

**POLITICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL VALORIZATION OF
THE BORDER SPACE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
IN THE FUNCTION OF IDENTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS
OF TRANSBORDER COOPERATION AND FORMATION
OF PERSPECTIVE TRANSBORDER REGIONS**

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Igor Zekanović

Aleksandra Petrašević

Department of Geography, Faculty of Sciences, University of Banja Luka,
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska

ABSTRACT

The border region of Bosnia and Herzegovina has characteristics of a problem area with an emphasized depopulation process, accompanied by poor economic development and infrastructural disconnection. Along with the mentioned reasons, the appearance of isolation and peripherality, and given the specific geopolitical circumstances, the problems in certain border areas differ from each other (a high level of ethnic conflict and distrust, then the problem of refugees and forced migrants, the slow process of economic transition and many others).

The subject of the research in this paper will be related to the analysis and the role of transborder cooperation as a relatively new way of policy in the field of cooperation between political-territorial units, whose goal and function, regarding the geospatial of Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, is the formation of perspective transborder regions. Also, the aim of the paper would point out that the planning of these areas through the concept of transborder cooperation in the context of political and geographical valorisation represents one of the guidelines, not only for revitalization of the border area in economic terms, but also as a guideline of the future concept of ethnic tolerance and geopolitical stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Western Balkans countries in general.

Realisation of the work is planned by complex general and special methods and techniques of data processing (statistical, cartographic, GIS analysis), in accordance with historical, structural, functional and dialectical methodological approach, then by determining the development functions of the border space, and monitoring of political and geographical processes and problems.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, border area, political-geographical processes, transborder cooperation, transborder region.

INITIAL CONSIDERATION

Relation to the border and border area, together with the cultural and historical heritage, population, and the influence of immediate and distant environment are the most important contents of political-geographical evaluation of a specific geospace.

In the domain of political-geographical research, borders and border area represent the basic premise and characteristic of political-geographical position of some country.

Professors from the Institute of Geography, University of Tübingen, Germany, L. Brujan and S. Kinder highlight the following on the importance of the study of borders and border problems: “There is a multitude of perspectives on borders, covering a wide range of scientific fields, from political sciences, to economics, cultural studies, anthropology and human geography. In the opinion of some scholars, a distinctive scientific field of border research or borderline studies can also be outlined or is emergent. Borders and border region are analysed on mainly based on their: 1. function, 2. significance, 3. contextualisation, 4. impact and 5. handling. One of the major consideration present in all disciplines is that borders *primarily demarcate/delineate* at least two different spheres of political, economic or social type. Therefore, whenever, we deal with borders, we deal with differences, even then when those differences are minor or almost unperceivable. This implies a *line-up of differences* on each side of borders“ [1].

Also, the border may be defined as “social factor in the form of imaginary line, zone or front which parts the territory of the state from all others or from the open sea. The border represents the limit of state power and the hedging instrument of sovereignty. Sovereignty has to be limited – the world of sovereign states is the world divided by borders. That is not just the line that divides two states, but it is also the contact zone.” [2].

In the most general sense, we may define borders as “the end line to which the sovereignty of one state extends” [3].

Among the different types of borders that exist in the socio-cultural sphere, political borders are the foremost indicator of the interaction between the different social, economic and cultural processes, and they also have their particularity, respectively, that they are immaterial spatial element, which may cause very dangerous political-geographical processes in geospace. Therefore, the geographers are intensely interested in the problems of political borders, and especially the political geographers [4].

In geopolitical terms in “traditional” regions, such as the geospace of Western Balkans, the border still, in the true sense of the word, is a symbol of national identity, and it still has a deterministic function in dividing “us” from “them”.

Geospace of Bosnia and Herzegovina is specific by its physical-geographical and cultural-historical characteristics. It occupies a central position in the geospace of Western Balkans and former SFRY.

In this area, three different cultural and civilization circles are faced: Orthodox or Eastern Christian, Catholic or Western Christian and Islamic or Turkish-Oriental, which provides specific ethno-cultural and national characteristics to geospace, as well as specific geopolitical characteristics of merging and mixing. Representing specificity in any way, this geospace, in different historical-geographical periods and political-geographical circumstances, had its integration and disintegration trends.

Four events effected the most the formation of ethnic and religious mosaic in BiH. The first is that the Slavic people of the Balkan Peninsula, by the end of 9th century accepted Christianity. The second is the division of the Christian Church in 1054. The third event is the arrival of the Ottoman Empire and a new religion – Islam, at the beginning of 14th century at the Balkan Peninsula. The fourth, solving the “Eastern Question” gave the political-geographical seal to ethnic and religious mosaic, ie. the emergence of new Balkan states and the withdrawal of the Turkish Empire at the end of the 19th century from South East Europe.

Religious-civilizational factor occupies a special role, both in the past and in modern political-geographical processes in this geospace. Here are his final “achievements” and zones of expansionist attempts (this is the space of the deepest penetration of Islam in

Europe, Catholicism in the East and Orthodoxy in the West). National mosaic is so complex that the constituent people in BiH have their compatriots and “brothers” in the territories of neighboring countries. Wars and military campaigns in this geospace had religious premises, as well as the last conflict.

It has been more than twenty-two years since the establishment of peace and the end of armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The political-geographical characteristics of Bosnia and Herzegovina significantly altered under the influence of European integration and contemporary political and geographical processes. Also, relapses, resulting from the disintegration processes of the early nineties of the last century, are inextricably linked to these processes.

Mutual presence, in geopolitical terms, of these diametrically opposed processes, and economic, political and primarily ethno-confessional developments in geospace of BiH, conditioned the specific relationship towards the border and border area.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AS POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SYSTEM

At the end of World War II and by the proclamation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, it was established administrative and political unit Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one of six republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The area of geospace was 51,129 km² or 19.9% of the territory of the SFRY. It was located between 42⁰26' and 45⁰15' of north latitude and 15⁰45' and 19⁰41' of east longitude. An important feature of its geographical location was central position in geospace of Yugoslavia, between two social-economic regions – Pannonian and Adriatic. From the north, west and south it bordered with the Croatia, and from east and south east with Serbia and Montenegro. It had an exit to the Adriatic Sea with a length of 20 km of coastline.

It was considered the “Yugoslavia in miniature”, because all ethnic specificities, that Yugoslavia had, Bosnia and Herzegovina also had. In Bosnia and Herzegovina lived Serbs, Muslims and Croats with the same rights and obligations, which means that neither one of the nations was the holder of the national sovereignty, as it was the case with the other Yugoslav republics, considering the political system and the concept of ethnic federalism. It was the only republic without “major” nation-building people. It was said that it was no Serbian, nor Muslim, nor Croatian, but also Serbian, Muslim and Croatian. According to the population census from 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina had a total of 4,377,033 residents: 1,902,965 Muslims (43.5%), 1,366,104 Serbs (31.2%) and Croats 760,852 (17.4%).

The last decade of the 20th and the beginning of 21st century were marked by turbulent political-geographical processes that greatly changed geopolitical relations in international community, and especially in Europe. These processes did not bypass Balkan Peninsula and geospace of Yugoslavia. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia disintegrated already in 1991, ie. 1992. In its geospace it was created five new political-territorial units: Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

Conflicting interests of Serbian, Croatian and Muslim people in Bosnia and Herzegovina had a particularly pronounced spatial dimension, arising from a different understanding of the essence of the territory, which all three sides entailed as “their”. Essentially, once again it was raised centennial question: “Whose Bosnia and Herzegovina is?”

“Bosnia and Herzegovina crisis manifested all the historical-political and political-geographical elements of balkanization conditioned by factors of local, regional and global character” [5].

When it became clear that the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina is inevitable, the international community tried to prevent it by forming various bodies and expert groups. The first plan of solution of Bosnian crisis was offered by the expert group headed by the Portuguese diplomat Jose Cutileiro. The plan remained unrealized and it was the last peace attempt prior to the escalation of tragic events and a milestone in the further peace talks, which were performed by the far more delicate conditions. Since the April of 1992, the civil war was led in the geospace of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which lasted more than three years.

The principal harmonization of attitude between the warring parties occurred in September 1995 when the Geneva and New York Conference were held, where the Basic principles for the implementation of peace were agreed. On these grounds, the final peace talks were performed in Air Force Base Wright Patterson (USA) and they were finalized on 21 November 1995 when it was agreed “General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its definitive acceptance and signing were carried out on 14 December 1995 in Paris” [6].

The former High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Wolfgang Petritsch in his book “Bosnia and Herzegovina: from Dayton to Europe” said the following: “Civil war in BiH lasted for three and a half years. During this war, many negotiations for its completion were led unsuccessfully. The first failed Cutileiro’s Plan from February 1992. In the period from February to April 1993, the war parties were offered Vance-Owen Plan that also failed. In January 1994, the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan was rejected, and also the Contact Group plan. Only upon the intervention of the USA the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina ceased and the peace was signed on 21 November 1995 at Wright – Peterson Air Force Base (state Ohio) USA” [7].

The state was constituted consisting of two political-territorial units, entities: the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The territory of the prewar municipality Brčko was proclaimed the district.

“Dayton” Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex political-geographical system, based on ethnic and heterogeneity of space. “Its arrangement has religious and civilization premises, and it is based on the formula 1+2+3, more precisely: one country, two entities and three constituent people and religions” [8].

The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina has three members and represents the three religions and the three nations. The entities are not defined as state units, but they have features of political and geographical communities, which are based on religious and civilizational determinants.

THE BORDER AREA AS A DETERMINANT OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF BIH

Bosnia and Herzegovina borders with three countries: the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro.

The total length of the border line of Bosnia and Herzegovina is 1,568 km. The border line of the Republic of Srpska with Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro is 872 km. The border line of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards Croatia is 660 km, and the

length of border line of Brčko District is 36 km (towards the Republic of Croatia) (Figure 1 Authors).

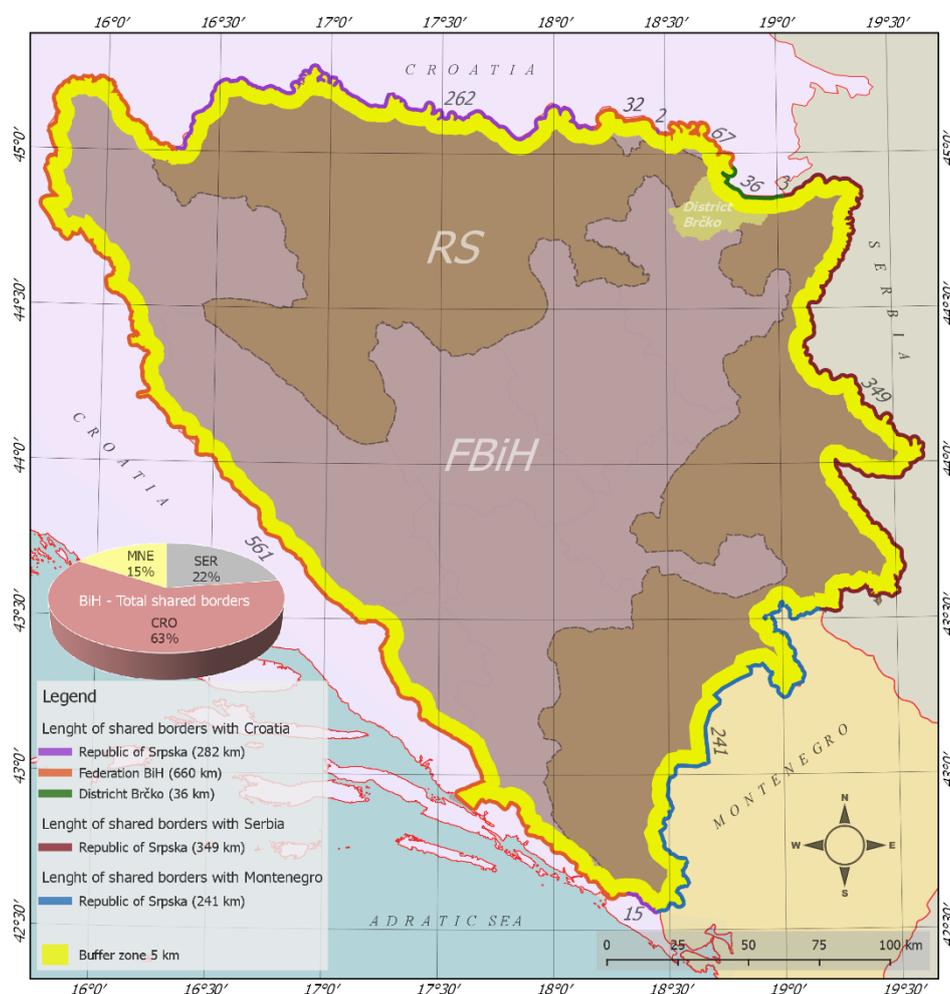


Figure 1. Length of borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The paper analyzes about 840 settlements entering the border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina is determined by the depth of 5 km from the state border, i.e. by the settlements that participate in this band (in accordance with the Agreement on Border Traffic between the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed in Brussels on 13 June 2013).

Table 1. Border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina

| Canton/Entity/District | Area km ² | Population 2013 | Pop/km ² |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Unsko-sanski | 970 | 63.302 | 65,26 |
| Kanton 10 | 730 | 11.772 | 16,13 |
| Zapadno-hercegovački | 403 | 36.988 | 91,78 |
| Hercegovačko-neretva | 461 | 13.100 | 28,42 |
| Posavski | 307 | 31.153 | 101,48 |
| Republika Srpska | 4.210 | 252.323 | 59,90 |
| Brčko distrikt | 164,7 | 51.833 | 314,70 |
| Total | 7,245,7 | 460.471 | 63.5 |

The total surface of the border area is 7,245 km² which amounts about 14.2% of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Table 1 Authors, [10]).

The surface of border area of the Republic of Srpska is 4,210 km² or 58.1% of the border area of BiH. The border area of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has the surface of 2,871 km² or 39.6%, and Brčko District has 164.7 km² or 2.3% of the territory of border area.



Figure 2. Settlements in buffer zone 5 km

According to the results of the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2013, in this area was recorded 460,471 residents or 13.4% of the total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The average population density of the border area is 63.5 residents/km², and according to the degree of concentration of the population this geospace belongs to the zone of dense population (from 51 to 100 residents/km²).

Table 2. Population and settlements of border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina

| Entity District | Settl. | Population | | | | | | | | Total |
|-----------------|------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|------------|----------------|
| | | Bosniacs | % | Serbs | % | Croats | % | Oth. | % | |
| F BiH | 280 | 58.454 | 37,4 | 3.656 | 2,3 | 87.953 | 56,3 | 6.252 | 4,0 | 156.315 |
| R S | 545 | 48.471 | 19,2 | 193.724 | 76,8 | 6.184 | 2,4 | 3.944 | 1,6 | 252.323 |
| D Brčko | 19 | 20.417 | 39,4 | 26.639 | 51,4 | 3.138 | 6,0 | 1.639 | 3,2 | 51.833 |
| Total | 844 | 127.342 | 27,6 | 224.019 | 48,7 | 97.275 | 21,1 | 11.835 | 2,6 | 460.471 |

Ethnic composition of the population shows that in the border area of BiH the most numerous are the Serbs with 224,019 residents or 48.7%, than there are Bosniaks with 127,342 or 27.6% and Croats with 97,257 or 21.1% of the total population in the border area (Table 2 Authors, [10]).

THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

The border area of the Republic of Srpska is determined by the length of the border of 872 km and surface of 4,210 km². In 545 settlements (from which in 25 there are no residents) arranged in 22 administrative-territorial units (cities and municipalities) live 252,323 residents.

Most residents are concentrated in border settlements of Zvornik municipalities (49,828), Bijeljina City (46,501) and Gradiška municipality (32,296) [10]. The average population density of the border area of the Republic of Srpska is 59.9 residents/km².

In ethnic structure Serb population represents the majority of the population with 193,724 or 76.8%. By number, Bosniaks are second with 48,471 or 19.2%, and Croats are third with 6,184 or 2.4% of the total population in the border area of the Republic of Srpska.

THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

5 cantons participate in the border area of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Una-Sana Canton, Canton 10, West Herzegovina Canton, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and Posavina Canton) with 280 settlements from which in 25 there are no residents. The most residents have the municipalities Velika Kladuša (27,700) in Una-Sana canton, Orašje (19,861) in Posavina Canton and Ljubuški (16,210) in West Herzegovina Canton. Surface of the border area of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is 2,871 km² and it has 156,315 residents. Average population density amounts 54.45 residents/km². The highest population density has Posavina Canton with 101.5 residents/km², and lowest is Canton 10 with 16.1 residents/km². The highest population density is in the Una-Sana Canton (63,302), and the lowest population density is recorded in Canton 10 (11,772) (Table 3 Authors, [10]).

Table 3. Population and settlements of border area of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

| Canton | Settl. | Population | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------|------------|------|-------|------|--------|------|-------|-----|---------|
| | | Bosniacs | % | Serbs | % | Croats | % | Oth. | % | Total |
| Unsko-sanski | 96 | 56.057 | 88,6 | 911 | 1,4 | 771 | 1,2 | 5.563 | 8,8 | 63.302 |
| Kanton 10 | 44 | 13 | 0,1 | 1.365 | 11,6 | 10.348 | 87,9 | 46 | 0,4 | 11.772 |
| Zapadno-hercegovački | 37 | 21 | 0,1 | 21 | 0,1 | 36.820 | 99,5 | 126 | 0,3 | 36.988 |
| Hercegovačko-neretvanski | 74 | 305 | 2,3 | 624 | 4,8 | 12.088 | 92,3 | 83 | 0,6 | 13.100 |
| Posavski | 29 | 2.058 | 6,6 | 735 | 2,4 | 27.926 | 89,6 | 434 | 1,4 | 31.153 |
| Total | 280 | 58.454 | 37,4 | 3.656 | 2,3 | 87.953 | 56,3 | 6.252 | 4,0 | 156.315 |

In ethnic structure of the population the most numerous are Croats with 87,953 residents. The second by number are Bosniaks with 58,454 or 37.4%, and the third are Serbs with 3,656 or 2.3%.

BRČKO DISTRIKT

Border area of Brčko District is determined by the surface of 164.7 km². 51,833 residents were registered in 19 settlements of the border area. Settlement with the most residents is Brčko (39,893) [10]. The average population density is 314.7 residents/km². The ethnic structure of the population is as follows: Serbs 26,639 or 51.4%, Bosniaks 20,417 or 39.4% and Croats 3.138 or 6.0%.

THE BORDER AREA AND GEOPOLITICAL GUIDELINES OF TRANSBORDER COOPERATION

The difference between the border and transborder region is contained in the fact that the border region is a peripheral system, which refers to the territory set on the inside of the border, and transborder region is a development system, which refers to the territory that is set over the border. Transborder region is a space that combines two or more different border regions. In specific geopolitical circumstances such as geospace of Western Balkans, it represents the spatial unit which combines two or more adjoining border regions, whose main characteristic is the unity of natural base, infrastructure, historical and ethnical factors.

The border region includes the peripheral area in relation to the center of development in the inland territory of the state, and transborder region indicates a possible development center directly or near the border line, whose economic and other spheres of influence extend on both sides of the border. This development center has an integrative role in conditions of peace and cooperation between two or more states. In complex geopolitical circumstances, these centers may have disintegration role and negative tendencies.

Transborder regions may be classified on the basis of three different approaches: 1. Political level; 2. Political composition; and 3. Spatial structures.

Pursuant to the approach of *Political level*, transborder regions may be classified according to the status of the territories which are unified as:

- First Class Regions (transnational level),
- Second Class Regions (republics, cantons, districts) and
- Third Class Regions (counties, municipalities, administrative-territorial units of the local level).

According to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) of the European Union, there are three levels of mutual integration: 1. National level: NUTS – 0 (states), NUTS – 1 (republics); 2. Regional level: NUTS – 2 (regions: administration, planning), NUTS 3 (districts); 3. Local level: NUTS 4 – (cities, counties), NUTS – 5 (municipalities, villages).

Political composition classifies transborder regions in two ways: 1. Homogeneous transborder regions (based on a single form of government) and 2. Heterogenous transborder regions (different forms of government or administration).

Spatial structure is based on the number of participating political units:

- Double transborder regions;
- Triple transborder regions;
- Four-part transborder regions;
- Complex transborder regions [9].

If we take into account political –geographical circumstances, historical, ethnical and also economic characteristics of border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in accordance with the approach and classification of the region pursuant to status of the territory (*Political*

level), we would be able to classify the potential transborder regions to the regions of the second and the third class, and according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics of the European Union to NUTS – 3 and NUTS – 4 levels of mutual integration. Prospective transborder regions could be formed primarily in the southern and eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there are already ethnic and geopolitical conditions. (Figure 3 Authors)

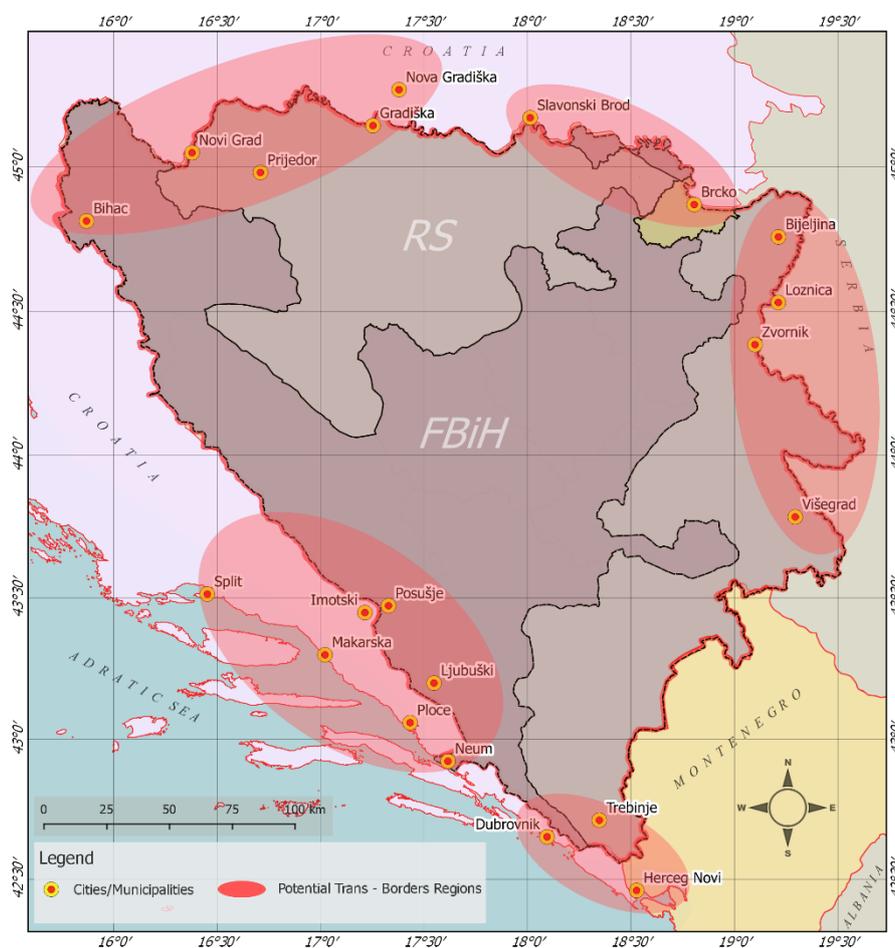


Figure 3. Perspective transborder regions in the Bosnia and Herzegovina

The first transborder region could be formed between Canton 10, West Herzegovina Canton and Herzegovina- Neretva Canton from one and southern part of Croatia from the other side. Holders of transborder cooperation would be cities: Livno, Tomislavgrad, Posušje, Ljubuški, Neum, Dubrovnik, Ploče, Makarska, Imotski, Split. This geospace has the best conditions for forming the transborder region, considering the historical and ethnical basis, as well as political-geographical circumstances and special parallel relations of the Republic of Croatia and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The second prospective transborder region would be based on connecting the eastern part of the Republic of Srpska with the border area of Western Serbia, where the Drina River would represent the axis of development and it would connect development centers: Višegrad, Zvornik, Loznica and Bijeljina. As in the first transborder region, for the formation of this transborder region there are ethnical and historical conditions, which "follow" in the political sense special and parallel relations between the Republic of Srpska and Serbia.

The third potential transborder region could be in the southeastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would link Eastern Herzegovina with Montenegro and Dubrovnik coast in Croatia, where the holders of development would be cities: Trebinje, Herceg Novi and Dubrovnik, for which there is a solid basis due to the earlier economic ties, which were destroyed by the desintegrative processes from the end of the 20th century.

More specifically, considering the disintegration processes and resulting recurrences from the same, as well as constant and often negative political-geographical processes in terms of inter-national reconciliation and cooperation, we can hardly, in the near future, talk about transborder cooperation in the northern parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is political-geographical reality and fate, that marks geospace of Western Balkans in geopolitical observations as "troubled region".

Thus, the border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be viewed in two ways. First, as a border region and area determined by the political border on the outside, while at the inside it is marked by wide transfer zone. This concept of border area, without the development center, represents the economic periphery which primarily causes depopulation process. Another way of observation represents the border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina as perspective transborder region which is characterized by the unity of the natural base, economic and cultural relationship with direct political-geographical environment.

CONCLUSION

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as complex political-territorial unit, is characterised by specific relationship to the border and border area. The border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the result of centuries-old historical, but also contemporary political-geographical processes. Political-geographical characteristics are conditioned by a number of factors. However, population represents a key factor and a resource from which arise the problems of development and political-geographical characteristics of the border area.

From the political and geographical point of view, perspective of the border area of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be viewed in two ways.

It can become the "connective geopolitical tissue" and the bearer of the new/old integrations in the geospace of the Western Balkans, given the ethno-religious and historical basis. It may become one of the models for the successful integration of European, national, spiritual and culturally diverse area.

On the other hand, under the influence of political-geographical factors of local, regional and global character it may have the role of an unstable region, and definitely, the source of further instability and disintegrative processes.

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