RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA RELATING TO THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THEIR IMPACT ON HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

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1. From War to New Nation

The war that was waged in the 1990s has interrupted both the scientific research projects and the development of research institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. When the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, conditions began to develop for the renewed development of historiography. During the decade after the war, several academic gatherings were held on the issues concerning the historiography in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the countries of the former Yugoslavia and South-East Europe. A number of these scientific debates dealt with the historiography of the Ottoman period, although it was not systematically analysed, as the key theme, so that the results could eventually be transposed to the teaching of history in our schools and universities. This paper will try to point at some themes that have not been sufficiently elaborated, or have been deemed controversial and sensitive in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that primarily relate to the historiography of the Ottoman period of the country’s history. Situating this theme in the context of the post-war society, we have to keep in mind that there are three constituent peoples that fought fiercely in the 1992–1995 war, and that continue to struggle for their political interest even after the war, this time using non-violent means. Unfortunately, history has been continuously used for political aims, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina we have the situation where historical events are

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usually interpreted in two, even three different ways. This relates to all historic events, those from the Ottoman period included.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a very interesting country for research given that both its peoples and individual citizens are burdened with a ‘condensed’ sense of history, while they need one another in order to define their own identities, at the same maintaining the integrity of their own fundamental relations. Parallel to this, we need to establish harmonious mutual relations. In addition, the historical terminology used in Bosnia and Herzegovina always reflects current political developments. We need to be subtle in using different nuances of words such as nation, state, ethnic group in order to be able to describe relations more clearly, while making sure not to offend anyone. This differs from the situation in other countries because ethnicity relates to the commitment of an individual to his/her religious and political heritage. This is the first task students have to learn – and they need to do it for very practical reasons - when they have to complete forms written in English. If a form requires filling in the box under the heading nation, they do not know whether they should write Bosnia and Herzegovina, or their ethnicity since, locally, the term nation applies to ethnic affiliation rather than to nation in the modern, English sense of the term. The box entitled citizenship is thus the one to be filled with the name of the country, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina. This remains confusing for most students even after they graduate from secondary school.

In order to understand issues related to the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we need to clarify that this historiography deals with three main ethno-political groups, i.e. Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, as they define themselves. In our constitution and in political discourse there is also the term Others. However, the so-called Others do not play any major role in mainstream political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and consequently in its historiography. It has been agreed that the terms Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs refer to the three constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina that are recognized in the Dayton Peace Agreement, whereby each of these ethnic (national) groups has its own extreme religious and nationalistic factions. In order to make the complexities of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina understandable, it needs to be stressed that Croats and Serbs exist both within and beyond the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. From time to time, the Croats and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina chose to consider the neighbouring states of Croatia and Serbia respectively as their mother countries in the sense of cultural reference. This implies that,