

“Simulating the present, shaping the future”

A) Introduction

This paper is the result of three consecutive workshops conducted with 24 participants from five cities all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. The workshops dealt with theories and practices of nationalism, extremism and populism and included recommendations by the students on how to tackle those issues. The paper summarizes the discussions of the workshops, and should serve as a source of inspiration for similar projects.

The paper is structured in the following way. First, we clarify what the concepts and terms of populism, nationalism and extremism concretely mean in the context of BiH, and in what ways they are putting a challenge to the current situation in the county. We then describe six enabling factors which fuel these phenomena. Those factors were drawn from a description of the situation of the five participating cities (Banja Luka, Bihac, Mostar, Sarajevo and Tuzla). We do so, because we are convinced that in order to tackle the above-mentioned phenomena, it is important to deal with the underlying causes. In the end we describe initiatives, actions and policy measures which were or could be taken in order to tackle those enabling factors in the sense of best practice recommendations. These recommendations are drawn from concrete experiences of the participants.

B) Concepts and Terminology

Populism and Ethno-Nationalism

Populism has become one of the major political buzzwords in the last years, serving among others as an explanation for the rise of Trump, Brexit or Viktor Orban’s success in Hungary. Despite its inflationary use, the question what constitutes the essence of the phenomena is hardly ever posed.

When looking at the public discourse, populism is often connected to the notion that politicians make any kind of promises to the general public, just to get support of voters. While being often used in such a manner, it provides difficulties for analytical purposes. Promoting political positions based on the needs expressed by potential voters is an inherent part of a democratic process. The only difference would be then that the so called ‘populist’ are giving empty process, knowing that they have no intention to work for their fulfillment. Looking at the reality of populist actors coming to power this doesn’t seem to be the case though. Taken the examples of Trump or Orban, they rather seem eager to pursue their nationalist agendas regardless of the consequence.

Within the populism studies in the academic sector, a different approach therefore was taken, based on the work by the Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde. According to Mudde, populism can be defined in the following way: “Thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the ‘volonté Générale’ (general will) of the people” To better understand the definition, it helps to look at

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the components in a separate manner. First of all, a 'thin-centred' ideology describes that 'populism' is not a full ideology but always needs to be attached to other ideological elements. This also explains why populism can be connected to contradictory ideological elements, covering left- and right-wing ideologies.

At the core of the definition is the dichotomy of 'the pure people' versus the elite. The term 'the people' also has multiple layers: first of all, it can refer to the people as sovereign, expressed e.g. in the saying by Lincoln that democracy as "a government of the people, by the people and for the people". The populist promise in this regard, is to give the government back to "the people". When it comes to the question who the people are, the notion of 'common' or 'ordinary' people plays the central role. In the populist discourse they often claim to represent a 'silent majority', which are either objectively excluded from power or at least subjectively have the feeling of being so. The other side of the dichotomy within the populist agenda is the so called 'elite', covering different sectors of society, including the political establishment, the economic and cultural elite. Within the populist discourse members of this elite are portrayed as a homogenous group, which is working against the interest of the ordinary people. In the case of Trump, it always has been the 'establishment in Washington', whereas in many EU countries the accusation is that the elite is working for the interests of the EU, not in the interest of the people of the country.

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When looking at the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the question arises if elements of the populist ideology can also be found in the political discourses in the country. First of all, one can state that a simple dichotomy between two groups (elite vs people), being at the core of the definition, is not an adequate description. Being a multi-ethnic state, in which ethnic self-identification plays a fundamental role in political processes, the division lines are more complex. Due to the concept of three-constituent people and the fact that majority of big parties are trying to represent the interests of one ethnic group, simply doesn't allow for a scheme, where the "ordinary people" could be mobilised against one "elite". An element, which is closer to political discourses in BiH is the idea that political parties can represent the 'general will' of the people. Whereas not many politicians are trying to attempt to speak for the citizens as a whole, the idea that a political party can represent the "general will" of an ethnic group is certainly something more familiar. Furthermore the 'us vs. them' divide was identified as a core element of political discourses in BiH.

In the discussions of populist manifestations in BiH the term of '**ethno-nationalism**' was therefore proposed by the participants for a further analysis. Looking at the recent elections in 2018, ideological differences of parties have a rather marginal influence on voting behaviour, with the national parties, claiming to represent the respective interests of the constituent people, being the strongest political forces.

Concerning the causes for ethno-nationalism, the discussion was centred on the incompatible historical narratives of the three ethnic groups, making it difficult to develop a common identity for the country as a whole. Another aspect mentioned has been the 'political complexities'. With a strict quota system that bureaucratizes ethnic belonging at every level of government, the political system also further strengthens the self-identification of individuals as members of one of the three ethnic groups. When it comes to consequences on a macro level, the risk of dissolution has been named. In case of a further increased ethno-nationalist rhetoric in the political discourse, it will become more and more complicated to focus on common development challenges for the country as a whole. Further consequences of an over nationalism include unlawfulness, corruption, destruction of resources and massive migrations from BiH, as it weakens the checks-and balance of the political system as such, which in the long run leads to further political passivity and fatalism.

Extremism and Radicalisation

As with the populist label, 'Extremism' is rather used to denounce the legitimacy of approaches of organisations and individual in the political discourse. For the sake of analytical clarity, we propose to frame radicalization as a process, during which a person takes over an extremist ideology. In full, the definition is the following: "Radicalization is a (1) gradual **process** which entails (2) **interiorization** of extremist ideology or belief system that (3) **sets the stage** for violence even if it does not make it inevitable."

When it comes to Extremism, it is useful to make a distinction between "cognitive extremism" and "behavioral/violent extremism". Cognitive extremism is then described as "holding an ideology or belief system which are opposed to the mainstream core values of a society". In this sense extremism is highly context dependent, as the use of the label depends on the specific values chosen as a reference point. When the use of violence is either advocated or even used as a mean to reach the goals of an extremist ideology (e.g. through terrorist attacks), we then can speak about 'violent extremism'. During the discussions about forms of extremism in BiH, the first references that came up were related to religious extremism. Additionally, nationalist extremist groups were named, such as the 'Serbian Radical Party', Chetniks or groups sympathising with Ustash ideology.

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C) Local Background: What are enabling factors for the phenomena in five Bosnian cities

As described above, the phenomena of nationalism, extremism and populism in the case of Bosnia and Hercegovina are even more complex than in Western countries, as they are linked to the very core of the political system in the country. Tackling thus issues by policy recommendations on a national level was therefore perceived as difficult by the group. Additionally, from their perspective the main issue here is not the lack of institutions and laws, but its implementation. In order to effectively tackle thus phenomena, a more efficient way seemed to be to identify factors on a local which are actually fuelling those processes and by this spoil and prevent most of the counter measures. Accordingly the group tried to identify the main enabling factors that foster nationalism and extremism, through the description of major challenges in their cities:

In **Banja Luka** the main factors that hinder the implementation of democratic structures that are not linked to ethno-nationalist lines are connected with corruption and poor management of local authorities. Additionally media houses are under control or strong influence by local politicians and their political parties. That leads to biased reporting and untrue information being presented to the public, which itself leads to journalists being attacked by certain individuals. Additionally politicians use inappropriate language in their public speeches, also politicians and their parties are pressuring people by all means possible to make them support the party and their representatives.

In **Bihac** the issue of migration was mentioned as an additional challenge, fostering ethno-nationalism. 6 000 migrants with no housing or basic human rights are estimated to live in the city. Political elites are exploiting the power they have so they can shift responsibility from each other which leads to accumulating even more power in the same individual i.e. the same function/position. Even though these problems aren't political in nature they are used as tools in making decision and as promises of solutions during elections.

Mostar is often referred to as a "case city" due to huge institutional and political crisis that originates from 2004. As a result of that, elections were not held in Mostar for more than a decade. The period from 2008 to present can be described as an institutional paralysis which results in stagnation. Despite all of this, citizens of Mostar are functioning relatively normal which is a social phenomenon. People are living as if nothing is happening and it is a hard task to estimate reason(s) for that. It showcases the political apathy of many people.

In **Sarajevo** also corruption is perceived as one of the main challenges that the city faces which brings a plethora of problems such as abuse of power. Corruption spreads to all sectors such as healthcare, education, judiciary and of course politics in every sense. One of the main consequences of the aforementioned problem is the so-called brain drain. Educated, hardworking, capable and qualified young people are leaving the city because of a lack of human security, health, employment and trust in our institutions which should be provided on a sufficient level worthy of a democratic society. Specifically the city lacks an oversight and control over aspects such as the media and the population in general. Another related topic is the ignorance of young people in politics. Best examples of this can be seen in the elections, local or general, where constantly below-average voter turnout can be witnessed.

In **Tuzla** the ignorance of young people was also mentioned as one of the key problems. This for example can be seen in the city's Budget which is about 390 million Bosnian Marks on year level. From that less than one percent is invested in education, culture, youth sport etc. Additionally local media tend to disseminate information about political parties and politics in general in biased way. Local media depends on government money, people are afraid to lose their jobs, and that is the problem that puts media in submissive position. As a consequence there are people who either don't trust media or trust them blindly, because there is no critical thinking or proper media education.

Summary of enabling factors:

Out of the above mentioned cases we could identify six main enabling factors that foster the growth of ethno-nationalism, radicalization and extremism in the country. Though on a different level of manifestation, thus enabling factors do play an important role in all 5 cities:

Corruption

Corruption in its different manifestations strengthens the links between political leaders and their constituency, establishing a patronage system which is building on personal contacts and benefits besides the political institutions.

Poor management of authorities

Poor management of authorities increases the above mentioned tendencies in a way, that many people don't rely on political institutions or elected bodies when they want to get something. This increases the dependencies between ethno-political elites and their constituency.

Political Apathy of Citizens

The above mentioned factors increase the tendency, that people perceive themselves as being unable to change anything through democratic means. Populism as such relies on a certain level of apathy, as it pretends to find solutions for complex problems without the need of further involvement of the people.

Inappropriate Language/hate Speech

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Populism, nationalism and extremism rely on mainstreaming hate speech, and through that changing the consensus of what is possible to say within a democracy.

Ignorance of young people by politics

Many young people have a strong demand for concrete improvements of the current situation. Ignoring them means excluding a potential driver for change from the political process, and eventually contributes to them leaving the country.

Lack of independent Media

Independent Media could be another institution to deconstruct populism or ethno-nationalism. It could also help to delink the connection between people and politicians along ethnical lines.

Although those factors cannot be seen as the only reasons and sources for the existing ethno-nationalism and growing extremism, they are definitely fuelling this process, and make it difficult to actually tackle it. It was therefore agreed upon in the group that in order to work on the above mentioned phenomena it will be more effective to actually work on those factors which are enabling the process. This is also due to the reason, that in general the main problem was not seen in the lack of institutions or laws in place but rather concerning their effective implementation.

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D) Best Practice Examples

The following initiatives were presented by the participants as best practice examples for tackling the identified enabling factors:

Title	Youth Union
City	Banja Luka
Factor addressed	The factor we addressed is the ignorance of young people by politics. It manifested in way of poor regulation of youth organizations meaning that youth is not represented in public in a proper way. Furthermore, there is no working environment and limited resources to the organizations themselves.
Aim	To improve youth access to public institutions and resources through youth organisations
Activities	Creation of a Youth Union, uniting all youth organisation of Banja Luka
Target Group	Members of youth organization and decision makers in the policy field. Furthermore, youth who are not active yes in any organization.
Achievements	Up to this moment we have achieved some results, mostly in the way that there are regular meetings of youth organisations and we established communication with city authorities
Challenges	Youth are not informed about the existence and work of youth organisations. There is furthermore a lack of understanding of the needs of the youth by city authorities
Lessons learned	Creating a Youth Union as a new way to influence local administration and promising strategy on how to deal collectively with existing issues.

Title	Office for corruption and quality control
City	Sarajevo
Factor addressed	Corruption and quality control
Aim	Fighting corruption within government structures
Activities	Formation of an employee register for public institutions. On a website, everybody can find every person working for public institutions with name, position, degree and net salary.
Achievements	Increased transparency of income, which helped to fight corruption.
Challenges	The major challenge has been the data protection laws. It was partly unclear to what extent it is possible to publish the rather detailed information about every person working in public institutions.
Lessons learned	Sarajevo canton government as a best practice example for other governments in combating corruption

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Title	Independent Media Empowerment Program
City	Bihac
Factor addressed	Lack of independent media
Aim	Create a safer environment in which BiH journalists can work, strengthen viable sources of information, increase media's role in social responsibility, and increase citizens' awareness of the importance of independent journalism for them and in their daily lives.
Activities	Trainings on citizen journalism in various cities and the creation of a website, where the stories can be published: https://imep.ba/
Achievements	One example has been a graffiti on the wall of the cultural centre in Bihać – it was removed because of an article on the website
Challenges	The biggest challenge is the identity protection of the citizen journalists, especially while reporting on sensitive issues. Publishing articles on the website therefore might become a risk for them, especially if it affects the interests of powerful people in the communities.
Lessons learned	A lot of things can be changed if you have a story and free media

Title	Civil Initiative "Because we care"
City	Mostar
Factor addressed	Corruption and poor management of authorities
Aim	To stop illegal postponement of the waste on landfill, which is very close to the houses. It brought health-risks for the entire population that lives close to it or drinks water from Neretva river

Activities Demonstrations and blocking the landfill for weeks. Furthermore, there were constant lobbying activities to the mayor.

Achievements The initiative wanted to achieve the goal of closing the landfill and removing the waste, which comes from the city, to some other location. The city of Mostar was not the only included location, the initiative covered the entire region. They changed the poor management of city authorities and “forced” them to look for solutions and solve this problem.

Challenges City authorities were very poorly doing their job, so they did not care about the local population. Getting them to do something was the biggest challenge, even more because they were suspected for corruption in there.

Lessons learned Something that could be learned from the experience of this initiative is to never quit if you want to change some important things in your local area. It would be very hard to deal with political elites and make them active and change their passive attitude and poor city management. So, if you start seeking solution for some problems, like this one or anything you want to change, you have to work hard to achieve your goals.

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E) Recommendations

It is recommended that future projects dealing with the issues of populism/nationalism/extremism, should focus on one or two of the enabling factors in greater detail. In general, the strategy of starting an analysis on the local level was considered a promising approach. Due to the complex political system of BiH, which makes it very unlikely that structural reforms will take place on a national level, the local level can serve as a starting point for working on a concrete betterment of the situation. At the same time, it is further recommended to increase the cooperation possibilities for people from different Kantons to exchange about the problems they are facing and best practice examples on how to tackle them. As seen during the process of analysis, the challenges are nationwide very similar and promising approaches to work on them are already implemented in many places without people from other Kantons knowing about it.

Through such an exchange and subsequent implementation of best practice in different Kantons, it then creates the possibilities to tackle the identified enabling factors on a national scale

