixed within just one.



5. Public opinion Research in Bosnia and Herzegovina

For the purpose of empirical examination of the attitudes of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the process of European integration and the perception of the role of the Republic of Croatia in this process, quantitative research was conducted using a questionnaire. The research was focused on the identification of social and political factors that structure support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union, as well as on the analysis of how citizens perceive the role of the Republic of Croatia as a neighboring country and a member of the European Union in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina's European path. The use of the questionnaire enabled the collection of comparable data at the level of the entire sample, as well as statistical testing of differences between different social groups. A total of 536

respondents participated in the research, which provided a sufficient empirical basis for the application of inferential statistical procedures. The sample structure included respondents with different sociodemographic characteristics, including gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, place of residence, political orientation, and entity affiliation. Such a structure enabled the analysis of potential differences in the perception of the European Union and the Republic of Croatia between different social groups.

The questionnaire was structured in several thematic units. The first part included sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education, ethnicity, place of residence, political orientation and entity of residence). The second part was focused on attitudes towards Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union. The third part contained a series of statements that measured the perception of the role of the Republic of Croatia in the process of European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Attitudes in this part were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where respondents expressed the level of agreement with individual statements. The final part of the questionnaire included questions about information sources, media perception and level of information about European integration, as well as one open question that allowed respondents additional qualitative commentary.

The analysis of the collected data was conducted by using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics were used to show the basic characteristics of the

sample and the distribution of answers to individual questions, including frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means and standard deviations. However, given the research goal of identifying social patterns in the perception of European integration, the analysis was not limited exclusively to the descriptive presentation of data.

To test the significance of differences between social groups, various inferential statistical methods were applied. For examining differences in variables that are categorical, chi-squares were used, while t-tests for independent samples were used to compare the mean values between the two groups. For the analysis of differences between several groups, a One Factor Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used, with subsequent post-hoc tests to more accurately identify the differences between individual groups. In addition to testing statistical significance, effect size measures (Cramér V, Cohen's d and Eta squared) were also calculated, which enabled the estimation of the actual strength of the determined differences.

To further analyze the structure of attitudes towards the Republic of Croatia, a composite scale of perception of the Republic of Croatia was constructed from several individual statements. Its internal consistency was verified by Cronbach's alpha measure of reliability. The scale constructed in this way enabled the further application of multivariate statistical procedures, including linear regression analysis, which examined which sociodemographic variables significantly contribute to the explanation of the overall perception of the Republic of Croatia in the context of the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This combined analytical approach enables not only a descriptive presentation of citizens' attitudes, but also the identification of structural patterns of political perceptions, which places the research in a broader framework of public opinion analysis on European integration and regional political relations.

5.1. Description of the characteristics of the sample

A total of **536 respondents** participated in the research, which represents a large enough sample to conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The sample includes respondents of different sociodemographic characteristics, which enabled the examination of potential differences in attitudes towards the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding key social and political variables. Regarding **the gender structure of the sample**, women predominate, as 323 (60.3%) participated in the study, while there were 208 men (38.8%). One respondent (0.2%) stated that they did not want to answer the question about gender, while for four respondents (0.7%) there was no data. This distribution indicates a slight disproportion in favor of female respondents, which is a relatively common occurrence in surveys of social attitudes, especially when the research is based on the voluntary participation of respondents.

Category	n	%
Female	323	60.3
Male	208	38.8
Missing answer	4	0.7
I do not want to answer	1	0.2

According to **the age structure**, the most represented group in the sample consists of younger respondents in the age range from 18 to 24 years, who make up 36.8% of the total sample. The age group from 25 to 34 years follows with a share of 19.6%, while older age groups are represented in a smaller share. The least represented are respondents over 65 years of age, who make up 3.5% of the sample. Such an age structure indicates a relatively more pronounced representation of younger generations, which is important to consider when interpreting the results, especially in the context of attitudes towards European integration, for which research often shows generational differences.

Category	n	%
18-24	197	36.8
25-34	105	19.6
35-44	102	19
45-54	71	13.2
55-64	42	7.8
65 +	19	3.5

In terms of **ethnicity**, the sample reflects the plural ethnic structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The most represented respondents are those

who identify themselves as **Croats** (43.5%), followed by **Bosniaks** (27.1%) and **Serbs** (23.3%), while a smaller share of respondents declared themselves as **members of the other category** (2.4%). Although the distribution does not fully correspond to the ethnic structure of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it nevertheless allows for a comparative analysis of attitudes between the main ethnic groups, which is particularly relevant in the context of the country's political and institutional specificities.

Category	n	%
Croat	233	43.5
Bosniak	145	27.1
Serb	125	23.3
I do not want to answer	19	3.5
Other	13	2.4
Missing answer	1	0.2

According to **the level of education**, the largest part of the respondents has completed **higher education** (college or university), which makes up 45.5% of the sample, followed by a group of respondents with a **high school diploma** (39.9%), while the share of respondents with **primary education or lower** is relatively small and amounts to 1.5%. This educational structure of the sample indicates a relatively high proportion of more educated respondents, which is also a common pattern in surveys in which participation depends on the personal motivation of the respondents.

Category	n	%
College/University	244	45.5
High School	214	39.9
Postgraduate Education or Higher	70	13.1
Elementary School or Lower	8	1.5

Regarding **the place of residence**, most of the respondents live in **urban areas**. 64.6% of respondents live in cities, while 26.7% state that they live in **smaller urban areas** and 8.2% in **rural areas**. This distribution indicates a dominant representation of the urban population in the sample, which may have some impact on the perception of European integration, as urban areas are often associated with greater exposure to political, economic, and social processes related to the European Union.

Category	n	%
City	346	64.6
Smaller urban area	143	26.6
Rural area	44	8.2
Missing answer	3	0.6

When it comes to **political orientation**, the majority of respondents state that they **cannot clearly classify themselves on the ideological spectrum** or do not want to answer this question (42.4%). Among those who declare themselves, most respondents identify as **right-oriented** (26.9%), followed by **centrist-oriented** (17.2%), while 12.9% of respondents declare themselves **left-oriented**. The high proportion of ideologically indeterminate respondents is in line with the

findings of other surveys of political attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a relatively weak identification with classical ideological categories is often recorded.

Category	N	%
Undefined/I do not want to answer	227	42.4
Right	144	26.9
Center	92	17.2
Left	69	12.9
Missing answer	4	0.6

Observed by **entity affiliation**, the largest number of respondents comes from **the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina** (66.4%), while 28.9% of respondents come from **Republika Srpska**. A smaller proportion of respondents come from **Brčko District**, which accounts for 1.5% of the sample. This variable is particularly relevant for the analysis of attitudes towards European integration, as the entity political context in Bosnia and Herzegovina often shapes different political discourses and perceptions of the European Union.

Category	n	%
Federation of BiH	356	66.4
Republika Srpska	155	28.9
I do not want to answer	16	3
Brčko District	8	1.5
Missing answer	1	0.2

In conclusion, the analysis of the characteristics of the sample shows certain disproportions in the representation of individual groups, which

seems important in the interpretation of the results. The sample is slightly more represented in younger and more educated groups, while most respondents live in urban areas. A considerable proportion of respondents are not clearly defined on the political spectrum, while ethnic and entity diversity makes it possible to examine attitudes among the main social and political groups.

5.2. Attitudes towards Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union

Given the previously presented sociodemographic characteristics of the sample, further analysis focuses on examining citizens' attitudes towards Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union. To the question **"To what extent do you support Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union?"** The results show a relatively high level of declarative support for this process. The majority of respondents report that **they are mostly in favor of accession** (33.4%), while 31.2% of respondents express **complete support for accession**. At the same time, 20% of respondents are **undecided**, while 10.6% are **mostly against accession** and 4.7% do are **completely against accession**. This distribution suggests the predominance of **a moderately positive perception of European integration**, with a level of indecision or reservation among some respondents, which indicates heterogeneity of attitudes and the need for a more detailed analysis of the factors that shape the perception of the EU.

The analysis of differences in the expression of support for accession to EU integration regarding demographic and socio-political issues was examined using chi-square tests for the purpose of examining the significance of differences in support for European integration.

Variable	r (categories)	c (EU category)	df	χ^2	p	Cramér V
Gender	3	5	8	8.66	.372	.090
Age	6	5	20	25.23	.193	.109
Ethnicity	5	5	16	49.52	<.001	.152
Education	4	5	12	26.83	.008	.129
Place of residence	3	5	8	9.39	.311	.094
Political orientation	4	5	12	34.67	<.001	.148
Entity of residence	4	5	12	45.81	<.001	.169

Legend:

r = number of categories of the predictor variable

c = number of categories of the dependent variable

df- degrees of freedom

χ^2 - the value of the chi square

p- significance value

Cramer V- effect size, guidelines (Cohen) .10 = small effect, .30 = medium, .50 = large

The results show that **ethnicity** has a statistically significant impact ($\chi^2 = 49.52$; $p < .001$; Cramér $V = .152$), with support and complete support being more pronounced among respondents of Croat and Bosniak ethnicity, while respondents of Serb ethnicity more often expressed indecision or a lower level of support. Similar differences were observed according to **the level of education**, where respondents with higher education on average show greater support, while respondents with lower education show greater reservation ($\chi^2 = 26.83$; $p = .008$; Cramér $V = .129$), which can be interpreted in the context of theoretical approaches that see education as a key resource for understanding complex political processes.

Differences are also recorded according to **political orientation** ($\chi^2 = 34.67$; $p < .001$; Cramér $V = .148$). On average, centrist and left-leaning respondents show higher support, while right-wing and ideologically undetermined respondents show lower levels of support or greater indecision. This finding confirms that the ideological framework functions as an important interpretative filter through which respondents evaluate political processes such as integration into the European Union. Finally, statistically significant differences were also found regarding **the entity of residence**. Respondents from the Federation of BiH on average show greater support for European integration, while respondents from Republika Srpska show greater reservations. Although the size of the effect is moderate, the result highlights the role of the institutional and political framework in shaping perceptions of the EU.

On the other hand, the analysis did not show statistically significant differences in attitudes towards European integration regarding **gender, age or place of residence**. This suggests that in this study, support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union cannot be **explained by generational differences or urban-rural divisions** but is primarily structured by political and identity factors such as ethnicity, political orientation, entity context, and level of education.

5.3. Perception of the Croatian role in the process of BiH integration in EU

After analyzing the general level of support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union, the next segment of the research is focused on the perception of the role of the Republic of Croatia in this process. This dimension is particularly relevant because the Republic of Croatia, as a neighboring country and a member of the European Union, represents one of the key political and institutional actors in the regional context of European integration.

The respondents were offered claims that assess Croatia as a dependable partner, a sincere supporter of BiH's membership in the EU, an actor that uses its position in the EU to help BiH, and a factor of stability and institutional cooperation in the region. The questions also covered the perception of Croatia's bias towards certain peoples in BiH, in order to observe different dimensions of perception.

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. The Republic of Croatia is a dependable partner of BiH in the process of European integration.	534	1	5	3.26	1.17
2. Croatia sincerely supports BiH's membership in the EU.	531	1	5	3.22	1.18
3. Croatia is using its position as an EU member to help BiH.	530	1	5	3.04	1.23
4. Croatia represents the interests of one people more than the whole of BiH.	535	1	5	3.58	1.21
5. Croatia contributes to stability and reconciliation in the region.	531	1	5	3.17	1.15
6. The cooperation between the institutions of the Republic of Croatia and BiH is effective.	535	1	5	2.99	1.13

Legend:

N- number of participants

Min- minimum score

Max- maximum score

Mean- arithmetic mean (average)

SD-standard deviation

Descriptive analysis of the responses shows that the perception of Croatia's role is **relatively heterogeneous**. While some respondents view Croatia as a potential partner in the process of European integration, a significant part of respondents express a neutral or vague attitude. This distribution of responses points to the fact that the perception of Croatia's role is not unambiguously formed in public opinion, but is shaped by the broader political, historical and identity context that characterizes relations between the two countries.

Particularly indicative is the relatively high share of respondents who take **a neutral or undecided position**, which may indicate that citizens have limited knowledge about specific political initiatives and diplomatic activities of the Republic of Croatia within the framework of the European policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such a finding can also be interpreted in the light of the broader literature on political awareness, according to which citizens often form attitudes on complex international issues based on fragmented or mediated information from the media. At the same time, a certain part of the respondents expresses skepticism towards the role of Croatia, which can be linked to political narratives that occasionally problematize Croat actions and priorities in BiH's internal politics.

5.4. Differences in the perception of Croatia regarding socio-demographic characteristics

To determine whether there are significant differences in the perception of the Republic of Croatia in the process of European integration, analyses were conducted to test the differences between the attitudes of respondents with regard to key sociodemographic variables. For variables measured on the Likert scale, parametric tests were applied. Gender differences were tested **with a t-test for independent samples**, while differences between multiple groups (age, education, ethnicity, entity, place of residence, and political orientation) were analyzed **using a single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA)**.

In addition to statistical significance, **the magnitude of the effect** (Cohen's d and eta-squared η^2) was also calculated. Subsequent post hoc testing using the Tukey post-hoc test showed which groups had statistically significant differences.

Variable	N Men	M Men	SD Men	N Women	M Women	SD Women	t(df)	p	Cohen d
P8 Dependable partner	206	3.12	1.14	323	3.36	1.18	- 2.37(527)	.018	0.21
P9 Sincere Support	204	3.03	1.15	322	3.34	1.19	- 2.91(443)	.004	0.26
P10 Croatia helps BiH	203	2.95	1.21	322	3.11	1.24	- 1.51(523)	.133	0.13
P11 Represents one people	207	3.71	1.24	323	3.51	1.18	1.91(528)	.057	0.17
P12 Stability of the region	205	3.04	1.15	321	3.25	1.14	- 2.01(524)	.045	0.18
P13 Cooperation between institutions	207	2.73	1.06	323	3.17	1.14	- 4.44(528)	<.001	0.40

The results show that the perception of the Republic of Croatia is not homogeneous among the respondents but is to some extent structured by sociodemographic and political characteristics. The most pronounced differentiating effects were noticed in **ethnicity, entity context and political orientation**, while differences by gender, age and place of residence were less pronounced.

5.4.1. Gender differences

T-test analysis shows that women on average express somewhat more positive assessment of the role of the Republic of Croatia compared to men. Statistically significant differences were recorded in the perception of Croatia as a dependable partner ($t(527) = -2.37, p = .018, d = 0.21$), sincere support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in the European Union ($t(443) = -2.91, p = .004, d = 0.26$), stabilization effect in the region ($t(524) = -2.01, p = .045, d = 0.18$) and the effectiveness of institutional cooperation ($t(528) = -4.44, p < .001, d = 0.40$). Although these differences are statistically significant, effect sizes indicate a relatively weak gender differentiation effect.

5.4.2. Generational differences

Variable	F(df)	P	η^2
P8 Dependable partner	4.11(5,523)	.001	.04
P9 Sincere Support	4.87(5,520)	<.001	.04
P10 Croatia helps BiH	5.96(5,519)	<.001	.05
P11 Represents one people	2.02(5,524)	.075	.02
P12 Stability of the region	4.07(5,520)	.001	.04
P13 Cooperation between institutions	6.34(5,524)	<.001	.06

A single-factor analysis of variance showed that age statistically significantly differentiates the perception of Croatia as a dependable partner, its sincere support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration, and the assessment of institutional cooperation between the two countries ($\eta^2 \approx .04-.06$). Post-hoc analysis shows that older

respondents (45+) express more positive attitudes in comparison to the youngest age group (18–25 years). Such a pattern can be interpreted in the context of different generational experiences of political transformations, and regional relations.

5.4.3. Education

The level of education showed a statistically significant, but relatively weak effect on the perception of the Republic of Croatia as a dependable partner and on the assessment of its support for the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina ($\eta^2 \approx .02-.03$).

Variable	F(df)	p	η^2
P8 Dependable partner	2.81(3,525)	.039	.02
P9 Sincere Support	3.12(3,522)	.025	.02
P10 Croatia helps BiH	3.88(3,521)	.009	.03
P11 Represents one people	1.02(3,526)	.384	.01
P12 Stability of the region	2.14(3,522)	.095	.02
P13 Cooperation between institutions	1.11(3,526)	.344	.01

Respondents with a higher level of education on average express slightly more positive attitudes, especially regarding the possibility of transferring institutional experience from the process of accession to the European Union.

5.4.4. Ethnicity

The most pronounced differences in the perception of the Republic of Croatia were recorded with regard to **the ethnicity of the respondents**. The analysis of variance showed statistically significant differences for all analyzed variables (P8–P13), with **mean effect sizes**.

Variable	F(df)	P	η^2
P8 Dependable partner	26.92(4,524)	<.001	.17
P9 Sincere Support	28.77(4,521)	<.001	.18
P10 Croatia helps BiH	24.91(4,520)	<.001	.16
P11 Represents one people	5.64(4,525)	<.001	.04
P12 Stability of the region	25.81(4,521)	<.001	.17
P13 Cooperation between institutions	18.92(4,525)	<.001	.13

The most pronounced differences were recorded in the perception of the Republic of Croatia as a dependable partner, $F(4,524) = 26.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$, and in the assessment of sincere support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in the European Union, $F(4,521) = 28.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. A similar pattern was observed in the perception of the stabilization effect of the Republic of Croatia in the regional context, $F(4,521) = 25.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$.

Post-hoc analysis has shown that respondents of Croatian nationality express **significantly more positive attitudes compared to respondents of Serbian nationality**, while respondents of Serbian nationality significantly more often perceive the Republic of Croatia as

biased towards certain political actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This finding confirms the thesis that political attitudes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are strongly influenced by identity divisions. The perception of international actors in such context often reflects internal political relations and collective identity interpretations.

5.4.5. Entity context

A similar pattern was seen in the analysis of differences regarding **the entity of residence of the respondents**. Respondents from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina statistically express significantly more positive attitudes towards the role of the Republic of Croatia compared to respondents from the Republika Srpska.

Variable	F(df)	P	η^2
P8 Dependable partner	19.55(3,525)	<,001	.10
P9 Sincere Support	19.81(3,522)	<,001	.10
P10 Croatia helps BiH	15.96(3,521)	<,001	.08
P11 Represents one people	1.92(3,526)	.125	.01
P12 Stability of the region	22.37(3,522)	<,001	.11
P13 Cooperation between institutions	31.45(3,526)	<,001	.15

Statistically significant differences were recorded for majority of the analyzed dimensions of perception ($\eta^2 \approx .08-.15$), which confirms the importance of the institutional and political context in shaping the perception of international relations. The single-factor analysis of variance showed that the place of residence in most cases does not

differentiate the respondents' attitudes about the role of the Republic of Croatia and EU integration.

The results suggest that the geographical context has a limited impact on the perception of the Republic of Croatia and EU integration, with differences appearing primarily in the domain of perception of political bias.

Variable	F(df)	P	η^2
P8 Dependable partner	1.24(2,527)	.290	.01
P9 Sincere Support	2.08(2,524)	.126	.02
P10 Croatia helps BiH	1.52(2,523)	.220	.01
P11 Represents one people	4.23(2,528)	.015	.02
P12 Stability of the region	1.01(2,524)	.364	.01
P13 Cooperation between institutions	1.32(2,528)	.268	.01

5.4.6. Political orientation

Variable	F(df)	P	η^2
P8 Dependable partner	9.87(3,525)	<,001	.05
P9 Sincere Support	11.42(3,522)	<,001	.06
P10 Croatia helps BiH	16.59(3,521)	<,001	.09
P11 Represents one people	6.72(3,526)	<,001	.04
P12 Stability of the region	10.98(3,522)	<,001	.06
P13 Cooperation between institutions	11.89(3,526)	<,001	.06

Political orientation also represents a significant differentiating factor in the perception of the Republic of Croatia. The analysis of variance

showed statistically significant differences for all analyzed dimensions of perception ($\eta^2 \approx .04\text{--}.09$). Respondents who ideologically position themselves on the left side of the political spectrum or in the political center express more positive assessments of the role of the Republic of Croatia, while right-oriented respondents more often express skepticism towards its political role.

5.5. Composite measure of perception of the Republic of Croatia

To obtain a unified measure of the overall perception of the Republic of Croatia, a composite scale was constructed that includes all six statements (P8–P13). The scale was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the included items, with the claim of Croatia's bias previously reversed to point all items in the same interpretive direction. Internal consistency analysis showed **good reliability of the scale (Cronbach $\alpha = .82$)**, which confirms that the included items measure a common latent construct of perception of the Republic of Croatia. Item–total correlations ranged from $r = .52$ to $r = .76$, which further confirms the constructive homogeneity of the scale. The average value of the composite measure was **$M = 3.16$ ($SD = 0.86$)**, which indicates a **moderately positive, but heterogeneous attitude of the** respondents towards the role of the Republic of Croatia in the process of European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This variability suggests that although the general trend of perception of Croatia is positive, there are significant differences in the intensity of perception among respondents, which may reflect the ethnic, entity and ideological differences identified in the previous analysis of nominal variables.

Descriptive indicators of the composite scale Attitude towards the Republic of Croatia:

N	M	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach α
530	3.16	0.86	1.00	5.00	.82

Item–total correlation of the composite scale Attitude towards the Republic of Croatia

Item/particle	r
P8 Dependable partner	.71
P9 Sincere Support	.74
P10 Instrument Help	.68
P11_rev Bias (reversal)	.52
P12 Stability of the region	.70
P13 Institutional cooperation	.76

To determine whether the overall perception of the Republic of Croatia differs among different social groups, t-tests for independent samples and ANOVA were used.

The results **of the t-test for independent samples** showed a statistically significant difference between men and women in the overall perception of the Republic of Croatia. On average, women expressed more positive attitudes ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.89$) compared to men ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.88$), $t(529) = -3.36$, $p = .001$.

The size of the effect was $d = .30$, which according to Cohen's criteria can be interpreted as **a small to moderate effect**. This finding suggests

that gender represents a statistically significant, but relatively weak differentiating factor in shaping the overall perception of the Republic of Croatia.

Gender	N	M	SD	t	p	d
Male	208	2.85	0.88	-3.36(529)	.001	0.30
Female	323	3.12	0.89			

Differences in the overall perception of the Republic of Croatia were further analyzed using **single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA)**. The results show that statistically significant differences were found with respect to **age, ethnicity, entity of residence and political orientation**, while education and place of residence did not show a significant effect.

Factor	F	p	η^2
Age	4.00	.001	.04
Education	0.97	.407	.01
Ethnicity	66.48	<.001	.33
Entity of residence	15.01	<.001	.11
Political orientation	8.75	<.001	.07
Place of residence	0.50	.607	.01

Overall, the results show that **the perception of the Republic of Croatia is primarily structured by ethnic identity**, with the additional influence of the entity and ideological context, while age has a weaker generational effect. Gender has a relatively small effect, while

education and place of residence do not represent significant factors in the differentiation of attitudes.

5.6. Predictors of perception of the Republic of Croatia

To determine which sociodemographic variables significantly contribute to the explanation of the overall perception of the Republic of Croatia, a multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted in which the composite scale of perception of the Republic of Croatia was treated as a dependent variable, while sociodemographic characteristics were included as predictor variables. Before conducting the analysis, the statistical assumptions of the model were verified. The tests did not show significant deviations from the normality of the residuals (Shapiro–Wilk $p = .117$) nor the presence of heteroscedasticity (Breusch–Pagan $p = .204$), while the values of the VIF coefficients indicated an acceptable level of multicollinearity.

The overall regression model proved to be statistically significant ($F = 19.47$, $p < .001$) and explained **38% of the variance in the perception of the Republic of Croatia ($R^2 = .38$; Adj. $R^2 = .36$)**, which represents a relatively high level of explained variance in the research of political attitudes and suggests that sociodemographic factors significantly shape the perception of the role of the Republic of Croatia in the process of European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The analysis of individual predictors shows that **ethnicity, entity of residence, political orientation and age** are statistically significant predictors of the perception of the Republic of Croatia. In contrast, gender and education level do not make a significant contribution to the model

after control of other variables. The results confirm the findings of previous analyses and indicate that the perception of the Republic of Croatia in the context of the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina is primarily shaped **by identity and political factors**, while individual sociodemographic characteristics have a weaker impact.

The results confirm the theory that **the perception of international actors in post-conflict societies** cannot be observed outside the context of ethnic and political structure. Citizens interpret the role of Croatia through the prism of identity affiliations, previous experiences of transformation and dominant narratives of regional influence. At the same time, the existence of a recognized institutional potential of Croatia in the process of EU integration of BiH indicates the possibility **of instrumental European learning** (Europeanization), whereby respondents recognize the potential benefits of the transfer of institutional experience, although the general political assessment remains reserved (Börzel & Risse, 2003).

Predictor	F	p
Gender	2.81	.093
Age	4.00	.001
Education	0.97	.407
Ethnicity	66.48	<.001
Entity of residence	15.01	<.001
Political orientation	8.75	<.001

R	R²	Adj. R²	F (model)	p
.62	.38	.36	19.47	<.001

Such dynamics illustrate **the complexity of the perception of European integration in societies with strong identity divisions**: support for the EU process is not only a function of information or economic expectations but is deeply related to internal political and identity frameworks, which shape the interpretation of the role of neighboring countries. At the policy level, this suggests that EU integration processes require a careful balancing of regional relations and communication strategies that consider identity differentiations.

5.7. Perception of the Croatian experience and media environment in the process of EU integration of BiH: analysis of nominal variables

For the variables whose answers were expressed on nominal scales (questions 14–22), the significance of the differences between the groups was estimated using **the chi-square test**. Only variables with **statistically significant differences** ($p < .05$) were included in the analysis. The results show that attitudes towards European integration, the role of the Republic of Croatia and the perception of the information environment, are **significantly differentiated according to certain socio-demographic characteristics**, with ethnicity, entity context and political orientation again being singled out.

Question	Demographic variable	χ^2	Df	P	V
Q14 BiH can benefit from Croatia's experience in EU accession.	Ethnicity	60.22	8	<,001	.24
	Entity of residence	36.86	6	<,001	.19
Q15 How do you assess the role of the Republic of Croatia in the context of BiH's EU path?	Ethnicity	48.71	8	<,001	.21
Q16 Is there sufficient information on Croatia's role in EU integration?	Age	21.31	10	.019	.14
Q18 How often do you consume content about the EU integration of BiH?	Politics	51.67	9	<,001	.18
Q19 What sources do you get your information from most often?	Education	327.27	144	<,001	.45
Q20 Have you noticed content that negatively portrays the Republic of Croatia?	Politics	61.66	12	<,001	.20
Q21 Do you think that some media outlets are fueling distrust of EU integration?	Ethnicity	38.68	12	<,001	.16
Q22 How much do you trust the information from the Croatian media about BiH?	Politics	66.29	12	<,001	.20

*Question number 17 was shown in the previous tables

5.7.1. Perception of the Benefits of Croatia's Experience in EU Accession

Statistically significant differences were determined by **ethnicity** ($\chi^2 = 60.22$, $p < .001$, $V = .24$) and **entity of residence** ($\chi^2 = 36.86$, $p < .001$, $V = .19$). The magnitude of the effect indicates **a moderately strong pattern of connection**, suggesting that the perception of the benefits of the Croatian experience in accession to the European Union depends to a significant extent on the identity and institutional context of the respondents. A more detailed analysis shows that **respondents of Croatian nationality** more often express a positive assessment of the benefits of Croatia's experience of accession to the European Union, while **respondents of Serbian nationality** more often express neutral or negative assessments. A similar pattern was observed according to entity affiliation, with respondents from **the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina** more likely to express positive assessments compared to respondents from **Republika Srpska**.

5.7.2. Perception of the Role of the Republic of Croatia in the EU Integration of BiH

The assessment of the role of the Republic of Croatia in the European integration of BiH is also statistically significantly differentiated by ethnicity ($\chi^2 = 48.71$, $p < .001$, $V = .21$). Respondents of Croatian nationality more often perceive the Republic of Croatia as **a political partner and support for the European path of BiH**, while respondents of Serbian nationality express **more skeptical or reserved attitudes**. This result confirms that Croatia's role in the EU integration process is interpreted through **the prism of ethnic identity**.

5.8. Media and information environment

The results of inferential analyses indicate that the perception of being informed, the choice of information sources and trust in the media are not randomly distributed but are systematically structured according to the sociodemographic and political characteristics of the respondents. The way of accessing information on EU integration and the role of Croatia reflects generational, ideological and identity lines of division. In other words, the perception of information is not only a function of the availability of content, but also of social position, political orientation, and identity framework.

5.8.1. Generational Differences in the Perception of being Informed

Age of respondents differentiates the self-perception of being informed ($\chi^2 = 21.31$, $p = .019$, $V = .14$), with little to moderate effect. Older age groups are more likely to assess that they are well informed about the role of Croatia, while younger groups express uncertainty or reservation. This pattern can be explained by generational differences in media habits and political socialization: older generations, formed in a more stable media environment, have greater subjective security, while younger generations, although exposed to more information, perceive the information space as fragmented and complex.

From the perspective of information policies, the finding implies the need for differentiated communication strategies that consider generational dynamics, offering structured and methodologically based

information to younger generations and analytically deeper content to older groups.

5.8.2. Ideological segmentation of information reception

Political orientation proved to be a significant differentiating factor in the assessment of the adequacy of information about the European Union ($\chi^2 = 51.67$, $p < .001$, $V = .18$). The size of the effect indicates a **moderate pattern of ideological segmentation of information reception**.

Respondents who ideologically position themselves on the left side of the political spectrum or in the political center more often assess the existing level of information on European integration as satisfactory. On the contrary, right-oriented respondents are more likely to express a more critical attitude towards the availability and quality of information and express a greater degree of dissatisfaction with the existing information environment. This finding indicates the existence **of interpretive ideological frameworks** through which respondents assess the credibility and quality of the available information. The information space on European integration is obviously not perceived as neutral but is filtered through political and ideological predispositions. In this context, the right-wing political orientation is associated with a more pronounced skepticism towards the dominant narratives of European integration and regional cooperation.

5.8.3. Education and choice of sources of information

One of the strongest empirical findings refers to the correlation between **the level of education and the choice of information sources** ($\chi^2 = 327.27$, $p < .001$, $V = .45$), which indicates a very strong pattern of connection. Highly educated respondents are more likely to use **online portals, specialized information sources and international media**, while respondents with a lower level of education are more likely to depend on **television and social networks** as primary sources of information. This pattern points to the existence **of an educationally structured information space**, in which different social groups consume different types of content and thus develop different interpretative repertoires in understanding political processes.

In other words, education affects not only the amount of information available, but also the **type of media sources and the interpretative frameworks** through which political information is processed.

5.8.4. Ideological perception of negative media narratives

The perception of the presence of negative narratives about the Republic of Croatia is also statistically significantly differentiated according to political orientation ($\chi^2 = 61.66$, $p < .001$, $V = .20$). This finding indicates **a moderate ideological effect in the interpretation of media content**. Right-oriented respondents are significantly more likely to perceive the presence of negative narratives about the Republic of Croatia in the media space, while left-oriented respondents

more often choose neutral or more moderate assessments, confirming **the ideological filtration of the perception of media content and the selective perception of regional relations.**

5.8.5. The identity dimension of media trust

Ethnicity significantly differentiates the level of trust in the media ($\chi^2 = 38.68$, $p < .001$, $V = .16$). The analysis of responses distribution shows that respondents of Serb ethnicity are more likely to express distrust in the media, while respondents of Croat and Bosniak ethnicity are more likely to express moderate or selective trust. Trust in the media, in this context, is not only a matter of professional standards or the quality of journalistic work but is also related to the perception of the representation of collective identities and political interests. Media trust therefore functions as part of a broader identity framework through which political information is interpreted.

5.8.6. Trust in Croatian media

The ideological segmentation of the information space was further confirmed in the analysis of trust in the Croatian media ($\chi^2 = 66.29$, $p < .001$, $V = .20$). Political orientation proved to be a key differentiating factor: respondents who ideologically position themselves on the left side of the political spectrum or in the political center more often express trust in the information coming from the Croatian media, while right-oriented respondents more often express distrust or reservation.

In conclusion, the information space in which attitudes on the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the role of the Republic of

Croatia are formed is structured through **the overlap of ideological and identity dimensions**, which further explains the previously identified differences in the perception of the Republic of Croatia among different social groups.

5.8.7. Qualitative insights from the open question

In the final part of the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to present additional comments related to the topic of the research through an open question. The purpose of including this question was to provide respondents with space for free expression of attitudes that may not be fully covered by the structured questions and thus complement the quantitative part of the research with qualitative insights. The content of the collected comments makes it possible to identify several thematic frameworks that reflect the way in which the respondents interpret the relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, and the European Union.

The first thematic framework refers to the identity dimension of relations between Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia. One of the respondents states:

"If the Croats from the Republic of Croatia loved the Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina as we love Croatia, we would probably have solved our national identity and the position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

This commentary illustrates the perception of a strong identity connection with the Republic of Croatia and at the same time reflects

the expectations of some respondents in terms of political and symbolic support for the position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such a discursive pattern points to the fact that the relations between the two countries in the perception of respondents are often interpreted through the prism of ethnic and political identity.

The second thematic framework refers to critical reflections on the functioning of the European Union. One of the comments formulates such a position as follows:

"The Brussels and the U.S. need a reform. The Brussels bureaucracy harasses members who do not follow the left-wing agenda. The EU is exaggerating with migration."

This commentary reflects the attitude that views European integration through the prism of institutional effectiveness and political priorities of the European Union. Such a discursive pattern can be related to the findings of the quantitative part of the research, which showed that the political orientation of respondents is an important factor in the perception of information and in the evaluation of European integration processes in general.

The third identified thematic framework refers to the perception of interethnic relations and the institutional structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the respondents points out:

"Until all three peoples are equal in the FBiH and respect each other, it will not be good for anyone."

This commentary points to the importance of the issue of institutional equality and interethnic relations in the interpretation of the broader political context. In this sense, perceptions of regional relations and European integration are often related to the way in which respondents assess the internal political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The last featured commentary illustrates the complexity of the perception of relations between the Republic of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina *and the position of Croats in BiH*:

"The attitude of Croatia towards Croats in BiH is like the relationship between a stepmother and a child, and the attitude of BiH towards Croats in BiH is like 'a judge, jury and executioner'."

Such a formulation metaphorically expresses the perception of an ambivalent attitude towards the political position of Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while at the same time problematizing the relationship between the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the level of support coming from the Republic of Croatia.

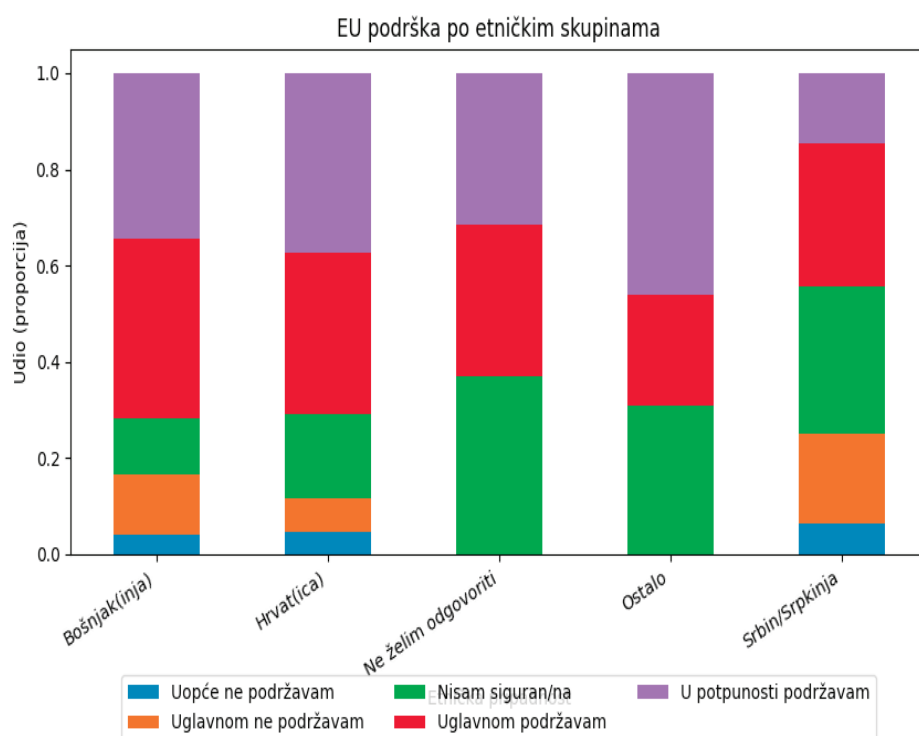
Although limited in scope, these comments provide additional insight into the discursive frameworks through which some respondents interpret political relations in the region, the processes of European integration and the role of various political actors. As such, they represent a complementary qualitative layer of analysis that contributes to the contextualization of the results obtained by the quantitative part of the research.

5.9. Conclusion

The results of the conducted research indicate that the perception of the Republic of Croatia, the European Union and the information space in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not formed in a random manner, but is clearly structured according to social, political and identity lines of differentiation. The combination of descriptive, inferential, and composite statistical analysis shows that respondents' attitudes are the result of a complex interaction of sociodemographic characteristics, political orientation, and the broader context of collective narratives that shape political perception in a post-conflict society.

The analysis of the composite scale of perception of the Republic of Croatia has shown that attitudes towards the Republic of Croatia are not homogeneous within the population, but are strongly differentiated according to ethnicity, entity affiliation, and political orientation of the respondents. Post hoc analysis further confirms that the identified differences in attitudes are systematically moving in the direction of ethnic and ideological polarization. Respondents of Croatian ethnicity, as well as respondents coming from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on average express more positive perceptions of the Republic of Croatia and more pronounced support for European integration processes. On the contrary, respondents of Serb ethnicity and respondents from Republika Srpska show a higher level of skepticism, both towards the role of the Republic of Croatia in regional relations and towards the processes of European integration.

Figure 1. Graphic representation of EU support by ethnic groups



Such a pattern points to the fact that the perception of the Republic of Croatia in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not formed exclusively through the prism of current political decisions or specific policies, but through a broader framework of historical-political relations, identity narratives, and institutional experiences of different social groups. In other words, the perception of foreign actors to a significant extent reflects the internal political and identity structure of society of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The analysis of the information space further confirms that the patterns of information and perception of media content are also socially structured. Generational differences in the assessment of one's level of

being informed indicate the existence of different media habits and patterns of political socialization. Older generations more often show a higher level of subjective confidence in their own information, while younger generations show a higher level of reflexive distance towards available information, which may be related to the fragmentation of the modern digital information space.

At the same time, the level of education shows an extremely strong effect on the choice of sources of information. Highly educated respondents are more likely to use online portals, specialized sources and international media, while respondents with lower levels of education are more likely to depend on traditional media and social networks. This finding confirms the existence of an educationally structured information space in which different social groups consume different types of information, which can consequently influence the formation of different interpretative frameworks for understanding political processes.

The political orientation of the respondents proved to be one of the key differentiation factors in the perception of information about the European Union and in the assessment of the presence of negative narratives about the Republic of Croatia. On average, left-wing and center-oriented respondents express a higher level of trust in the media and more often assess the existing information as adequate. On the other hand, right-wing respondents are more likely to express distrust of the media space and perceive the presence of negative narratives about the Republic of Croatia to a greater extent. This pattern indicates the existence of an ideologically filtered reception of the information

space, in which the evaluation of media content is not only a function of information availability, but also of the interpretive frameworks through which individuals process political information.

The connection between the perception of the Republic of Croatia and attitudes towards the European Union further confirms the thesis of the existence of a broader political and ideological framework in which political perceptions in the region are formed. More negative attitudes towards the Republic of Croatia are statistically concentrated in the same groups in which skepticism towards the European Union is more pronounced, which indicates the interconnection of these perceptions. This suggests that relations with regional actors and towards European integration are not viewed in isolation, but as part of a broader political and identity narrative.

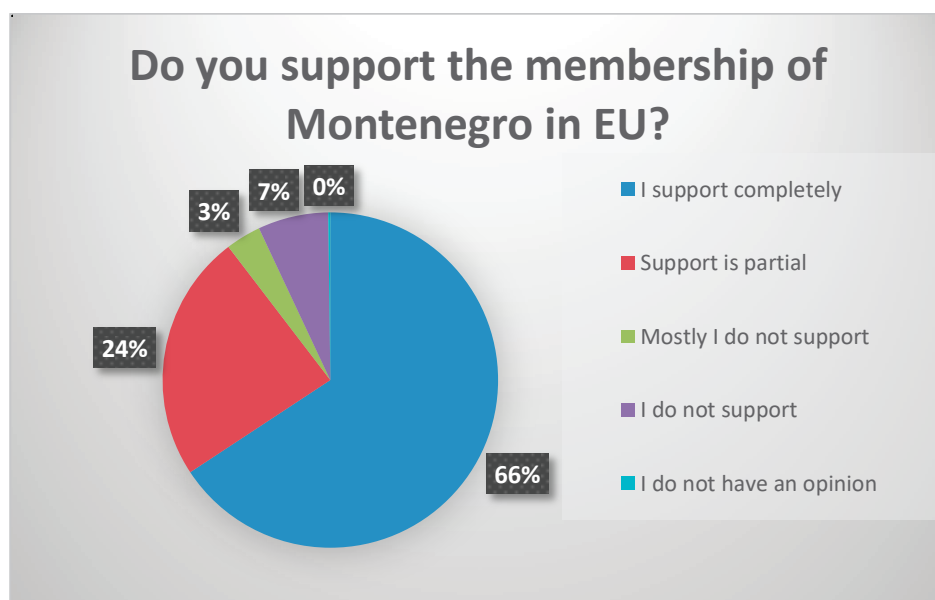
The qualitative insights obtained from the open-ended question further illustrate these findings, showing that respondents often interpret political relations in the region through a combination of identity, institutional, and ideological frames of reference. Although the number of comments is not large, the content of the answers confirms that the perceptions of the Republic of Croatia, the European Union and the position of the constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina overlap in a wider discursive space of political interpretations.

Overall, the results of the research suggest that political perceptions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are strongly conditioned by social segmentation and identity structures. The information space, media reception, and evaluation of foreign actors do not function as a neutral

communication sphere, but as a space in which the existing political and identity divisions of society are reflected. That is why understanding the perception of the Republic of Croatia and European integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina requires an analytical approach that simultaneously considers the institutional context, social structure, and discursive patterns through which political reality is interpreted.

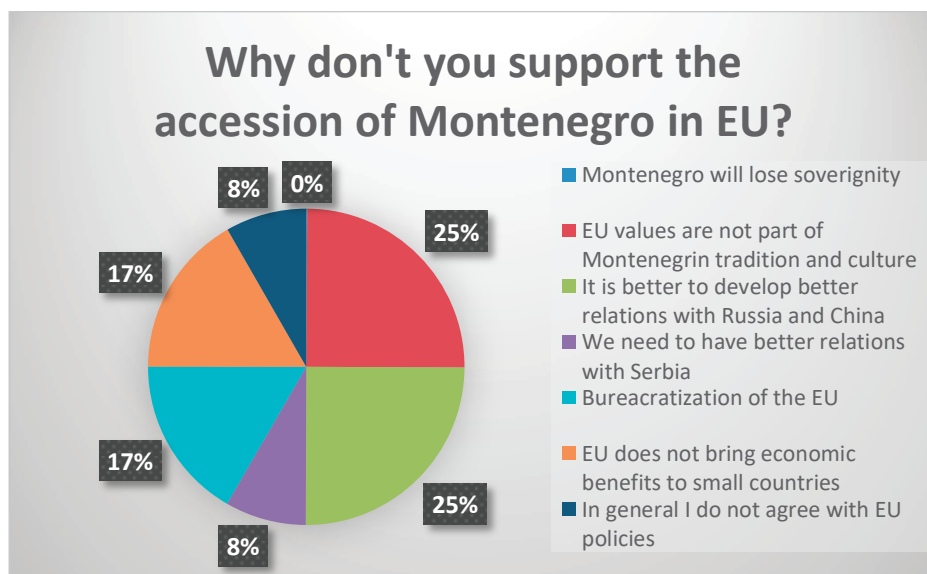
6. Public Opinion Research in Montenegro - attitudes of young people in Montenegro on the EU integration of Montenegro

The survey was conducted from February 20 to March 4, 2026, on a sample of 422 students, with the aim of examining the attitudes of young people in Montenegro towards the European integration process. Data collection was organized through an anonymous online questionnaire distributed through local youth networks and university. Participation in the study was voluntary. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was approximately two minutes. It was emphasized to the respondents that the data is collected exclusively for research purposes, with full anonymity of answers.



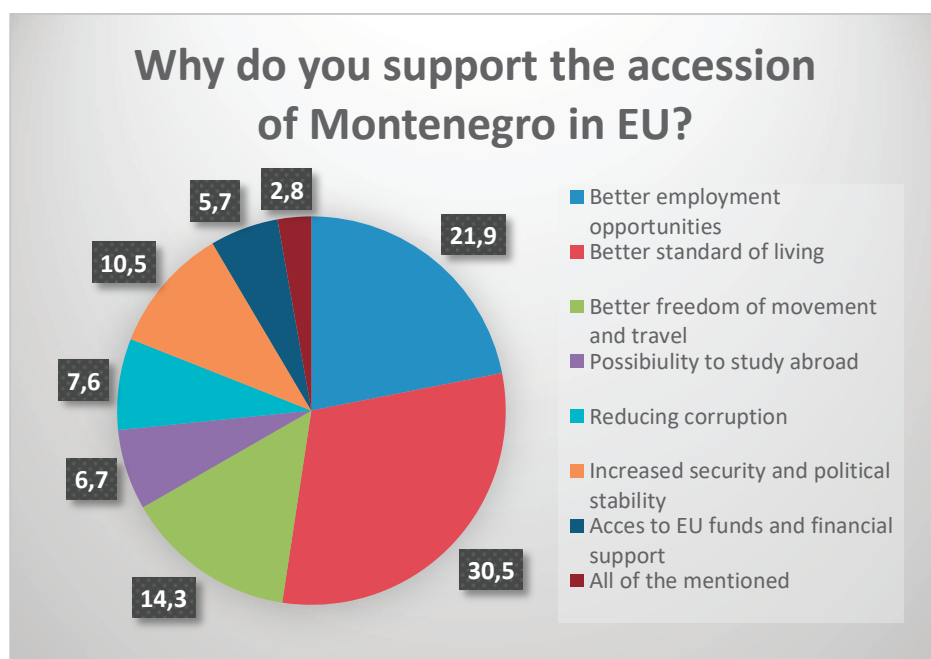
The answers to this question show that 65.8% of respondents fully support membership of Montenegro in the EU, while a further 23.9%

express partial support. In contrast, 3.4% of respondents generally do not support and 6.8% do not support Montenegro's membership in the EU at all. An extremely small percentage of respondents do not have a clearly formed attitude.



Respondents who are against Montenegro's membership in the EU or are skeptical of the European Union cite several reasons. Among the most common are the perception that the European Union imposes values that are not in line with Montenegrin tradition and culture (25%), as well as the belief that Montenegro should develop closer relations with alternative partners such as Russia and/or China (25%). In addition, some respondents point to excessive bureaucratization of the European Union (16.7%), while some believe that the EU does not bring economic benefits to small countries (16.7%). 8.3% of respondents are more confident in cooperation with Serbia and regional

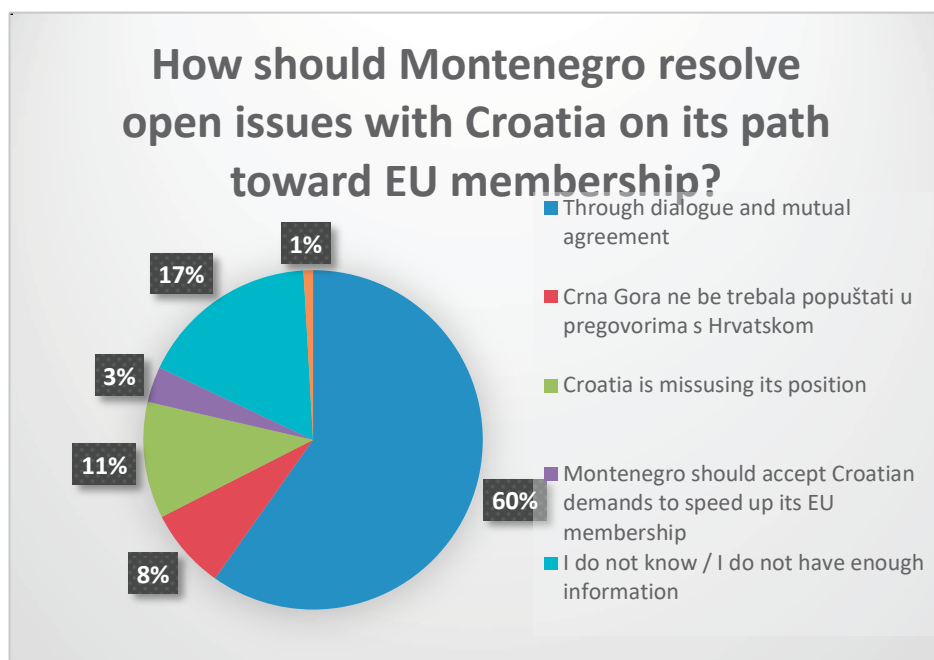
allies, while 8.3% of respondents generally disagree with the EU's policies, namely the imposition of free market.



The survey shows that respondents who are supportive of Montenegro's membership in the EU most often highlight economic benefits and advantages. The largest number of them (30.5%) believe that membership would contribute to a better standard of living, while 21.9% cite better employment opportunities as a key factor. Also, a considerable number of respondents (14.3%) recognize the advantages in freedom of movement and easier travel. 10.5% of respondents believe that Montenegro should become a member of the EU because of greater security and political stability, while 7.6% of respondents support EU membership because it would reduce corruption and strengthen the rule of law, and 6.7% of respondents because of the possibility of studying abroad. Finally, 5.7% of respondents cite access

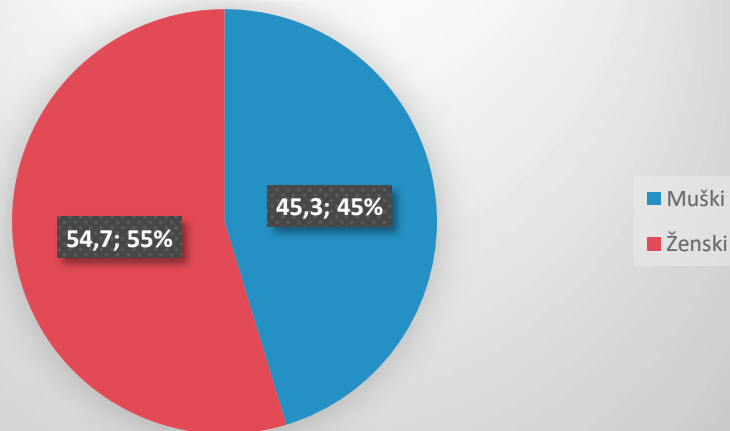
to funds and financial support as the reason for supporting Montenegrin membership in the EU.

Most respondents (59.8%) believe that open issues between Montenegro and Croatia should be resolved through dialogue and mutual agreement, while (17.1%) respondents are unable to assess or



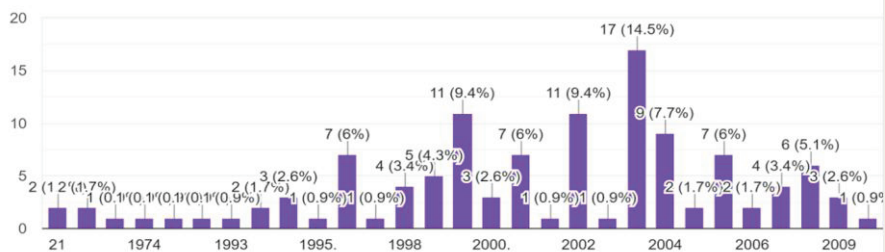
are not sufficiently informed. At the same time, 11.1% of respondents believe that Croatia is using its position as an EU member to the detriment of Montenegro, while some respondents believe that Montenegro should not give in to negotiations with Croatia (7.7%), that it should accept Croatia's conditions in order to speed up accession (3.4%), and that it should not provoke Croatia because that will ease the dialogue (0.9%).

Respondents in regard of sex



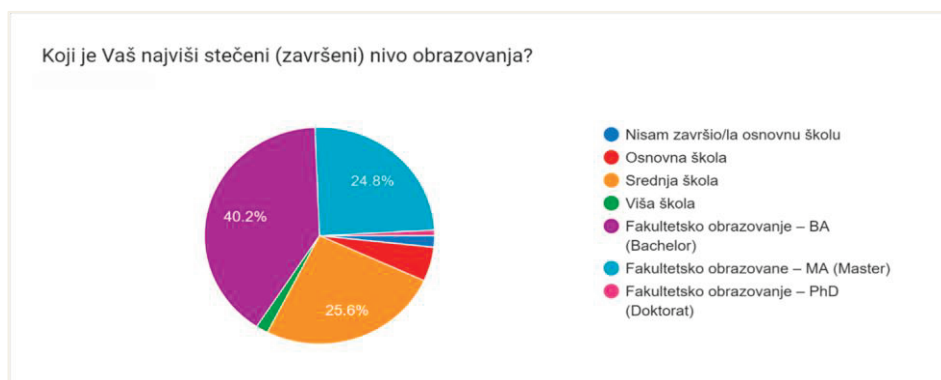
54.7% of female and 45.3% of male respondents participated in the study.

Koja je Vaša godina rođenja?

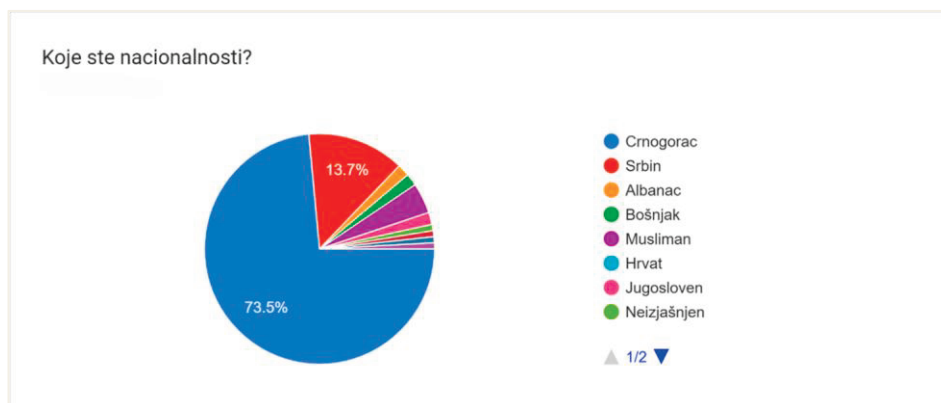


The division of respondents by year of birth shows that most respondents were born between 1999 and 2004, with respondents born in 2002, 2001 and 2004 being the most numerous. The participation of older and younger generations outside this framework is minimal,

which confirms that the sample is predominantly made up of respondents born in the early 2000s.

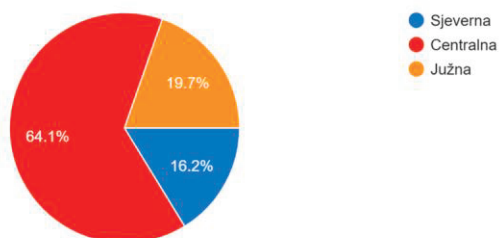


In terms of education, the largest number of respondents have completed basic academic studies BA (40.2%), while a significant part of respondents are the ones with completed master studies MA (24.8%) and respondents with finished high school (25.5%).



When it comes to the ethnic structure, the majority of respondents identify as Montenegrins (73.5%), followed by Serbs (13.7%), Muslims (4.3%), Albanians (1.7%), Bosniaks (1.7%) and Yugoslavs (1.7%).

U kojoj regiji Crne Gore živite?



Regional representation shows that the largest number of respondents comes from the central part of Montenegro (64.1%), while the southern (19.7%) and northern regions (16.2%) are less represented.

¹ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-bosnia-and-herzegovina> (accessed 31.3.2026.)

²

https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Bilteni/2025/IKT_00_2024_TB_1_BS.pdf (accessed 31.3.2026.)

³ https://vzs.ba/en/in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-488-web-portals-registered-only-40-percent-transparent/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 31.3.2026.)

⁴

https://www.similarweb.com/website/n1info.ba/competitors/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (accessed 31.3.2026.)

⁵ We have made an exhaustive analysis of this myth during the implementation of the Athens project, which is available on the website: <https://www.tocnotako.hr/clanak/Je-li-tvrdnja-da-su-Tudman-i-Milošević-imali-izravnu-telefonsku-liniju-putem-crnog-telefona-instaliranog-u-uredu-predsjednika-Tudmana-istinita-ATENA/1948> (accessed 31.3.2026.)

⁶ We have also written a detailed analysis of this myth in the Athens project available on this website: <https://www.tocnotako.hr/clanak/Je-li-predsjednik-Tudman-dogovarao-podjelu-Bosne-i-Hercegovine-na-sastanku-u-Karadordevu-ATENA/2475> (accessed 31.3.2026.)

⁷ We have written several detailed analyses about the credibility and relevance of Zijad Bećirović as well as IFIMES during the implementation of the Athens project, available on these websites: <https://www.tocnotako.hr/clanak/Je-li-Institut-poznat-pod-nazivom-IFIMES-kao-i-njegovi-strucnjaci-vjerodostojan-i-relevantan-izvor-u-svojim-analizama-koje-javno-objavljuju-na-hrvatskom-i-engleskom-jeziku-ATENA/1668>, (accessed 31.3.2026.)

<https://www.tocnotako.hr/clanak/-IFIMES---slovenski-think-tank-izmedu-analiza-i-tabloidnih-opservacija-ATENA/1932>,

<https://www.tocnotako.hr/clanak/Jesu-li-istiniti-navodi-koje-u-svojoj-analizi-od-11-rujna-2025-na-temu-Srbije-objavljuje-IFIMES-ATENA/2117>,

<https://www.tocnotako.hr/clanak/-IFIMES-o-Crnoj-Gori-i-Sjevernom-prometnom-koridoru-koji-spaja-Bjelorusiju-i-Crnu-Goru--Strategija-stabilnost-i-sigurnost-ATENA/2344> and other similar ones that prove that authors who systematically spread untruths are unreliable and irrelevant.

⁸ The "Split Agreement", as well as numerous other documents and information necessary for a truthful and objective understanding of the Homeland War and the relations between the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are available at this web address:

https://www.academia.edu/66429155/Istina_o_Bosni_i_Hercegovini_Dokumenti_1991_1995_Planovi_sporazumi_izjave_o_ustavnom_ustrojstvu_Bosne_i_Hercegovine_1991_1995_Truth_about_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_Documents_1991_1995 (accessed 31.3.2026.)

⁹ The article by lawyer Luka Mišetić in which he argues against these allegations is available in Croatian at this web address <https://hrcak.srce.hr/clanak/285166>, and in English at this web address <https://hrcak.srce.hr/clanak/285156> (accessed 31.3.2026.)

¹⁰ At that time, the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina no longer existed, but the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not exist either, because on the basis of the Washington Agreements, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was created by the unification of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Croatian Republic of Herzeg Bosnia. More about them in:

https://www.academia.edu/66429155/Istina_o_Bosni_i_Hercegovini_Dokumenti_1991_1995_Planovi_sporazumi_izjave_o_ustavnom_ustrojstvu_Bosne_i_Hercegovine_1991_1995_Truth_about_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_Documents_1991_1995

¹¹ Although his name and surname could indicate to the uninformed that Jasmin Hodžić is a Bosniak, he declares himself a Croat. It should be pointed out that this is not an important determinant at all (it is important that the veteran was a member of the 7th GB Puma) if there were no such abuses by certain persons who are trying to politicize and falsify the facts.

¹²We use the term **deconstruction** since it more precisely defines the mentioned media strategies. The term **revision** would include refutation of historiographical sources or at least an effort to polemically cover some potentially controversial details. This is absent in the case of the pro-Serbian Montenegrin media, and historically, legally and politically established facts are interpreted in an arbitrary and extremely reductionist way.

¹³ <https://www.in4s.net/krvavi-ustaski-pir-u-slavoniji-za-dva-dana-pobili-200-muskaraca/>

¹⁴ <https://borba.me/medojevic-savremena-hrvatska-izgradjena-na-temeljima-genocidne-ndh-a-svaka-drzava-zasnovana-na-mrznji-ne-moze-opstati/>

¹⁵ <https://borba.me/hrvatska-ministar-smijenio-savjetnika-za-sport-zbog-podrske-incidentu-u-splitu/>

¹⁶ "During the Greater Serbian aggression against Croatia, there was a camp here, the so-called Morinj Center for detained Croatian civilians and defenders. We remember the crimes committed to disgrace the name and spirit of Montenegro. We regret all the suffering endured by the detainees. So that it never happens again", is engraved on the memorial plaque in Morinje.

¹⁷ <https://aloonline.me/crna-gora/knezevic-crna-gora-mora-skinuti-ljagu-koju-su-joj-naneli-krivokapic-i-konjevic/>

¹⁸ <https://borba.me/knezevic-rezolucija-o-jasenovcu-nije-usporila-crnogorski-eu-put-bilo-je-jasno-da-ce-hrvatska-ucjenjivati-i-uslovljavati-sa-drugim-pitanjima/>

¹⁹ <https://www.in4s.net/ne-znam-sta-je-ndh-obrazovni-sistem-mlade-hrvate-slabo-uci-o-drugom-svjetskom-ratu/>

²⁰ *The same.*

²¹ <https://www.in4s.net/antisrpska-histerija-u-kninu-sveti-sava-proglasen-ideologijom-agresije/>

²² <https://borba.me/novi-udar-na-spc-zasto-hrvatska-podgrijava-aveti-ndh-i-kome-smetaju-srpski-svestenici/>

²³ <https://borba.me/hrvatska-nota-crnoj-gori-prvi-korak-ka-kaparanjanju-boke-kotorske/>

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- ²⁴ <https://aloonline.me/Region/bezbjednost-region/8393/skandal-trese-evropu-hrvatski-rukometasi-slavili-polufinale-uz-ustasku-pjesmu.html>
- ²⁵ [Kaluđerović: Fascist chants of Croatian fans are a message to Montenegro - we must protect our dignity - Borba.me](#)
- ²⁶ [Scandal at the match between Montenegro and Croatia: Anti-Serb shouts without condemnation from the EU! - Borba.me](#)
- ²⁷ [Spasoje Tomić: Croatian complexes are incurable - Portal 083](#)
- ²⁸ <https://www.in4s.net/revizionisti-i-negacionisti-ustaskog-logora-jasenovac/>
- ²⁹ [Sovereignty adapted to Zagreb – is there an end to Montenegrin poltronicism? - IN4S](#)
- ³⁰ *The same.*
- ³¹ [Croatia is repaying the debt to the Albanians? A new military axis raises tensions in the region - Borba.me](#)
- ³² [Another German-Croatian offensive on Serbia - IN4S](#)
- ³³ <https://borba.me/video-djukanovic-nalozi-laznih-studenata-u-blokadi-masovno-kreirani-u-hrvatskoj-nemam-dilemu-u-ozbiljnu-ukljucenost-hrvatske-obavjestajne-sluzbe-u-citavu-akciju/>
- ³⁴ <https://borba.me/provjeravaju-se-lazni-studentski-profilu-u-srbiji-sirenje-dezinformacija-dolazi-iz-regiona/>
- ³⁵ <https://borba.me/sok-otkrice-regionalna-mreza-iz-hrvatske-koordinirala-nalozima-za-destabilizaciju-srbije/>
- ³⁶ [Nikolić: Croatia will not give up on the subjugation of Montenegro, it protects war crimes committed against our citizens - Borba.me](#)
- ³⁷ [Brnabić: Picula finally admitted that he supports blockades because they are pursuing an anti-Serb policy - Borba.me](#)
- ³⁸ [As soon as something happens in Europe – Picula attacks Belgrade: Old rhetoric in a new packaging – IN4S](#)

³⁹ <https://www.in4s.net/sokol-trazi-sanitarni-kordon-oko-srbije-novi-napad-iz-hrvatske-na-cijeli-srpski-narod/>

⁴⁰ [Tanja Belobrajdić ex Duić, tortured prisoners in Lora: They called her a monster woman, and she became an award-winning writer in Croatia - Borba.me](#)

⁴¹ ["Where are these people being shut down": Croatia delivered another blackmail, again silence from the president and prime minister - Borba.me](#)



Information Policies and Integration of BiH and Montenegro in the EU

Publishers:

- **Hybrid Warfare Research Institute**
Teslina 10, Zagreb, Croatia
www.zagrebsecurityforum.com
- **Institute for Socio-Political Research**
Kralja Petra Krešimira IV b.b
Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina
www.idpi.ba

For publishers:

Assoc. Prof. Gordan Akrap
Stipan Zovko

Editors:

Assoc. Prof. Gordan Akrap,
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Print preparation:

Davor Maričić, Institute for Electronic Business Ltd.,
www.INSTITUT.hr

Print:

PRESSUM – University of Mostar, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Zagreb 2026.

Mostar 2026.

ISBN: 978-953-472111-7



Financed by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
of the Republic of Croatia: VIII-JP-OCD-01-2024/7