FOREST POTENTIAL AS A POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA IN THE FUNCTION OF GEOPOLITICAL VALORIZATION OF TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

The Republic of Srpska, given its diverse natural and geographical conditions and units, possesses significant natural potentials, which represent an important segment in assessing its geopolitical position through the lens of the "Geopolitics of Resources."
Forest resources represent one of the key natural and strategic potentials of the Republic of Srpska, which implies that forests have exceptional geopolitical significance, and therefore the establishment of a protection system and their monitoring carries not only ecological and economic premises.
The subject of research in this paper will focus on the articulation, analysis, and role of forest potential in the geopolitical valorisation of the Republic of Srpska. Additionally, the research will focus on identifying the connections and interactions between different categories of the given space - geopolitical, ecological, and economic.
The study is planned to be conducted using a research methodology based on historical, functional, and structural and functional methodological approaches, as well as using general methods (analysis, synthesis, concretization, generalization) and specific methods consistent with geographical research (comparative, spatial analysis), along with appropriate data processing techniques (statistical, cartographic, graphical, GIS analysis).
The results and objective of the research will indicate that the rational management of forest potential in the context of geopolitical valorisation represents one of the future guidelines for enhancing the regional and development identity of the Republic of Srpska not only in an economic sense, but also as a guideline for political and geographical stability.

Keywords: Natural potentials, Republic of Srpska, "Geopolitics of Resources," forest potential, geopolitical valorisation.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary geopolitical constellations and in a time of accelerated scientific-technological development, changes occur within political-territorial communities as a response to changes in the international community as a whole. The action of a state is limited by resources that have special significance for each state, as well as by norms of international law regulating international relations and the international political system of values.
The last decade of the 20th century was marked by the end of the dualistic system and the affirmation of a unipolar order in international relations, while the beginning of the 21st

century represents a period in which its end is already visible and the contours of a new – multipolar order. In the first and second decades of the 21st century, the USA retained a leading role in international relations, whose military, economic and other dominance was still pronounced, but not unquestionable. Absolute unipolarity as a geopolitical order has already transformed into relative unipolarity with Russia and China as respectable geopolitical actors, and considering contemporary political-geographical processes in the international community, the world in the third decade of this century is increasingly "approaching" a multipolar order, which will undoubtedly unfold in several phases in the coming period, where the carriers of contemporary international relations are already visible (the USA, Russia, China, India, Iran, EU).

New guidelines of political-territorial organization in conditions of national integrations and subnational fragmentations, the spread of "new" democratic values, the emergence of new-old political ideologies, the multipolar world order, and neo-Eurasianism represent open questions in organizing modern political-geographical systems and new geopolitical approaches in understanding changes in the contemporary international community [1].

"Changes in the hierarchy of constellations among leading states in the world, as well as the reincarnation of the 'Silk Road', reaffirm the geospace of the Western Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska as a geopolitically attractive part of the 'Rimland', and the importance of geopolitical position and the role of natural potentials for the survival of a political-territorial community are once again actualized" [2]. The opinion about the minimalistic role of geographical factors in the global structure of the world order and contemporary expansionist goals in the world has definitely been overcome.

In accordance with such reflections, we can quote Professor Milovan Radovanović who emphasizes: "Geopolitics, which is meaningless and without subject matter without logical and objective grounding in regionalism and territoriality, both is and is not a science, which certainly depends on the level and skill of the (mis)use of geographical and all other relevant facts, theories, methods, goals, etc. At its highest, therefore scientific level, which cannot be disputed to its predecessors (Hegel, Ritter, Humboldt, Ratzel), and in Serbian-Balkan proportions not even to Cvijić, it is always in a critical latent position of 'slipping' from the scientific track into the mud of quasi-science and expansionist doctrine. Yet even as such a surrogate of geographical, historical, ethnological, demographic, economic and political science, geopolitics has, since the very emergence of nation states and their alliances, and especially in the present time, been a logical inevitability of political practice and a leading, or at least accompanying, doctrinal basis of regional-political, regional-economic and regional-strategic conceptions" [3].

The "Geopolitics of Resources" as a subdiscipline of geopolitics is an indispensable segment in contemporary international relations, because access and secure disposal of natural potentials and raw material bases determine international status and relations between political-territorial communities at local, regional and global levels. Natural potentials are located in space and function in time, which determines their geopolitical significance for a state or political-territorial community. We can conditionally divide them into those always necessary, such as water, air and land, and those whose importance has changed depending on historical-geographical or economic development of society as a whole (coal, oil, nuclear energy).

The Republic of Srpska possesses natural potentials that represent significant political-geographical components in evaluating its geopolitical position. Planned and rational use

of natural potentials represents one of the geopolitical priorities, because its geopolitical future will depend on optimal management of natural potentials. In accordance with such considerations, forest potential represents one of the most important natural resources of the Republic of Srpska.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The issue and subject of the research are defined by the title of the topic. Through this research we seek to point to the premise that, although we live in a time of globalisation, a scientific-technological and information revolution, there is an increasingly prevailing view that the basic geopolitical theories founded on the pronounced role of geopolitical position and deterministic postulates once considered to be subjective interpretations and retrograde reflections indeed have a firm grounding in contemporary international relations and are receiving their full affirmation and confirmation in the case of the Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Western Balkans region.

More precisely, space its effective control and natural potentials as a geopolitical category ("the geopolitics of resources") often determine the future of a particular political-territorial community.

The paper has been realised through general methods (analysis, synthesis, concretisation, generalisation) and special methods inherent to geographical and political-geographical research (comparative and spatial analysis), as well as data-processing techniques (GIS analysis, statistical and graphical techniques), in accordance with a historical, geographical, functional and dialectical methodological approach, in order to define an interdisciplinary problem area, establish priorities, and identify guidelines for the implementation of specific solutions.

The results and the objective of the research will indicate that rational management of forest potential in the context of geopolitical valorisation represents one of the future directions for enhancing the regional-development identity of the Republic of Srpska, not only in the economic sense, but also as a guideline for political-geographical stability, which implies political, socio-economic, demographic and ecological sustainability of the geospace.

Basic statistical data on the geospatial characteristics of the Republic of Srpska (area, population size, geographical coordinates), as well as the basic characteristics of forest and agricultural areas, are found in publications issued by the Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Srpska: *This is Republika Srpska 2025*; *Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Srpska 2013*, 2017; *Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Srpska 2025*.

For the theoretical-methodological foundation of the paper, and for the study and analysis of the natural potentials of the Republic of Srpska, particularly forest potential as a political-geographical category, relevant scientific literature was used (Radovanović M., 1994; Zekanović I., 2019; Zekanović I., 2020), as well as proceedings from international scientific conferences (*Proceedings of the 4th Serbian Congress of Geographers with International Participation*, Belgrade, 2015; *Political Geography and Geopolitics in Russia: Historical Experience and Contemporary Developments*, Saint Petersburg, 2021; *Tourism in the Modern European and Eurasian Space*, Trebinje, 2022), more precisely scientific papers (Zekanović I., Živković M., 2015; Zekanović I., 2021; Zekanović I., 2022).

GEOSPATIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

The Republic of Srpska is an entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina whose area amounts to 24,641 km². It covers approximately 48% of the country's territory. In mathematical-geographical terms, it occupies the northern and eastern part of the geospace of Bosnia and Herzegovina, between 42°33'18" and 45°16'36" north latitude and 16°12'18" and 19°37'44" east longitude (Table 1,[4]). According to the results of the 2013 Census, it had 1,170,342 inhabitants [5].

Table 1. Geographic coordinates of the end points of the Republika Srpska

	North latitude	East longitude	Administrative-territorial units	Settlement
North	45° 16' 36"	16° 56' 08"	Kozarska Dubica	Donja Gradina
South	42° 33' 18"	18° 26' 45"	Trebinje	Podštirovnik
East	44° 02' 59"	19° 37' 44"	Bratunac	Žlijebac
West	44° 56' 52"	16° 12' 18"	Krupa na Uni	Srednji Bušević

Natural characteristics of the Republic of Srpska are conditioned by its belonging to different natural-geographical units. For that reason, it is characterised by a heterogeneous geomorphological, climatological, vegetational, pedological and hydrological structure.
It has an atypical territorial shape, consisting of two units: a north-western and an eastern one. The north-western unit, with a total area of about 12,200 km², extends along the lower courses of the tributaries of the Sava River (Una, Vrbas, Ukrina and Bosna) and largely encompasses three historical and geographical regional entities: Krajina, Posavina and Ozren. The eastern unit includes the geospace of Semberija, Romanija, the greater part of Podrinje and Eastern Herzegovina. Its area amounts to approximately 12,400 km².
From a geomorphological point, the northern parts is widely open towards the Pannonian Plain, to which hilly terrains and fertile river valleys are connected towards the south. Further south, the hilly terrain transitions into a mountainous area. At the extreme south, karst relief is represented, with all its surface and underground forms.
Different climate types within the geospace are the result of natural elements and the general circulation patterns of air masses over a broader area. The climate is influenced by several factors: geographical latitude, relief which is predominantly mountainous in character the proximity of the Adriatic basin, and continental masses, primarily the Eurasian landmass. For this reason, the following climate types are represented in this area: temperate-continental, continental, mountain, mountain-basin, and modified Adriatic climate types.
From a hydrological perspective, the geospace of the Republic of Srpska can be characterised as relatively rich in both surface and groundwater hydrological networks. The water potential is represented by the river courses of the Una, Sana, Vrbas, Bosna, Sava, Drina and Trebišnjica. In addition to the aforementioned larger rivers, the hydrographic network is also represented by lowland, mountainous and karst rivers, as well as natural and artificial lakes, and geothermal and mineral springs.
The vegetation is characterised by heterogeneity, resulting from the geographical position of the Balkan Peninsula and a specific spectrum of eco-geographical conditions, as well as pedological, climatic, biological and anthropogenic influences.
Thus, "within the Eurosiberian region, the geospace of the Republic of Srpska is differentiated into lower territorial units: the Illyrian, Moesian, Central European and Adriatic provinces. Furthermore, the vegetation areas of Srpska are differentiated into six

belts with 18 global phytocoenological units" [6].Alluvial brown soils characterise the peri-Pannonian area. The hilly-mountainous area is mainly represented by acidic brown and brown soils. In the geospace of Eastern Herzegovina, lithosols and regosols have developed, while the area of karst fields is characterised by brown soils and terra rossa.

THE GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION OF THE NATURAL POTENTIALS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

The Republic of Srpska has natural potentials, the rational use of which will determine both overall socio-economic development and the quality of its geopolitical position. The most significant natural potentials are represented by the forest complex, hydropotential, agricultural land, mineral and ore resources, and climatic conditions.

The forest complex amounts to a total of 1,112,063 ha, or 45.13% of the total area of the Republic of Srpska. Within the forest structure, the largest areas are covered by mixed broadleaf and coniferous forests, 773,196 ha or 69.53%, while pure stands account for 338,867 ha or 30.47% of the total territory under forests. The state enterprise "Šume Republike Srpske" manages 798,606 ha of forest-covered area [7].

The largest timber reserves in the western part of the Republic of Srpska are found in the areas of the following administrative-territorial units (zones): Ribnik – Mrkonjić Grad – Šipovo, as well as parts of the municipalities of Istočni Drvar, Kupres in RS and Drinić, followed by the area of Mount Kozara (Gradiška, Kozarska Dubica and Prijedor) and the areas of the municipalities/city Kneževo – Kotor Varoš – Teslić. In the eastern part, the richest timber mass is possessed by the following areas:

a) the Romanija and Middle-Drina municipalities (Han Pijesak, Sokolac, Pale, Rogatica, Višegrad), b) the Upper-Drina area (Foča, Čajniče, Rudo and Kalinovik) (Figure 1, [8]).

The importance of the forest complex is considerable, as it provides raw materials and plays a significant role in the economic development and biological diversity of the geospace. The exceptional value of forest areas is also contained in the importance of their ecosystems. Forests, as a renewable resource, are of invaluable geopolitical value, therefore, the establishment of protection systems, monitoring of their health condition, as well as the development of a sustainable development concept and a strategy for forest resource management represent one of the primary obligations of the executive authorities in the Republic of Srpska.

The concept of sustainable development emerged in the early 1970s as a response to changes caused by the endangerment of natural resources, within which the forests of Europe and the world play a significant role. The three basic components of sustainable development are environmental protection, economic development, and social equity. In order to enable the implementation of sustainable development, the Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1992 adopted a global sustainable development plan through Agenda 21. Sustainable development represents the improvement of living conditions in such a way that key natural and social resources are maintained and developed over the long term [9]. The basic premises of sustainable development are founded on the rational exploitation of natural resources, efficient use of space, economic and technological efficiency, humanity, demographic development, and the protection and improvement of the environment. The leading principle of sustainable forest management is to encourage development that meets the needs of the present while enabling future generations to meet their own needs.

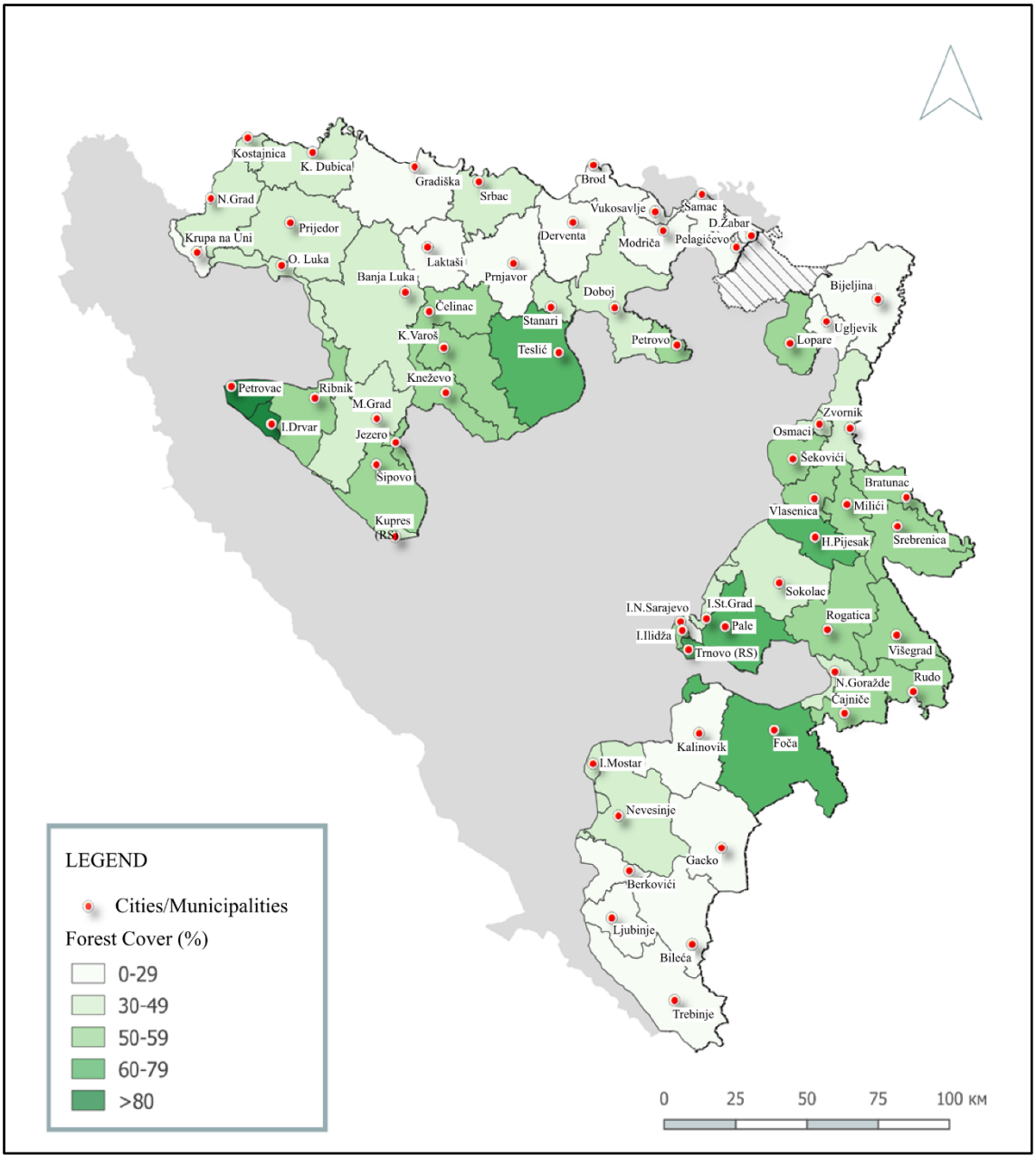

Figure 1. Forest potential according to administrative-territorial units of Republika Srpska

The Republic of Srpska is characterised by an abundance of water of excellent quality, and therefore water potential, together with the forest complex, is considered the most important natural development resource. The hydrographic network consists of lowland, mountainous and karst rivers, natural and artificial lakes, as well as thermal and mineral springs.

The hydrographic network belongs to the Black Sea and Adriatic Sea basins. The watershed between these two basins extends approximately along the mountain peaks of: Lebršnik – Čemerno – Zelengora – Lelija – Treskavica – Bjelašnica – Bitovnja – Makljen – Raduša – Cincar – Šator – Dinara. In karst areas, the watershed is not orographic, but is conditioned by a developed underground hydrography [10]. The axis of the Black Sea basin is the Sava River, which flows along the northern border of the Republic of Srpska for about 190 km (from the confluence of the Una River in the west to the Drina River in

the east). The course of the Sava River lies at a low elevation, and thus all major rivers of the Republic of Srpska flow into it (the Una with the Sana, Vrbas, Ukrina, Bosna and Drina). These rivers have composite valley characteristics with significant gradients and possess considerable hydroenergy potential (the Una, Vrbas and Bosna rivers about 14.3 billion cubic metres annually). Nevertheless, the hydroenergy potential of these rivers cannot be compared with the hydropotential of the Drina River. The Drina River is the largest tributary of the Sava. Its length amounts to 341 km, and the catchment area covers approximately 19,570 km² [11]. The south-eastern area (Eastern Herzegovina) hydrographically gravitates towards the Adriatic Sea, with the Trebišnjica River as the most significant watercourse. Unlike river flows, the Republic of Srpska is relatively poor in other water surfaces. It does not possess larger natural lakes, but has artificial hydro-accumulations on the Vrbas, Drina and Trebišnjica rivers, primarily aimed at the exploitation of hydroenergy potential.

The importance of hydrographic potential is based on the possibilities of hydroenergy exploitation and electricity production, since the hydropotential of rivers, together with coal reserves, forms the basis of electricity production in the Republic of Srpska. The estimated hydropower potential amounts to around 10,000 GWh annually, of which about 35% is utilised (HPP Višegrad, HPP Trebinje 1, HPP Trebinje 2 and HPP Bočac), as well as several smaller hydropower plants: HPP Bočac 2, Bogatići, Mesići, Tišća and Vlasenica. The Dubrovnik HPP is located on the territory of the Republic of Croatia and utilises the hydropotential of the Trebišnjica River basin. The production of this plant is currently shared in a 50:50 ratio between the Electric Power Utility of the Srpska and the Croatian Electric Power Utility.

Different geological structures and the composition of geotectonic units, as well as the heterogeneous hydrogeological function of rock masses, have influenced the formation of diverse aquifers. The southern part of the Pannonian Basin is quantitatively the richest in groundwater.

It is estimated that Srpska possesses around 80% of the estimated exploitable quantities of groundwater in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Posavina, with the lower courses of the Una, Vrbas, Bosna and Drina rivers, is quantitatively the richest groundwater region. Localities are found in Lijevče Polje, the wider area of the City of Bijeljina, and in the alluviums along the Sava River and the lower course of the Bosna River [12]. Numerous studies have shown the richness in mineral and thermo-mineral waters. These waters are mainly used for balneological and recreational purposes. On the basis of these potentials, several spa-recreational centres have already been built and established.

The hydrographic network provides broad opportunities for irrigation of arable land, development of fisheries, possibilities for river transport, and the promotion of fishing and spa tourism. Considering increasingly frequent scientific warnings about future crises in drinking and industrial water supply at the global level, hydropotential will gain even greater geopolitical importance and, alongside forest potential, is rightly considered the most important development resource of the Republic of Srpska.

The total area of *agricultural land* amounts to approximately 977,000 hectares [13], which represents around 40% (39.65%) of the total area of the Republic of Srpska. Utilised agricultural land accounts for about 401,269 ha (arable land and gardens 190.771 ha, orchards 21,682 ha, vineyards 647 ha, meadows 115,747 ha, pastures 72,422 ha) [7]. The entire lowland region possesses conditions for intensive crop and mixed crop-livestock production. Hilly-mountainous areas have ideal conditions for the development of fruit growing, while the region of Eastern Herzegovina is suitable for viticulture and

the cultivation of Mediterranean crops. Pastures and meadows in mountainous areas provide opportunities and a basis for livestock farming.
From a political-geographical perspective, food production, in addition to its existential dimension, has great geopolitical significance in the state planning strategy.
Ore and mineral raw materials, their significant reserves and diversity as natural potentials, should have a greater role in future economic development. There are realistic geological and mineral-genetic assumptions for the discovery of new deposits and the quantitative increase of existing reserves.
Lignite and brown coal are exploited in the mines of Ugljevik, Gacko, Stanari and Miljevina. Their total reserves are estimated at around 700 million tonnes. Iron ore is present at two locations: Ljubija–Omarska and Mokra Gora–Vardište. Confirmed reserves amount to about 350 million tonnes, and based on analyses of ore-bearing formations in the Ljubija locality, the metallogenetic potential is estimated at 800 million tonnes of new ore reserves. Manganese ores have been registered in the area of Mount Ozren, as well as in the surroundings of Šekovići, Čelinac and Rudo. Bauxite mines near Milići and Vlasenica form the basis for alumina production in the "Birač" factory in Zvornik. With their exploitable reserves (around 55 million tonnes), they represent the backbone of non-ferrous metallurgy development. Lead-zinc ore is exploited near Srebrenica (the Sase mine) [2]. There are several oil-geological potential sites, related to the areas of Posavina, south-eastern Herzegovina and Semberija. The exploration and exploitation of non-metallic raw materials are far behind the potential of these resources.
Climate, as a natural potential, is increasingly gaining a geopolitical dimension in the time of global climate change. Having four seasons within a relatively small territory such as the Republic of Srpska represents a geopolitical resource.

FOREST POTENTIAL AS A POLITICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL CATEGORY

The geospace of the Republic of Srpska is covered by forests at about 45%, which places it among political-territorial communities with a respectable (significant) forest potential. Forest cover varies from 10–15% in lowland areas (Lijevče Polje, Posavina, Semberija) and 20–30% in hilly areas, while in the hilly-mountainous areas of the inner Dinarides it ranges between 30–70% of the surface area, with forest cover composed of tall trees being least expressed in Eastern Herzegovina. Deciduous forests account for about 80%, and coniferous forests about 20% of the total forest fund.
The forest vegetation of Srpska can be divided into several belts: the belt of marshwetland ecosystems, the belt of floodplain forests, the belt of oak forests, beech forests, mountain pine forests, and sub-Mediterranean forests. The most widespread forest complexes are represented by oak forest areas. They extend across lowlands and lower hilly northern areas. Pedunculate oak is present in the north, along the banks of the Sava River and its larger tributaries (the Drina, Bosna, Ukrina, Vrbas and Una). On hilly terrains further south, forest communities of sessile oak and common hornbeam are found. Smaller localities of sessile oak and common hornbeam are also encountered in Eastern Herzegovina. Belts of beech forests, followed by fir and spruce forests, occupy the pre-Dinaric and Dinaric phytogeographical areas.
Thus, in higher mountainous areas, a mixed forest community of beech, fir and spruce has developed, where the main companions of beech forests are communities of maple, elm, ash and others. These forests are more represented in the eastern part (Mountains Majevica, Romanija, Jahorina, Treskavica, Zelengora) than in the western part of the

Republic of Srpska (Mountains Klekovača, Vitorog, Dimitor, Lisina, Čemernica, Vlašić, Borja, Ozren). Mountain pine forests represent the upper altitudinal limit of forests. Sub-Mediterranean vegetation characterises the area of Eastern Herzegovina and appears in the form of maquis. Sub-Mediterranean forests of downy oak, Turkey oak and black ash are today practically degraded. Within forest vegetation areas, particularly in hilly-mountainous regions, significant surfaces are covered by grass vegetation (meadows and pastures) [14].

Forests of the Republic of Srpska are categorised according to stand types, distinguishing pure stands (broadleaf or coniferous) and mixed stands (mixtures of broadleaf species, coniferous species, or both).

Within the forest structure, the largest area relates to mixed broadleaf-coniferous stands, 773,196 ha or 69.53%, while pure stands account for 338,867 ha or 30.47% of the total territory under forests. Representation and distribution by stand type are further categorised by ownership: state and private. Approximately 70% of forest-covered areas are managed by the state enterprise (Table 2, [7]).

Table 2. Forest areas – state as on 31 December 2024 (ha)

	Forest areas by type of ownership		
	total	in state ownership	in private ownership
TOTAL	1 112 063	798 606	313 457
Pure stands of	338 867	271 823	67 045
Broadleaves	303 777	243 499	60 278
Conifers	35 090	28 324	6 767
Mixed stands of	773 196	526 783	246 412
Broadleaves	449 947	234 888	215 058
Conifers	85 857	81 031	4 827
Broadleaves- Conifers	237 392	210 864	26 527

The largest share of forest area and forest land in the Republic of Srpska (state forests), according to categorisation, consists of high forests with natural regeneration (about 47%). This is followed by coppice forests with 23%, areas suitable for afforestation with 15.3%, areas unsuitable for afforestation with 6.9%, forest cultures with 4.8%, as well as 1.3% high degraded forests and 1.9% usurped forests and forest land (Table 3, Figure 2, [7]).

Table 3. Forest areas and forest lands by forest category, state forests – state as on 31 December 2024*

BROAD CATEGORY	AREA (ha)	%
Total	1 001 977	
High forests with natural regeneration	469 120	46.82
High degraded forests	13 381	1.34
Forest cultures	47 900	4.78
Coppices	230 494	23.0
Areas appropriate for afforestation and management	153 456	15.32
Areas inappropriate for afforestation and management	68 851	6.87
Usurpation	18 775	1.87

*Data taken over from hte cadastre of areas of the public enterprise „Šume Republike Srpske"

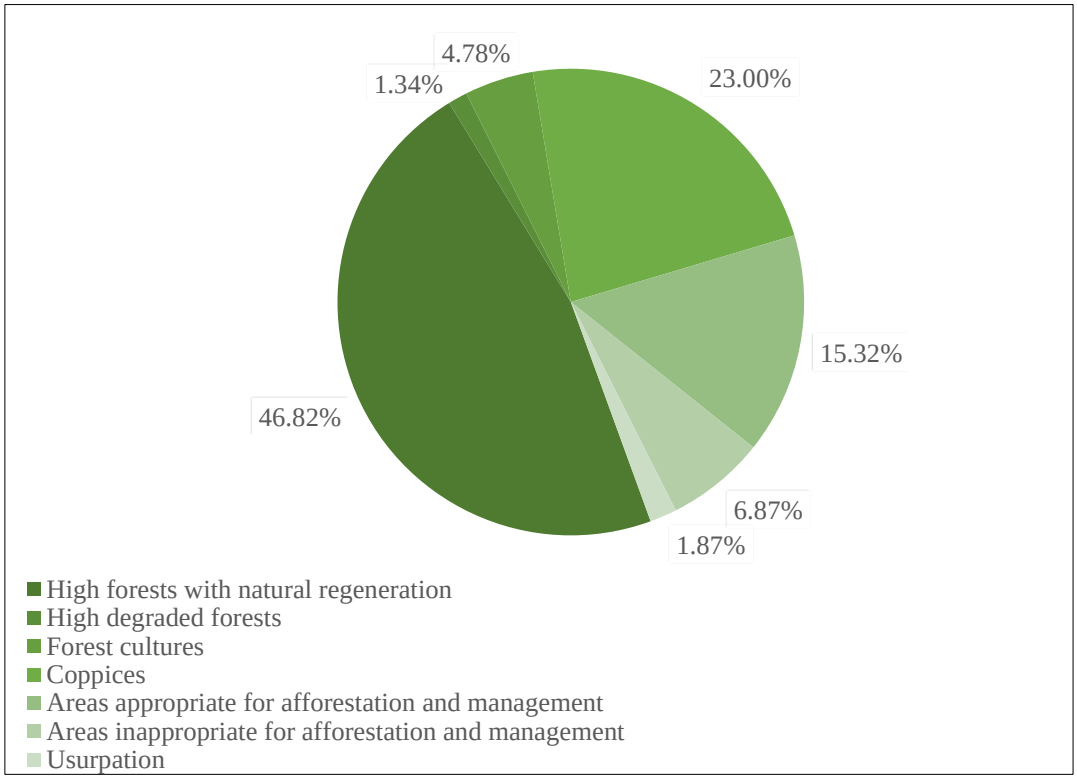

Figure 2. Forest areas and forest lands by forest category, state forests (%)

Forests in the Republic of Srpska are standardised through the international FSC certification (The Forest Stewardship Council™ – FSC). The objective of the FSC programme is to promote environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically sustainable management of forest complexes worldwide by establishing general standards and principles of sustainable development. Through the application of these principles, efforts are made to manage the forest fund [15].

The basic objectives of forestry policy in the Republic of Srpska are as follows:

- Preservation and improvement of forest conditions;
- Development of forestry as an economic sector and increasing its contribution to economic and social development;

- Development and maintenance of forest protection systems;
- Protection of forest ecosystems as natural assets and sustainable use of the biological diversity of forest resources;
- Valorisation and preservation of the cultural and social functions of forests;
- Economic profitability of the state forestry sector, in accordance with ecological and social requirements and sustainable development;
- Ensuring an efficient support system for private forest owners;
- Contribution to economic development, advancement of forestry and environmental protection;
- Application of multidisciplinary research and development of technologies in forestry and research institutions;
- Establishment of international cooperation in forestry [9].

The gross felled (exploited) timber volume in the forests of the Republic of Srpska in 2024 is lower compared to previous years (2020–2023) and amounts to about 2.5 million m³. Of this, approximately 2.5 million m³ relates to exploitation in the state sector, which is significantly higher than in the private sector and represents more than 90% of the total felled timber volume (Table 4, [4]).

Table 4. Exploitation of the forest complex of the Republika Srpska (thousand m^3)

	Gross felled timber				
	Total	in state ownership	in private ownership	Broadleaves	Conifers
2020	2 950	2 685	266	1 574	1 376
2021	2 890	2 475	415	1 558	1 332
2022	2 965	2 580	385	1 625	1 341
2023	2 789	2 465	324	1 518	1 271
2024	2 568	2 378	190	1 284	1 284

The condition of forests and the forest fund can be improved through management and better monitoring by the institutions of the Republic of Srpska through the following approaches and objectives:

- increasing forest-covered areas and their protection, i.e. afforestation of barren land, accumulation zones, roadside belts and areas around urban cores;
- consolidation of state forest holdings for the purpose of protection and more efficient management of forest belts;
- harmonisation of legislation with international standards and the adoption of improved strategies for the preservation, monitoring and protection of the forest fund.

Observing the current state of forests in the Republic of Srpska, it can be concluded that, from the perspective of a renewable natural resource, the forest ecosystems represent a unique complex. They constitute a national wealth and one of the fundamental potentials of present and future economic development. For that reason, the forest complex must be permanently renewed and utilised in accordance with national development priorities and goals.

In the Republic of Srpska there are officially three national parks, one nature park and three primeval forest reserves:

- Kozara National Park
- Sutjeska National Park
- Drina National Park

- Bardača Nature Park
- Perućica Primeval Forest
- Janj Primeval Forest
- Lom Primeval Forest.

The forest complex has always represented a national wealth and one of the fundamental potentials for present and future geopolitical valorisation, as well as a driver of the economic development of the Republic of Srpska. As a renewable natural potential, forests have a particular geopolitical significance. The problems is the location of the highest-quality forest complexes, which are mainly situated in the inter-entity border area, which still feels the consequences caused by the war conflict (lack of labour force, demographically abandoned and depopulated areas), which limits the possibilities for forest protection and monitoring systems as well as exploitation.

CONCLUSION

Observed through the prism of contemporary historical-geographical processes, but also through the overall historical development of a people and a political-territorial community as a whole, renewable natural potentials in the geopolitical context have been and remain a condition of "remaining" and "survival."

Renewable natural potentials, with their physical and economic characteristics, as well as their ecological, economic and political-geographical significance, represent potentials that condition or limit the sustainable development of a state community, region or society as a whole.

It can be stated that forest potential, as a renewable natural potential, is one of the most significant factors in the geopolitical valuation of the Republic of Srpska. Due to the great importance of forest potential, permanent renewal and responsible management of the forest complex are necessary, all in accordance with national development goals and strategies. Their exploitation should be planned and purposefully controlled, regardless of quantity and type, as they are one of the pillars of the economic development. For that reason, forests must remain preserved for future generations and for the geopolitical future of the Republic of Srpska.

The preceding statements indicate the necessity of developing strategies in the field of forest resource protection and forest management systems. During the development of strategies, analyses and monitoring, it is necessary to engage scientific experts from various fields, with particular emphasis on: risk management and protection of forest ecosystems from drought and fires, construction of irrigation systems, and in general, rational use of forest potential with the aim of more efficient control, as well as adaptation to the consequences of global climate change impacts on forest ecosystems. Among other things, strategy and continuous monitoring are necessary as a scientific basis for assessing and answering the question of whether certain changes in forest potential in the Republic of Srpska are caused by human activities or are the result of global climate change. It is also necessary to devote attention to education, training and raising public awareness about the importance of forest potential through the education system with clearly designed goals.

International cooperation within global environmental protection agreements, carried out within the countries of Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans, should be intensively continued. Joint action regarding the planned and rational exploitation of natural potentials, viewed through the prism of the cross-border concept of regional development,

would represent one of the guidelines for the geopolitical stability of the Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the region as a whole.

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