

THE EU'S ROLE IN MAINTAINING A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA¹

O PAPEL DA UE NA MANUTENÇÃO DE UM AMBIENTE SEGURO E ESTÁVEL NA BÓSNIA HERZEGOVINA

Paulo Pereira Zagalo

Colonel, Portuguese Army

PhD student in Military Sciences at the Military University Institute and MA in Military Sciences from the Portuguese Military Academy

Researcher at the Research and Development Centre, Military University Institute (Portuguese War College) and at the Portuguese Military Academy Research Center (CINAMIL), Military Academy
zagalo.pp@ium.pt

Abstract

The EU objectives are to improve peace, freedom, security, and justice across borders. However, without regional stabilization in the Balkans, the EU's goals could be challenged. Our argument is that wrong attitudes of Bosnian politicians could jeopardize the Dayton Agreement's fulfilment.

This research analyses the relevance of the impact of EU neighbouring countries and candidate countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on stability and economic growth on that part of Europe. A change in attitude can directly affect the region's stability.

The EU's options for resolving the conflict in BiH are examined, and it is argued that if the EU provides inexorable conditions for the Dayton Agreement's continued implementation, its importance in addressing potential conflicts will increase.

Keywords: European Union, Bosnia-Herzegovina, EU Global Strategy, Integrated Approach, Common Security and Defence Policy.

Resumo

A UE tem por objetivos melhorar a paz, a liberdade, a segurança e a justiça além fronteiras. No entanto, esses objetivos poderão ser postos em causa se a região dos Balcãs não for estabilizada. O nosso argumento é que as atitudes erradas dos políticos bósnios ameaçam colocar em risco o cumprimento do Acordo de Dayton.

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Este estudo analisa a relevância da influência dos países vizinhos da UE e dos países candidatos à adesão como a Bósnia Herzegovina (BiH) na estabilidade e no crescimento económico dessa zona da Europa. Uma mudança de atitude pode ter um impacto direto na estabilidade da região.

O artigo analisa as opções que a UE tem à sua disposição para resolver o conflito na BiH e argumenta que, se a UE criar condições inexoráveis para que o Acordo de Dayton continue a ser aplicado, verá a sua relevância na resolução de futuros conflitos aumentar.

Palavras-chave: *União Europeia, Bósnia-Herzegovina, Estratégia Global da UE, Abordagem Integrada, Política Comum de Segurança e Defesa.*

1. Introduction

Because of globalisation and the interconnected world we find ourselves in, we are experiencing a moment of great contagion (Keohane & Nye, 1998) among all actors on the international scene. This phenomenon is characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability, and competition (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009).

Security is a permanent concern of States and organizations, like the European Union, having the objective of promoting peace and the well-being of its members, as well as guaranteeing the freedom of movement of people, goods, and capital, and economic and social cohesion (European Union, 2007).

In order for the EU to contribute to fruitful relations with the rest of the world, any behaviour that could jeopardise economic, social, cultural, and political relations, even if exhibited by countries in the vicinity of the Union, especially candidate countries, will have consequences for the desired stability that will directly affect the economic area.

Since its signing in December 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina has complied with the Dayton Agreements, sometimes under pressure from the international community, purportedly moving towards the creation of conditions for the departure of external entities that have been providing its support at the political, social, economic, and security and defence levels, among others, starting to assume the "governance" of the country in a completely autonomous way (European Union, n.d.).

Recently, signs have been perceived that could indicate the secession of one of the entities that integrate BiH. If confirmed, those signs, originated by the representative of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, a former member of the tripartite presidency and leader of one of the ethnic groups, may jeopardize the compliance with the Dayton Agreements, raising issues that need to be resolved, particularly by the EU.

Considering this, the Union must identify options for the solution of the identified problem, because it may compromise the fulfilment of international agreements and could affect the stability of the country, advancing with the implementation of those options in accordance with the development verified in BiH.

Thus, the question that this research answers is: How can the European Union influence BiH in maintaining a safe, secure and stable environment?

We argue that only an Integrated Approach, building on the EU's Comprehensive Approach and promoting a civil-military cooperation, making use of all forms and possibilities of action in a more coherent and holistic engagement, will have effective and efficient results aiming to maintain a safe and secure environment in the country.

This paper is organised into nine chapters. After this introduction, the second chapter summarizes the literature review and presents the main concepts. The third chapter presents the materials and methods used in this research. The following chapter, the fourth, presents a historical framework, from the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) to the Dayton Agreements' signing that ended the 1992-1995 civil war. The fifth chapter analyses the opportunities given to BiH by the accession to EU and NATO as a full member. The sixth chapter identifies the current instability factors and where they can be located. In the seventh chapter, the options of the EU to tackle the identified conflict are analysed, and in the eighth chapter, the EU's response is proposed as the answer to the research question. The paper concludes with some final notes.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Before addressing the challenges posed by the questions identified above, it is necessary to define the expression "safe and secure environment". It was extracted from the mission statement of the EU Forces deployed in 2004, the Operation ALTHEA, still under execution, in which is referred that the "EU deployed a robust military force (EUFOR) to ensure continued compliance with the Dayton/Paris Agreement and to contribute to a Safe And Secure Environment (SASE) in BiH" (European Union, 2020).

The meaning of a "safe and secure environment" can be drawn from the Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction of the United States Institute of Peace (Figure 1), i. e., the environment in which individuals may go about their daily lives without fear of widespread violence politically motivated. Specifically, large-scale fighting must cease; there must be a sufficient level of public order; responsible security forces must submit to lawful state authority; and important people, communities, sites, and infrastructure must be safeguarded. In addition to that, freedom of movement must be ensured without fear of unnecessary harm to life (United States Institute of Peace & Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, 2009).



Figure 1 – Safe and Secure Environment

Source: Available from United States Institute of Peace & Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (2009, p. 6–38)

The terms "conflict" and "crisis" need to be conceptualized, and the United Nations' operational definitions can be compared to the EU's structural framework.

This text explores the Union's crisis management doctrine, tracing its evolution since the Petersberg Declaration, and including the Global Strategy, and the Strategic Compass for Foreign and Security Policy. This research enables us to identify potential solutions for crisis or conflict situations that are aligned with the defined parameters.

Samuel Huntington (2002) wrote that for most of humanity's existence, conflicts between civilizations were intermittent or non-existent and that in the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions between peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural, and tribal wars and ethnic conflicts will take place within civilization (Huntington, 2002). Observing the behaviour of the three ethnic groups² and the two entities³ living in imposed harmonious coexistence in BiH, we can conclude that these statements make sense.

Moreso, relationships are established between the various actors, which can be of cooperation, reciprocity, and conflict, depending on whether the objectives are stated as common, reciprocal or conflictual (Fry, 2013).

So, we can consider that the first two types of relationships are friendly and the last is a conflicting one, noting that we can accept that politics respects all types of relationships, including those of conflict.

² Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox.

³ The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the two entities within the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the other being Republika Srpska.

As is detailed in this research paper, those statements define the relations between the Bosnian ethnic groups and entities.

On the other hand, taking into account the considered political positions, decisions and announced projects of the leaders of BiH, it is clear that we are dealing with the Strategy's mainframe. It is known that this area of knowledge deals with conflictual interaction, in particular when coercion is used to resolve the problem, generating and organizing the resources to be used in favour of this form of resolution, even considering potentially opposing purposes.

As the security environment can deteriorate as a result of conflicts or crises, it is important to establish the definitions of these two concepts.

2.1 Conflict and Crisis

Before proceeding, and because we argue that the Strategy (Baylis et al., 2019) deals with conflict interaction, intending to guarantee the great ends of the State, which are well-being and security, we can say that strategy has a very close relationship with coercion because it is necessary to nullify it or to restrict the purposes of adversaries that oppose the achievement of our objectives.

Thus, Strategy is closely related to the conflict.

Conflict is as old as Humans are. It is considered something intrinsic to the existence of humanity (Tidwell, 2001). Its premise is the sociable nature of the human being, which often culminates in misunderstandings or disputes in social relations, caused by differences in understanding regarding the lived or perceived reality (Honneth, 1996).

The EU's role in conflict resolution and crisis management in BiH requires a clear definition of concepts to address potential reigniting conflicts or maintaining the identified crisis.

Considering that there is no single universally accepted definition of conflict, and that is an intensification of a divergence, which is its common prerequisite, and is characterised by the existence of conflict behaviour, in which the beings are actively trying to damage one another, we will use the one that is proposed by Michael Nicholson (1992).

Nicholson defines conflict as an "activity, which takes place when conscious beings (individuals or groups) wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations" (Nicholson, 1992).

Peter Wallensteen (2015) recognizes three types of conflict: interstate, internal, and state-formation conflicts. Interstate conflicts occur when nation-states disagree or when the state system is violated. Civil and ethnic wars, anti-colonial efforts, separatist and autonomous movements, territorial conflicts, and contests for control of government are all examples of internal and state-formation conflicts (Wallensteen, 2015).

Conflict is a dynamic situation, and it evolves through time in terms of its level of intensity, passing by a situation defined as a crisis that can evolve to violence (conflict). Understanding this relationship is made easier by the conflict cycle notion (Figure 2).

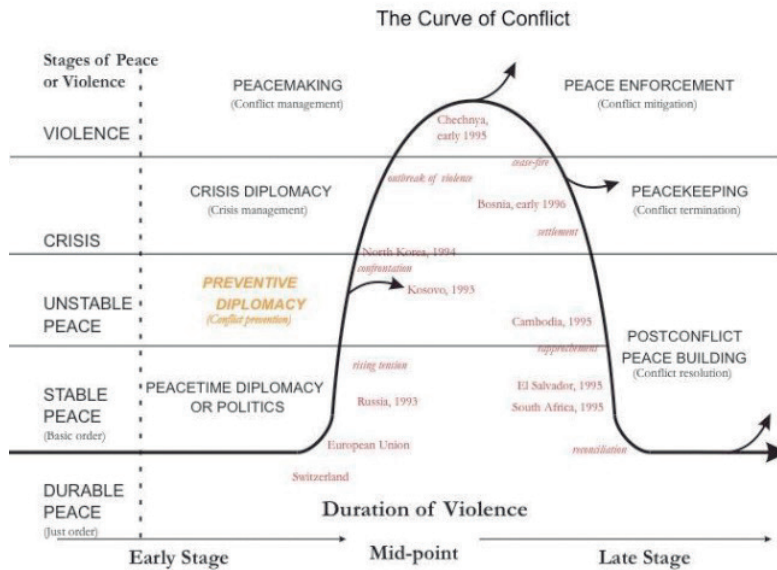


Figure 2 – Life Cycle of a Conflict

Source: Available from Lund (1996, p. 38)

Analysts agree that conflict prevention consists of taking proactive steps before violent conflict erupts, ideally during the "uneasy peace" phase of the conflict cycle.

Figure 2 refers to the crisis, a situation that comprises three conditions arising from a change in the state's internal or external environment, a threat to one or more core values, recognition of limited time to assess the identified threat, and a high probability of escalation to military activities (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997).

"We live in a time of crises. Or rather, we live in a time when our dominant representation of the world is one of crises" (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997, p. 1). The term "crisis" refers to a rupture, a discontinuity - a point at which regular order can no longer be maintained. However, crisis rhetoric has made its way into our common language to the point where recognized irregularities have become accepted (Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997).

The concept of crisis is often perceived within or between states and is therefore a matter of domestic or foreign policy. A crisis is, therefore, an alteration of the normal course of relations between two or more actors of a State or from the international scene with a high probability of the use of force.

Occurring between peace and war, it is considered a factor of particular concern, as, if not resolved in time, it could trigger a war. A crisis is always constituted as a risk or threat, related to a situation evaluated according to the information and values adopted by the entities that observe it, which may jeopardize the rule of law and the values it contains (Zwitter, 2012).

For the United Nations (UN), the spectrum of peace and security activities is developed into five types of intervention in the conflict, all related to each other: Conflict prevention, Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, Peace enforcement, and Peacebuilding (United Nations, 2008b, pp. 17–19).

The United Nations' peace and security activities spectrum reveals overlapping boundaries between conflict prevention, pacification, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and peace enforcement, as depicted in Figure 3.

Reality shows that peace operations are rarely limited to one type of activity, either led by the United Nations or conducted by non-United Nations actors.

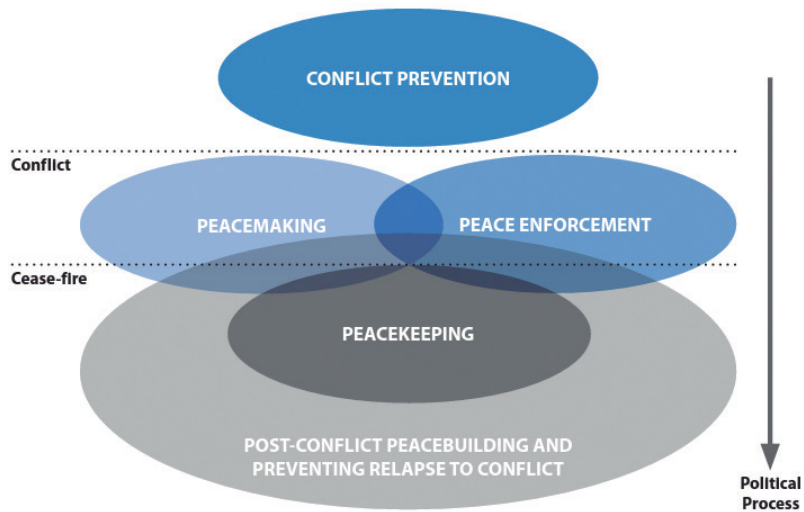


Figure 3 – Spectrum of peace and security activities

Source: Available from United Nations (2008b, p. 19).

In addition to all the peace missions presented above, it is our understand that it is necessary to mention that mediation is present in all of them, at all times, as a "conflict management process where the parties seek support or accept the offer of help from an individual, group, state or organization, to resolve their conflict or resolve their differences, without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of the law" (DeRouen et al., 2011, p. 664).

As we live times of crisis, including social, demographic, economic, security, and defence, events in and near the European Union significantly affect its citizens.

For the Crisis Response Mechanism under the European External Action Service, a crisis or an emergency is a sudden, serious deterioration of the political, security, and/or economic situation. Can be also defined as an event or development in a given country or region that might have an impact on the security interests of the EU or the security of EU personnel or citizens (Rehrl, 2021).

It is defined by the EU that, in addition to preserving peace and strengthening international security, the policy aims to promote democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and freedoms worldwide (European Union, 2016a, pp. 41–42).

The concept of crisis management evolved since the Treaty of Brussels, in 1948, passing through the Maastricht Treaty (1992), when was decided to implement a Foreign Security and Defence Policy (FSDP/ESDP), allowing the Member States to have more influence in the global sphere than if they acted individually (European Union, 1992).

In the Maastricht Treaty, ambitious objectives were established in the area of external security and defence relations and the “Petersberg Missions” (European Union, n. d.) were agreed upon. Despite that, it was only in 1999, due to the sequence of events resulting from the Balkan War and the conflict in Kosovo, that the urgent need to provide the EU with a security and defence policy became evident. Therefore, the missions were included in the text of the Amsterdam Treaty, having a prominent placement within the text (European Union, 1999).

The Treaty of Lisbon created the diplomatic branch of the EU, the European External Action Service (EEAS), under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to allow the Union to speak “with one face and one voice” on foreign policy issues (European Union, 2007).

In 2016, the European Union's Global Strategy (EUGS) was approved (European Union, 2016c), defining a new Implementation Plan on Security and Defence (European Union, 2016b).

Federica Moguerini also referred to the EUGS as “a strategy that focuses both on military and anti-terrorist fighting capabilities, as well as on employment opportunities, on the inclusiveness of societies and human rights”, stating that “the weaknesses of my neighbours and partners are my weaknesses” (European Union, 2016c, p. 5).

One of the priorities points to “an integrated approach to conflicts” (European Union, 2016c, p. 2), through a coherent use of all policies at the EU's disposal.

The EU should act at all stages of the conflict cycle, intervening promptly in prevention, reacting to crises with responsibility and determination, investing in stabilization, and avoiding premature withdrawal when a new crisis erupts (European Union, 2016c).

The relationships between crisis and conflict are significant. In general, we can say that crisis and conflict are a consequence of changes in the strategic environment, generating changes in the behaviour of the State and its agents, and leading to changes in the international system (Brecher, 2018).

The EU's actions in BiH aim to create peace and security conditions in Europe through an integrated approach, defending common European interests.

Changes in the strategic environment influence the behaviour of States and their agents, causing changes to the organization of the international system, leading to crises and conflicts. The EU must act at every stage of the conflict cycle, invest in stabilization, respond responsibly, and intervene quickly.

EU activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina aim for peace and security in the region, but efforts have been implemented below intentions, despite all the work carried out in preparing a body of documents that is logical and supportive of external actions - since 1948, when the Treaty of Brussels was signed.

3. Methodology and Method

This article was developed using a case study. It is qualitative in nature and follows a deductive logical approach. The choice of the case study strategy is justified by the need to assess the European Union's response to the resurgence of conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For this purpose, three methodological phases were defined: exploratory, analytical and conclusive.

The exploratory phase was used to search for scientific articles, legislation, and other supporting documents (Santos et al., 2019). The analysis phase was based on the collection and interpretation of various data sources, such as scientific articles, official documents and historical data.

For the search for scientific articles, we used SCOPUS and Google Scholar. SCOPUS was selected because it is considered the largest international and multidisciplinary database of manuscripts reviewed by academic peers (Rozario et al., 2021; SCOPUS, 2022).

With the help of research and articles categorized by the Ranking Web of Universities/ Highly Cited Researchers, Google Scholar is a tool that enables thorough academic material searches.

As a result, when using Google Scholar, the results are primarily from academic sources, and if the desired work is entirely available online, it can be viewed right away. Time savings is a benefit because using this search engine is quicker than using other search engines where results come from many sources.

As Google Scholar is a component of Google, a broad search engine, there is a drawback to utilizing it: occasionally, search results from non-academic sources or even erroneous or out-of-date sources emerge (Mayr & Walter, 2007; Vine, 2006; Zientek et al., 2018). Due consideration was considered for those cases.

The content analysis (Mayring, 2004) ended the analytical stage. After reading all of the content (transcripts, field notes, and official documents), we were able to use this technique to pinpoint the phrases and concepts that were the most pertinent.

We considered the categories and subcategories during the coding process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which required us to look for patterns in the codes to pinpoint the most pertinent concepts and create a map that gave us a general picture of the data.

The conclusion phase aimed to evaluate, interpret, and discuss data on the European Union's potential solutions to the BiH conflict and its potential contributions to reducing or eliminating conflicts in the region.

4. Background to the Bosnia-Herzegovina War, from the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 to the Dayton Agreements

Analysing the events and consequences since the Balkan wars of 1912-1913 until the signing of the Dayton Agreement is crucial for comprehending the current situation.

4.1 The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913

The Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 involved conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and European powers, with Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia seeking access to the Adriatic Sea, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Thrace. A final agreement between Bulgaria and Greece defined Bulgaria's retention of Thrace and Greece's control of South Macedonia.

The first Balkan War began on October 13, 1912, with Macedonia's attack and Ottoman-European occupation. Serbia sought review of agreement terms, claiming initial Adriatic coast possession was denied.

In 1913, Russia was called to mediate between the Balkan League and Bulgaria, who sought to divide Macedonia, following a treaty between Greece and Serbia. (Pavlowitch, 2000).

After a month of fighting, Greeks were forced to withdraw to the south. Romania, exploiting Bulgaria's balance, attacked and approached Sofia, forcing Bulgaria to end hostilities against Greece.

The Second Balkan War was a series of conflicts between the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan nations, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which ended with the signing of the Peace Treaties of Bucharest and Constantinople in August and September 1913 respectively (Pavlowitch, 2000).

4.2 The Civil War 1992-1995⁴

Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1921. In 1929 the kingdom was renamed Yugoslavia (Land of the South Slavs). In 1941 BiH was "dissolved" as an entity and its territory reorganized.

During the Second World War, after the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis forces, the entire territory of Bosnia was absorbed by the Independent State of Croatia, which was a "puppet state of Berlin" (Ristovitch, 2014). The genocide that followed was terrible, with most of the 14,000 Jewish people killed and Serbs massacred on a large scale.

The Bosnian capital was then taken over by a Serb-Croatian army led by Josip Broz Tito, who declared a People's Government, of communist ideology, which began to govern BiH, and the war ended.

During World War II, BiH was part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, a country that was the meeting point of a truly diverse set of ethnicities, creeds, and languages.

⁴ This chapter uses as reference information collected, compiled and used by the author as Deputy Joint Operations Center Director at EUFOR Headquarters in Sarajevo between December 2006 and June 2007.

It is estimated that 164,000 Serbs, 75,000 Muslims, and 64,000 Croats were killed in BiH during this war (Andreychuk, 2018, p. 18).

Although keeping the communist matrix, Tito never accepted to submit to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), constituting and leading the Non-aligned Movement (Munro, 2023).

After Tito's death, in 1980, Yugoslavia went into economic decline with the consequent and rapid popular protest. In 1989, the first parties appeared and, soon after, in 1990, elections took place in Slovenia and Croatia.

In Bosnia, after elections, a new government was formed resulting from a tripartite coalition, composed of Bosniaks (Muslims), Bosnian Croats (Catholics) and Bosnian Serbs (Orthodox).

Political tensions escalated, leading Serbian Democratic Party members to leave parliament and establish the Serbian National Assembly in Banja Luka, while Belgrade armed Bosnian Serbs, leading to territorial division.

On the 3rd of March 1992, President Izetbegovi proclaimed the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina (International Crisis Group (ICG), 1996).

International recognition of BiH by most European countries and the United States occurred on the 7th of April, with the country being admitted by the United Nations in 1992.

What could have been given reasons for national unity and convergence has become a cause of ethnic conflict and, later, ethnic cleansing (United Nations, 1994, p. 33).

Bosnian Serbs targeted Bosniaks, while Croats were targeted and massacred. In 1994, Bosnians and Croats signed an agreement, reducing warring factions to two.

In mid-1994, NATO began planning for the withdrawal of troops of its members from the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) from Bosnia, even though three NATO planes were targeted near Goražde. In August 1994, Serbs increased the siege of Sarajevo, cutting off the distribution of natural gas to the city. Furthermore, UN officials confirmed the increase in ethnic cleansing by Serbs (United Nations, 1994, p. 34).

A four-month ceasefire, negotiated by former US President Jimmy Carter, took effect in early 1995.

The Serbs were ordered to surrender to UN troops and withdraw heavy weapons, but ignored this order, leading to NATO attacking a Serbian ammunition depot, attacks on Muslim security areas, and hostage-taking among UN personnel.

In April 1995, the Serbs deepened the siege to Sarajevo and began deliberately attacking and harassing UNPROFOR troops more frequently. In early July, Serbs started attacks at the UN-protected area (UNPA) of Srebrenica and be-sieged Žepa, also a UNPA⁵.

In July 1995, Fikred Abdić declared himself president of the "Independent Republic of West Bosnia". In August, a mortar attack originating from the Serbian side killed 37 civilians

⁵ The ICTY has brought new charges against Radovan Karadžić and General Ratko Mladić for crimes against humanity, including the massacre of approximately 6,000 Bosnians in the capture of Srebrenica.

in Sarajevo. Most Krajina Serbs (Rieff, 1995) converged into Serbia via Bosnia and settled in the Vojvodina region and Kosovo.

NATO's 15-day air campaign against violations of the UN resolution led to a Geneva agreement between Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro's foreign ministers, establishing BiH as a legal entity with parallel relations with neighbouring countries.

US Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke met with President Slobodan Milošević to negotiate a "framework for cessation of hostilities". On 10 October 1995, a comprehensive ceasefire began.

4.3 Peace plans for Bosnia and Herzegovina

Prior to the 1995 Dayton Agreements, four peace plans were proposed by UN and European Community (EEC) diplomats to resolve the conflict in BiH.

They were the Carrington-Cutileiro Plan, the Vance-Owen Plan, the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan and the Contact Group Plan, and, lastly, the Dayton Agreements.

The Carrington-Cutileiro Plan (Cutileiro & Carrington, 1992), named after its authors Lord Carrington and the Portuguese ambassador José Cutileiro, resulted from the European Community Peace Conference held in February 1992, in an attempt to prevent BiH from slipping into the war. Its text proposed the sharing of ethnic power at all administrative levels and the devolution of the central government to local ethnic communities.

In addition, all BiH districts would be classified as Muslim, Serb or Croat, even where no ethnic majority was evident. On the 11th of March 1992, the Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina unanimously rejected the plan, releasing its map that claimed nearly 2/3 of Bosnia's territory, with a series of ethnically divided cities and isolated enclaves.

On the 18th of March 1992, all three sides of the conflict signed the agreement: Alija Izetbegović for the Bosnians, Radovan Karadžić for the Serbs and Mate Boban for the Croats. On the 28th of March 1992 however, Izetbegović, after meeting with then-US Ambassador to Yugoslavia Warren Zimmermann in Sarajevo, withdrew his signature and declared his opposition to any kind of division of Bosnia;

The Vance-Owen Peace Plan (Vance & Owen, 1993) started when, in early January 1993, UN Special Envoy Cyrus Vance and EEC Representative Lord Owen began negotiating a peace proposal with Bosnian faction leaders. The proposal, which became known as the Vance-Owen Peace Plan, called for the division of Bosnia into ten semi-autonomous regions and received UN support.

The president of Republika Srpska (RS) (Wagener, 2023), Radovan Karadžić, signed the plan on the 30th of April, but it was rejected by the Bosnian Serb National Assembly on the 6th of May and later countersigned. 96% of the voters rejected the plan, although mediators referred to the referendum as a farce.

The Owen-Stoltenberg Plan (Owen & Stoltenberg, 1993), named after the UN mediators Thorvald Stoltenberg and David Owen, on the 20th of August 1993, unveiled a map that would divide Bosnia into three ethnic mini-states.

According to the plan, Bosnian Serb forces would receive 52% of BiH's territory, Muslims would be allocated 30% and Bosnian Croats would receive 18%. On the 29th of August 1993, the Bosnians rejected the plan and therefore it was never signed.

The Contact Group Plan (Leigh-Phippard, 1998). Between February and October 1994, another attempt was made to reach an agreement, this time by a group of diplomats from the USA, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany (Schwegmann, 2000). The Group made progress that allowed moving toward a negotiated solution to the conflict in BiH. It was ultimately rejected in a referendum held on the 28th of August 1994.

New Peace Talks took place between the 1st and 20th of November, 1995, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio, USA, due to ethnic groups' rejection of compromises influencing their claims.

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was formally signed in Paris on the 14th of December 1995 (GFAP, 1995).

As a result of the Dayton Agreement, the country was divided into two entities The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the RS.

On the 20th of December 1995, all remaining UNPROFOR forces were transferred to the NATO leadership – to the Implementation Force (IFOR) – or withdrawn. Around 60,000 military personnel from all 16 NATO countries and 16 non-NATO countries were present for the execution of the Joint Endeavor operation, which was employed until mid-February 1996.

Dayton Agreement established the Bosnian/Croatian Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Serb Republic of Bosnia. The agreement also established a second level of government for the Federation and RS governments. The UN Office of the High Representative (OHR) was created to oversee civilian aspects of the agreement.

4.4 The implementation of the Dayton Agreement

In 1995-96, a 60,000-strong NATO-led international peacekeeping force IFOR was installed in Bosnia to implement and monitor the military aspects of the agreement.

IFOR was succeeded by a smaller NATO-led Stabilization Force SFOR, whose mission, defined in Operation Joint Forge, was to deter renewed hostilities and ensure the stabilization of peace.

The European Union peacekeeping troops EUFOR replaced SFOR in December 2004. The mission, involving 2500 troops, aimed to maintain peace and stability in the country, while NATO supported defence sector reform and counter-terrorism operations. Despite international assistance, the economy remained chaotic, with many unemployed. World Bank-financed projects rebuilt infrastructure and implemented political and economic reforms.

5. Towards EU and NATO

BiH's EU membership offers full access to the world's principal single market, financial and development assistance, sustainable development, and freedom for citizens to live, study, or work anywhere, thereby stabilizing the state and the region.

BiH plans to boost NATO support for democratic, institutional, and security sector reforms, focusing on developing professional armed forces based on national values and high professional standards.

The intention of BiH to join the European Union and to be admitted as a member of NATO was also registered as proof of its determination to be a sovereign country.

5.1 BiH's intention to integrate EU

Aiming to move forward to give better living conditions to its citizens, BiH declared its intention to apply for EU membership, although other problems continued to delay the internal integration of BiH. While the danger of renewed violence remained minimal, the stalemate between the Federation and RS persisted. Struggles over a new constitution, including contested provisions for a common police force, have staunchly resisted resolution.

The United Nations High Representative remained in office despite repeated attempts to end his authority and transfer his advisory functions to an EU office. Behind all these difficulties are the ongoing troubled relations between Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs.

Their leaders' respective demands for a federation with a few central powers in Sarajevo and a loose confederation offering the right of secession were not consensual. Their disagreement thwarted repeated efforts to draft a new constitution (GFAP, 1995) to replace the Dayton Agreement.

In 2013, the work of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina was hampered by attempts to reform the government and by street demonstrations in Sarajevo. Later that year, the rupture of an alliance between the two main Bosnian Serb parties - the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) further compromised the government's precarious balance of ethnically based agendas.

In its annual progress report, the European Commission warned that Bosnia's complex decision-making process is hindering its progress towards EU membership.

On 15 February 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina formally applied for EU membership. While full membership was likely more than a decade away, the move signalled the country's commitment to economic and political reforms and greater integration with other European countries (Lampe et al., 2023).

The relations that Bosnia and Herzegovina has with European Union are based on the fact that the EU is its biggest trading partner, other than a security provider. In 2020, 60.6% of the country's imports originated from the EU, while 72.3% of its exports went to the EU. About two-thirds of the country's stock in FDI originates in EU countries. Adding to this, the European Union continues to support the implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace signed at Dayton/Paris in 1995.

EU is planning to maintain if not increase its support for the Armed Forces of BiH (AFBiH). The plan is to support the AFBiH through an assistance measure announced in November 2021 worth €10 million for the demining battalion of the AFBiH, an assistance measure worth €6 million announced in June 2022 for the benefit of the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF) and the continuous support for EUFOR Althea for the BiH Armed forces, including through training.

Those assistance measures intend to provide BiH with the conditions to comply with 14 fundamental priorities to become a member as defined by the Council on the 10th of December 2019 (European Union, 2019).

5.2 BiH's connection to NATO

Continuing efforts to maintain peace, security, and stability in the country and the region, in 2007 NATO accepted BiH in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program and in 2010 it was invited to integrate the Action Plan for NATO membership (NATO's Membership Action Plan).

NATO maintains a Headquarters in Sarajevo to support Bosnia in the PfP program while promoting greater integration with this organization and providing logistical support to EU forces in the country.

Bosnia intends to join NATO, aspiring for stability and to have support for the needed democratic, institutional, security sector and defence reforms, recognizing that NATO is the greatest security and defence umbrella of Europe as a Continent and of EU as the main peace and prosperity provider since the Second World War.

NATO wants to play its original role in deterring increased Russian influence in Western Europe by using a Balkan country as a gateway. Doing so, it returns to the main purpose of its creation, i.e., to preserve the freedom and security of Europe as a whole, preventing its general breakdown.

For NATO, having BiH as a candidate and, if so decided, a member allows it to fulfil another purpose, denying the increase of Russia's power and influence in the country and the Balkans at large, preventing the augmentation of its advantage through Serbia.

The dynamics of the inclusion of the Western Balkans in the EU is seen in complementary terms when Atlantic integration (NATO) was considered a prerequisite for EU integration. It was a path followed by all Western Balkan countries so far, so the support regarding NATO integration reflected the fact that NATO integration is the first plan to fulfil the ultimate goal, the EU integration.

6. Current instability factors (consequences of the 1992-1995 war)

This chapter presents the causes of the instability currently perceived in BiH. It is based on the analysis of the motivations associated with the present social and political instability, as well as the implications of the intervention of external entities (countries or organizations), which, according to the conflict cycle, can be considered specific catalysts.

As we argue, the instability is due to various factors, derived mainly from the consequences of the war that took place between 1992 and 1995.

6.1 Identification of the instability

About 20 years have passed since the implementation of the Dayton Agreements and Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to have the presence of forces from the international community, namely the EU, under the mandate of the United Nations (United Nations, 2021a).

Recently, at a meeting held on June 29, 2021, the United Nations Security Council analysed

the situation in BiH, with the head of Europe and Central Asia Division of the Department of Peace Support Operations, Hervé Lecoq, expressing his concern about the situation in the country. He was referring to aspects of consolidating peace and reconciliation, with hate and revisionist speeches being recorded and the glorification of those convicted of war crimes, despite progress being made in some areas.

The recently appointed High Representative for BiH, Christian Schmidt, was also officially received at the meeting, despite RS having sent a document requesting the closure of this High Representative's office in the country (United Nations, 2021a). In response, it was stated that the cabinet will be closed when BiH achieves the objectives of the "Agenda 5+2" defined by the High Representative and approved by the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board (PIC SB) (United Nations, 2008a).

In a report sent to the Council, Christian Schmidt states that the country faces the greatest threat of the post-war period, with the imminent danger of splitting, with a very real prospect of a return to conflict. Very explicitly, in the Summary on page 1, it is said that:

"Persistent, grave challenges to the fundamentals of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP) by the Republika Srpska (RS) entity authorities, led by the biggest RS party, the Alliance for Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) headed by BiH Presidency member Milorad Dodik, endanger not only the peace and stability of the country and the region but – if unanswered by the international community – could lead to the undoing of the Agreement itself" (United Nations, 2021b, p. 1).

According to the document, if this threat is carried out, Dodik intends to have a new constitution for RS, rejecting all "decisions and other laws illegally imposed by the High Representatives". This statement, in practice, would mean the "recreation" of his army, dividing the national armed forces and occupying the facilities currently in use by the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH) with its military, in addition to the withdrawal of the high court and tax administration, fundamental pillars of the country (defence, judicial and tax system).

The parliament of Bosnia's autonomous Serb Republic voted on December 2021 (48 votes out of 83 seats) to start the work on withdrawing from the AFBiH, judiciary, and tax system institutions, breaking ties with Bosnia, in a non-binding motion meant to pave the way for secession (Sito-sucic, 2021).

In the report, still in the Summary, on page 1, it is mentioned that this behaviour is to carry out secession without proclaiming it since the unilateral withdrawal of any entity from state institutions would lead to the collapse of those institutions and ultimately jeopardizes the state's ability to function and fulfil its constitutional responsibilities.

Dodik continues to assert that there is no war, there will be no war, nor does he raise that possibility, adding that the Serbian leadership does not intend to take military action (Sito-Sucic, 2021) and that even in the face of the threat of Western sanctions; it will always count on China and Russia (Boffey, 2021). In addition to these statements, Dodik criticizes the decisions taken by the High Representative, which he considers "decisions of unelected foreigners" (Guimarães, 2021).

For their part, the other members of the Presidency called for the guarantee of constitutional protection, stability and compliance with the agreements and other commitments assumed.

Added to these appeals is that in October 2021, a few thousand people demonstrated in Banja Luka against the government, accusing Milorad Dodik's party of corruption in acquiring equipment intended to combat the COVID-19 pandemic (Higgins, 2022).

From what has been described, the absence of armed conflict and the obedience to the Dayton Agreements seem to configure what Johan Galtung calls a situation of negative peace, since there is no war or conflict when the aim is to achieve positive peace (Galtung, 1967).

At this point, it is worth not forgetting that at the end of the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, Serbia was left to claim territory that was "snatched from its interests" by the other countries of the Balkan League. Other arguments used are that in the Second World War, the Croats and Muslims massacred the Serbs on a large scale, and that one of the focuses of the civil war was to create "Greater Serbia" in the territories where this ethnic group was the majority.

In addition to this, with the signing of the Dayton Agreements, the presence of foreign troops was imposed. This presence is still maintained in a residual form and a constitution that should remain in force until a proper "Fundamental Law" was defined, voted, and implemented, that has not yet happened and, as the highest representative of the international community, the High Representative of the United Nations monitors in detail the action of the tripartite presidency.

Also noteworthy is the report of 19th December 2021 by the Head of the European Union Delegation, who is also the European Union Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUSR), Ambassador Johann Sattler. The report says that BiH is still at an early stage in the reform of the public administration and the judicial system, reflecting poor performance and the discredit of the actions of these institutions, which causes the lack of motivation of the citizens and the increase of corruption and organised crime, with the police being very vulnerable to the influence of politicians, and freedom of expression and assembly being guaranteed, particularly in RS, where activists are subject to persecution and prosecution (European Union, 2021c).

In the report of December 22, 2021, the EUSR states that Milorad Dodik has informed the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, of his intention to convene a session of the RS parliament to start the process of reducing competence to the national parliament as far as the Republic is concerned.

In response, Commissioner Várhelyi replied that if the plans of the Bosnian Serb member of the tripartite presidency were to be implemented, the consequence would be a deviation, a setback, in the EU accession process, with all the resulting implications, and that "the EU is fully committed to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and rejects any proposal that would undermine the constitutional framework of BiH" (European Union, 2021d).

Recently, as a consequence of the Ukraine war, the Bosnian Serb nationalists decided to delay the plans to pull their region out of Bosnia's national institutions, not implementing

what was decided in December 2021, as said by their leader Milorad Dodik on the 6th of June (Reuters, 2022).

Despite this, on February 27, Dodik, as RS President, and after the HR for BiH issued a decree suspending a law approved by the RS National Assembly that seeks to establish RS ownership of selected property used by RS public authorities, rejected it, threatening that RS would secede from BiH if the legislation were interfered with (United Nations, 2023).

In the presidential elections held on 2 October 2022, voters in the Federation elected Denis Bećirović, a Bosniak, and re-elected Željko Komšić, a Croat, while voters in Republika Srpska elected Željka Cvijanović, a Serb (United Nations, 2022).

The High Representative Christian Schmidt emphasized the significance of establishing a government quickly and enacting the main reforms required for BiH to seek EU candidate status and move forward with its Euro-Atlantic integration (United Nations, 2022).

During a recent working visit to Croatia, last May, the Member of the BiH Presidency Denis Bećirović, stated, "I came to Croatia first and foremost to send a message that it is time to relax and improve bilateral ties between our two countries" (Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia, 2023).

BiH instability stems from Dayton Agreements peace and ethnic group presence, with problematic tripartite presidency and seldom consensus-generating consensus, despite distant Balkan and World Wars memories.

The conflict cycle is triggered by factors such as Serbian President Milorad Dodik's ambition for personal and political affirmation, and disputes over Balkan geostrategic space by Russia and China.

After the 2022 elections a hope for peace and stability emerged, with the departure of Dodik from the tripartite presidency, despite having been elected president of the RS.

Even though Dodik left the tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is believed that the instability he and his supporters are creating will undermine the Dayton Peace Agreement and the state of BiH.

Dodik, by stating that his voters want him to take the decision to declare independence and secede RS from BiH, is destabilizing the country and the region, and preventing its progress towards the EU, putting security and the stability of the region at risk, creating conditions for a return to interethnic conflict.

My analysis is that EU must intervene actively to persuade BiH to maintain a safe and secure environment.

7. European Union Options

Given the conceptual framework presented and the situation currently experienced, without disregarding the general and specific antecedents and catalysts identified, it is necessary to address the options that arise for the EU to reduce and eliminate the sources of conflict that seem to jeopardize the Dayton agreement and the social, political and, consequently, the economic stability of BiH.

As stated by the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, "the policy of enlargement is a geostrategic investment in peace, stability, security and economic growth on the European continent" (European Union, 2022).

The enlargement will take place if EU candidates accept and meet the criteria that are agreed upon, something that the Commission on BiH's application for EU membership says Bosnia is not doing.

This information is taken from the Commission's opinion on BiH's application for EU membership, according to which, "Bosnia and Herzegovina currently does not sufficiently meet the Copenhagen political criteria and must make considerable efforts to strengthen its institutions to ensure democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the respect and protection of minorities" (European Union, 2022).

We, therefore, consider that to enforce the conditions of the Dayton Agreement and the requisites for admission to become a Member State, the EU has at its disposal three approaches to face the deterioration of political, social, and economic stability in terms of security and defence experienced or envisioned in BiH, i. e., the diplomatic option, the economic option, and the military option (under the CSDP).

7.1 The political/diplomatic option

In her intervention during her official visit to BiH, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said that the country "belongs to the European Union", being a cause of common interest and a shared destiny and calling for it to build the "bridge of reconciliation" on behalf of victims of war and youth, with people's interests being placed first.

For the candidacy process to advance, the country's leaders have to make progress in terms of reforming the electoral system and the constitution, and above all, equal status must be granted to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina: "this is the key to advancing its European aspiration" (European Union, 2021b).

EUSR advocates for Bosnian authorities to comply with agreements, guarantee stability, equal treatment, sustainable development, combat corruption, and organised crime, while maintaining EU membership focus in diplomatic action.

This option is in line with the EUGS and is implemented in any situation, being the reason for recommendation by the current head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, who said at a press conference: "I encourage Bosnia and Herzegovina to intensify alignment with external decisions and security of the EU. (...) I regret that the alignment rate has decreased in the first months of this year. It is certainly not in line with the aspirations to become a candidate country to the European Union" (European Union, 2021a).

It should not be forgotten that also at the political/diplomatic level, measures must be taken to keep BiH complying with the principles and values of the EU, despite the influences of Russia and China.

In practical terms, it is admitted that China intends to place a foothold on the Balkan Peninsula to expand its “string of pearls” (Jie & Wallace, 2021) having, among other projects, started to provide support for the construction of a hydroelectric power generation complex in the region of Foča, located 80 km southeast of Sarajevo, with a budget of 103 million euros (Huaxia, 2021).

Regarding Russia, there is a historical connection to the region and the country belonging to the “South Slavic peoples” (Yugoslavia), and, in particular, to RS, creating conditions to guarantee a port in the “warm waters of the Mediterranean”. Also related to the rapprochement with Russia is the “affective relationship” with Serbia, which recently received weapons from Russia, in particular, “Kornet” (Klimentyev, 2022) anti-tank missiles and which, in the event of an escalation of conflict, may cross the border.

As an additional argument from Russia, confirming its opposition to BiH joining the EU and NATO, was expressed by the Russian Ambassador to Sarajevo, Igor Kalabijov, when he threatened to follow the Ukrainian example, saying that if Sarajevo decides to join NATO Moscow will consider that a “threat attack” (DN/LUSA, 2022).

Another player to be considered is the USA, which was one of the first countries to recognize BiH's independence, having established diplomatic relations with it in 1992, and which has always supported the implementation of the Dayton agreements in BiH (and taken a very active part in the process of peace that preceded it).

Its position is that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country must be maintained, as well as its European integration, as published on the Foreign Policy (Tamkin, 2018).

This position gives the USA a great deal of credit in BiH, both for the role played in the peace process and during the initial phases of the implementation. Therefore, they try to remove pressure by sending diplomats to the country, to reiterate their support for the country's territorial integrity and central institutions.

7.2 The economic option

From an economic point of view, BiH relies significantly on the international community, receiving large funds from EU support of key sectors, the largest part of which is to provide the rule of law and fundamental rights, and which, between 2014 and 2020, amount to 530 million euros.

Regarding trade, the EU is the destination for 72% of products originating in BiH, and BiH imports 61% from the EU, making the Union its biggest trading partner. In loans, the EU, since 1999, has already granted 2.4 billion euros (European Union, 2023b).

Meanwhile, in the voice of the German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock, Germany suggests that sanctions be applied to Milorad Dodik considering that the secession attempt is unacceptable and that the situation in BiH is worrying.

Although this position was taken at a meeting of EU foreign ministers, no decisions were taken in this regard, as the measure requires unanimity, which is not guaranteed, as Slovenia and Hungary blocked the proposal (Zawada, 2021).

Other investors weigh BiH's economy, the US worth mentioning, which in 2020 made a direct investment of 10 million US dollars - a value that remained in 2021 (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022).

Here also positions have already begun to emerge with some solidity, with the US Treasury imposing punitive measures such as freezing assets and the travel ban to Dodik. Other measures may also be adopted if the Bosnian Serb leader does not change his stance tends to weaken the central state (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2022).

In response to these decisions and others taken in the meantime, Dodik has already said that "his Chinese and Russian friends" are available to provide all the help that is understood as necessary (Boffey, 2021), in a clear posture of a challenge to the Western international community.

7.3 The military option (under CSDP)

Taking as a starting point the declarations of Christian Schmidt, HR at BiH, it is certain that EUFOR, with a force of approximately 1,100 soldiers, is the key to the stability of the country. It must be borne in mind that, in the event of the departure of the Bosnian Serbs from the AFBiH and the worsening of instability, its mission must be expanded (in terms of tasks and personnel) (United Nations, 2021b).

Considering what has already been mentioned about the EUGS and its Integrated Approach, we conclude that the presence of an EU force, acting under the UN mandate, EUFOR, is an effective deterrent to the escalation of the conflict.

EUFOR has been in BiH since 2004, accomplishing the ALTHEA mission, as "the European Union's military contribution to the stabilization and integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the family of European Nations", with a mandate in two parts, one executive and another non-executive.

The executive derives from the aforementioned United Nations Security Council resolution (supporting BiH authorities in maintaining a safe environment) (United Nations, 2021a). The non-executive one (to support the collective and combined training of AFBiH), is executed in compliance with the stipulations of the Dayton Agreement and seeks that BiH is a "security provider" rather than a "security consumer" (European Union, 2023a).

The HR's statement regarding an extension of the EUFOR mission seems very unlikely. The main justification for that lays on the Union decision-making process, which requires unanimity for a proposal to be carried out, and Hungary's evident and already expressed support for Dodik, associated with an unwillingness of the other member states to increase their presence.

On the other hand, it is not considered that the conditions are met for the return of a NATO force, in close collaboration with the EU, considering that namely Turkey, which has shown an alignment with Russia in support of Dodik, would oppose it.

8. The European Union's Response

EU has played a significant role in promoting a safe and stable environment in BiH. After the armed conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s, the EU has been a key actor in the region's peace and stabilization process.

Given that the strategy of a political entity is based on interests and that it is in the EU's interest for Europe to be at peace, to ensure the security of all citizens to continue sustainable development, and to deal with the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU has three options at its disposal, concerning that country.

The first is the diplomatic option, which has always been used and was enhanced by the more visible performance of the EUSR, the UN HR, with the visit of the President of the European Commission and the statements of the EU High Representative for External Relations.

Bearing in mind the positioning and economic dependence of BiH on the EU, an economic option was also identified, which, if implemented extensively, will have an immediate impact on citizens, their living conditions, and their purchasing power, already affected by the pandemic COVID-19. A fact of different importance is the application of sanctions on the Bosnian Serb leader, to make him stop the secessionist impetus that will jeopardize the union of the country constituted by two entities and the fulfilment of the Dayton Agreement.

The third option is military, with the maintenance of the EUFOR mission in the territory, providing deterrence and continued compliance with the Dayton Agreements. This presence contributes to a safe and secure environment in the country, in line with its mandate, and to fulfilling the core tasks of the OHR's Mission Implementation Plan and the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP).

This option can be accomplished with the extension of the mission, or even with the participation of NATO forces, essentially to support the AFBiH training, and in their progression towards NATO standards.

Considering the options available to the EU, an analysis of their applicability in the context described and lived in BiH is needed.

It is important to consider that the political/diplomatic option is and will always be present at any time, to ensure that the country has the conditions to interact with its peers in the international community. The main objective is that, through timely and opportune advice, extremist positions are not taken by any of the national leaders, whether for political, nationalist, or individual reasons, leading to negotiation, and be-ing taken consensual and reasonable decisions.

Still in this area, the change in geostrategic balances should be taken into account, providing timely advice so that there are no deviations that jeopardize the EU and NATO accession process, deviations that may arise as a result of opportunities taken by Russia and/or by China.

In the economic scope and having described what can be done about this option, it is believed that it is a powerful instrument of influence to reduce nationalist impulses and a natural focus of instability.

The pressure was placed on the tripartite presidency. Especially on the Bosnian Serb member, Milorad Dodik, who has made statements and taken secessionist positions, by the USA and the European Union, and individually by their leaders, namely by the President of the European Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and by representatives of the EUMS. This point is even more relevant considering the dependence on external funding, namely from the Union, via loans and the transfer of structural funds is well known.

Looking now at the military option, we find that the EU has been present in BiH since 2004 under a United Nations mandate and in the execution of Operation ALTHEA. Considering its objectives of supporting the formation and training of AFBiH and guaranteeing a safe and secure environment, providing security and well-being to the populations, it is an important asset on site. Other than that, it constitutes a rapid reaction force to cope with any change in the situation or as a force of emergency military support, being accepted as a guarantor of social stability for the deterrence it presents. Despite the 1,100 military personnel of ALTHEA present in BiH, we believe that it will be maintained in the execution of the current mission, keeping the mandate and with the present strength.

Considering the initial question of this paper - How can the European Union influence BiH in maintaining a safe, secure and stable environment? - we believe that an integrated solution will be adopted - the "Integrated Approach", as defined in the European Union's Global Strategy presented and strongly defended by Federica Mogherini, responsible for the EU's external and defence relations until 2019.

The Integrated Approach uses at the same time all the instruments available to the EU in the resolution of the crisis, intending that it does not evolve into conflict. To reach this goal, the EU is due to act in a multidimensional way. Doing so, will use all options within the scope of the prevention, maintenance, and management of the conflict, multiphase, and acting at all stages of the conflict cycle. EU will intervene multilevel, by acting at the local, regional and global levels in conflict resolution, and multilateral, involving all actors present in the conflict and considered necessary for its resolution, whether international organizations, countries or the country's civil society (European Union, 2016c).

In addition to this, Josep Borrell, the current EU High Representative for foreign and security policy, continues to favour this approach within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy. The main reason is that it utilizes all available options concurrently, makes the most of what each one can contribute to the resolution of the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and is unmistakably consistent with the ideas put forth and supported by Federica Mogherini on the EUGS.

In an attempt to maintain BiH motivated to move forward the European values and principles, on 15 December 2022, the European Council unanimously voted to grant BiH candidate status, making a milestone in the country's path towards EU integration (United Nations, 2023).

9. Conclusion

Globalisation forces us to look at the world holistically, knowing that the action of one actor will affect all other actors on the international scene. This statement drives us to the need to pay attention to the position taken by the Bosnian Serb member of the tri-partite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, for the possible change in the security situation and its impact on Europe, with particular importance in the European Union.

BiH has a past based on wars and conflicts, with preponderance, in recent memory, for the civil war of 1992-1995, from which, after the signing of the Dayton Agreement, a compromise solution came out with a tripartite presidency, where the three ethnic groups and the two entities are represented.

BiH keeps on having trouble developing its institutions due to economic constraints, racial conflicts, several levels of administration, and corruption.

In face of the nationalist positions taken by Dodik, outbreaks of instability have been perceived that can lead to crisis and, ultimately, to conflict.

After the recent general 2022 elections, one of the major obstacles to the needed safe and secure environment was removed from the tripartite presidency, when Dodik was replaced by Željka Cvijanović. Despite that, he is still influencing the nationalists and radical activists of his ethnic group and going further on his attempt to creating conditions to the secession from the Bosnia as created by the Dayton Agreements.

The EU has played a key role in promoting a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina through its involvement in security, support for the rule of law, encouragement of the European integration process, promotion of regional cooperation, and economic and development assistance.

However, it is important to highlight that there are still challenges to be faced in the region, and the EU continues to play an active role in the search for lasting peace, stability and prosperity in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

To seek a solution, the EU must analyse the options at its disposal and adopt what it considers to safeguard the ultimate purpose of the safety and well-being of its citizens, in an integrated manner.

Having identified the origins of the conflict in the presence of differences between the ethnic groups and entities that make up BiH and, in particular, in the nationalist impulses of Milorad Dodik, we believe that the options available to the EU to deal with the reigniting of the conflict are of a political/diplomatic, economic and military nature (under the CSDP), being the EU Integrated Approach.

All the above mentioned might be associated with Dodik's need for political affirmation due to the approach of elections and the possible cover-up of economic illicit activities, not ruling out the geostrategic dispute of the Balkan peninsula by Russia and China, with the opposition of the USA and the EU.

Considering a theoretical approach, the activities of the EU in BiH are being conducted mainly by neoliberalism ideas, with Van der Leyen and Josep Borrell acting at the institutions

and government level (legal, tax, and defence systems). Working with the local leaders and institutions are the UNSC HR, Christian Schmidt, and the Head of EU Delegation and EU Special Representative, Johann Sattler, providing timely advice on the benefit of cohesion and territorial integrity.

The main objective of international action is to evolve from a negative peace to a positive one.

The solutions presented are based on an integrated approach, resorting to all the options identified, considering that security, liberty, and development are intertwined, focusing on security and defence, economic development, and diplomacy.

By using humanitarian aid, economic advice and diplomatic actions, in addition to military capacity, to bring the dissonant party to common ground where, in a negotiated solution, the crisis ends, so that there is no escalation in the cycle of conflict, being, thus, the situation resolved peacefully. Thus, the answer to the starting question is given.

The research materialized in this article was limited by the positions adopted by Milorad Dodik and his followers and associates, since the instability experienced is large-ly due to his statements or actions, which, if a solution is not adopted, enables the reigniting of conflict in BiH.

Even being a nationalist and trying to gain an advantage in the elections held at the end of 2022, both individually and politically, and calling China and Russia to the internal dispute, Dodik lost the elections. Another limitation to his purposes was the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, rightfully deviating the attention and resources from the EU and the international community to this war, defusing Dodik's arguments.

So, removing Dodik from the leadership of his party and, therefore, from the tripartite presidency, is considered a new breath to BiH, returning to the safe and secure environment that gives the right strength and focus to fulfil the integration in the EU, although the results are not being recognised by Dodik or his hardliners.

At this point, a future investigation is to be carried out, with the objective of knowing how the tripartite presidency, formed by different personalities, will behave, which we assume to be less nationalistic and more committed to the integration of BiH in the EU as a member full right.

To this fact two things must be added: the first is the reaction of Dodik and his followers, who have done everything to annul the result of the elections; the second is the unpredictability of the end of the war in Ukraine. Yet another unknown fact will be the position adopted by the Kremlin in relation to the assumed rapprochement of BiH with the EU and, possibly, to NATO. Finally, it is also important to analyse the role that Serbia may play in the whole situation, being known its proximity to Moscow.

The closing remark of this research work refers to the need for the EU to adopt a more interventionist stance, namely through the integrated approach, overcoming its recognized timidity to act more effectively in the construction of peace, security and sustainable development.

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