



University of Sarajevo Faculty of Political Science

**A Powder Keg Once More?: Contemporary
Separatist Movements in Bosnia & Herzegovina and how
it may Reshape the Western Balkans**

CEERES Master's Thesis

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis project was to analyse views held by political representatives from select nations on contemporary issues affecting Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, the key focus of this thesis was on the pressing issue of the potential secession of the Republika Srpska entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other factors such as political representation, foreign interference, and the standing of Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of the international community, were brought in and analysed to examine how these issues may be affecting the potential for Republika Srpska secession.

As part of this, qualitative data was gathered through an interview process, within which 9 interviews took place between March-May 2023 across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia.

The final analysis of gathered responses highlighted clear disagreement along ethnic lines on not only the potential, but feasibility of an eventual secession attempt being attempted by the current Republika Srpska administration. Furthermore, disagreement was found between different ethnic groups on the role of foreign actors and the international community within Bosnia and Herzegovina. More specifically, different groups viewed international actors, namely Russia and Turkey, in various ways, with some seeing them as their people's closest ally, and some, their greatest hindrance to development.

However, most interviewees from all backgrounds agreed on the need for stronger integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the international community, namely implementing political reforms in order to eventually attain membership of the European Union.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Secession, Nationalism, Foreign interference, European Union

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

The world today is currently going through a period of intense and extraordinary flux. For almost two decades standard political, financial, and in certain cases, social orders, across the globe have all been faced with unprecedented challenges, leading to a more fractured and unstable international community. One which may become unable to adequately respond to growing challenges presented before it.

As much of the international community's attention is currently focused on Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, beginning in February 2022, it has seemingly lost its focus on several other unstable regions. This includes recent failures in dealing with increasingly fraught situations across northern and western Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia, that could slip into large-scale conflict or unrest if neglected in the long run. Another potential hotspot is that of the Western Balkans. With a battered and bloody history, marred by ethnic, linguistic, religious, and political divisions, the region could be at enormous risk of returning to conflict if nothing is done to help bridge the numerous political and social divides between various groups (Bieber, 2004).

The continued role of separatist movements within societies in the Western Balkans, often through combinations of linguistic, religious, and ethnic brandings, has shifted greatly since the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In more recent years, it has been perceived that many such movements across the region, most notably those situated within Bosnia and Herzegovina, are increasingly gaining momentum, and that the region may once again be heading towards attempts at redrawing national borders (Spanovic et al, 2010, Marshall, 2019).

1.2 Historical Contextualisation

First, it is important to understand the recent history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region of the former Yugoslavia, before more broadly discussing political issues affecting the country presently. Throughout the 1980s, the Socialist Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia suffered through a series of economic woes, alongside growing social and political tensions amongst the six constituent republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia, along with the two autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodinja. This first culminated in the dissolution of the ruling socialist regime, as well as the introduction of democracy and the first multiparty elections across the federation, with nationalists sweeping to victory across a number of republics, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia.

Due to growing disagreements, including the emergence of nationalist forces across all Yugoslav republics, alongside the ongoing constitutional dispute over the distribution of political authority between the federal government and the republics, calls for full independence from Yugoslavia increased. This was first realised through Croatia and Slovenia eventually taking their first steps towards secession in 1991, holding successful referendums and declaring their independence later that year. Similar referendums and eventual declarations of independence were made in other republics such as Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In an effort to reassert their political control and influence over the newly independent republics, the federal Yugoslav government in Belgrade, which was by this point in time mostly composed of ethnic Serbs, resorted to using military force (Radan, 2002).

As conflict first erupted between the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) and the independent republic of Slovenia, alongside breakaway Serb communities fighting against the Croatian authorities, attention soon turned towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the most ethnically diverse republic, the situation became increasingly insecure as the new national government, mostly composed of the three main ethnic groups in the country: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, struggled to agree upon a political solution going forward. The disagreement focused on the desire of many ethnic Serbs, who advocated for remaining part of Yugoslavia, whereas most ethnic Bosniaks and Croats opted for full secession (Dieck, 2015).

Growing political and social disagreements continued to heighten tensions within the country, and especially between the Bosnian Serbs and other communities living within the republic. Following the formation of the 'Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina', which effectively split the republic in two (Ali & Lifschultz, 1994), alongside the mass Serb boycott of the Bosnia and Herzegovina independence referendum held in the spring of 1992, small-scale

violent incidents occurred increasingly between the ethnic communities, before culminating in the full outbreak of hostilities later that year. At the start of the conflict the Bosnian Serb forces massively outgunned the ethnic Bosniaks and Croats thanks to a JNA-led programme of transferring former Yugoslav military equipment into the possession of Bosnian Serb militia forces before the outbreak of full hostilities, alongside the JNA's confiscation of weapons used by the Territorial Defence Force within Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, Bosnian Serb forces, backed initially by the JNA, were able to easily dominate much of northern and eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, leading to a programme of ethnic cleansing and the creation of concentration camps across the country, predominantly against ethnic Bosniaks. Although Bosniak and Croat forces initially worked together to counter the Serb threat, ethnic Croats within the country also soon began to attempt to carve out a section of the country for themselves, most likely to unite with the newly independent Croatian state (Hoare, 1997).

In 1995 after a number of previous unsuccessful attempts at resolving the conflict peacefully, international actors including the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Russia and the European Union (EU), proposed the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more commonly referred to as the Dayton Agreement. This agreement would seek to retain Bosnia and Herzegovina's internationally recognised territorial status, whilst creating two entities within the country: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), and Republika Srpska, alongside a self-governing autonomous district in the north of the country, the Brčko District. The Federation would be mostly comprised of ethnic Bosniaks and ethnic Croat areas, with the entity of Republika Srpska being heavily dominated by ethnic Serbs. After three years of conflict and over 100,000 dead, the agreement was seen as the best chance for peace with all parties eventually agreeing to, and signing the deal on the 14th December 1995. The agreement was implemented over the following months and brought to a close the deadliest war in Europe since the Second World War.

Additionally, Annex 4 of the Dayton Agreement represented the new constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This annex recognised the continuity of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state under international law, as well as allowing for the creation of the aforementioned two entities and self-governing district. Furthermore, under this annex of the agreement, Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs were granted the status of 'constituent peoples'

within the newly independent nation, which provided each group extensive political powers and positions throughout the country's political infrastructure.

Since the end of the war, the situation remained broadly stable, with Bosnia and Herzegovina undergoing a relatively successful transition to democracy. This included the founding of political infrastructure on national, entity, and cantonal levels, the holding of free and fair elections, with participation from all national communities, and the country beginning down the path towards European integration into organisations such as the EU, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The country did, however, struggle greatly with tackling widespread corruption in political bodies, as well as dealing with the complicated issue of the return of refugees to their home after the conflict (Loughlin & Toal, 2009; Keil & Kudlenko, 2015).

This remained the case mostly until 2006, when the stability of the state was once again put into doubt with the political entrance of Milorad Dodik and his Alliance of Independent Social Democrats party (SNSD). Although there had been challenges to Bosnia and Herzegovina's structural makeup since the signing of the Dayton Agreement, this new political entrant quickly rose to become the most formative threat the nation had faced yet. Once viewed as a political reformer and liberal, hailed by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as "a breath of fresh air" (Edwards, 2019), Dodik quickly turned on his reformist past towards a path of nationalism and eventually advocating for full secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Chivvis, 2010; Toal, 2013). Since his ascendance to the post of Prime Minister of Republika Srpska in 2006, alongside his growing personal control over political structures within Republika Srpska, the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been questioned, with fears that his government may one day seek to fully break away the entity of Republika Srpska from the rest of the country continuing to the present day.

1.3 Prior Literature and Relevant Concepts

Previous literature on secessionist movements within the region have often focused on specific time periods or events, such as the collapse of the Yugoslav state in the early 1990s (Jovic, 2001), and the numerous parties and groups involved in the brutal fighting that followed into the late 1990s. Focus has also been placed on modern day examples of both

internationally recognised independence claims: Montenegro in 2006 (Darmanovic, 2007), or disputed international recognitions: Kosovo in 2008 (Ceku, 2020).

However, in the case of Republika Srpska it is paramount to understand the various forms in which mainly entity-level actions have pushed forward secessionist ideas. These have ranged from the undermining of the Bosnia and Herzegovina state through the unconstitutional creation of new Republika Srpska entity institutions, to the suggested threat of boycotting national elections for political leverage, all the way to the proposal of a full independence referendum within the region.

The concept of ethnic separatism shall be introduced in order to create a better understanding of the Republika Srpska secessionist movement. Anthony Smith describes this concept as being the seeking “through separation the restoration of a degraded community to its rightful status and dignity” and that “The aim of ethnic autonomists and separatists is the recovery of a cultural identity allegedly lost to the community and corrupted by alien influences” (Smith, 1979). This concept has been selected for some key reasons. Firstly, the separatist movement in Republika Srpska is mostly viewed as being ethno-centric in its focus. Although elements such as culture, language and religion often come into play during discussions on the issue, ethnicity is often seen as the main factor in this regard (Kostovicova, 2004). The concept can be further detailed within the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, when understanding that much of the country’s modern political structures have been built around the facilitation of dividing and administering territory clearly amongst certain ethnic groups, creating the conditions for ‘territorial claims’ by various actors (e.g. Republika Srpska as a territory for Bosnian Serbs) through the use of ethnic separatism.

In the following chapter, further literature shall be analysed focusing more on the concepts of secessionism, political representation, and the role of international actors within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1.4 Research Question

The government of the entity of Republika Srpska and its leader, Milorad Dodik has often discussed the potential for seeking independence from the Bosnian state, or at the least, done

everything in their power to undermine the national government. Now however, their most recent political moves, fermenting constant political and constitutional crisis through attempts to remove any remaining semblance of Bosnian state-level political control from Republika Srpska, appear to have set the entity's administration on a collision course with the national government. This path may see them taking on not only the Bosnian state, but also with Western forces that have, up to this point, continued to support the current foundation of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the 1995 Dayton Agreement. Difficult questions must now be asked about what can be done to help resolve the ongoing political impasse, as the country continues to face further instability.

This thesis therefore presents the following research question: **What factors may be contributing to ongoing calls for Republika Srpska secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina?**

This study aims to contribute to the creation of a broader understanding of (1) the recent history of the separatist movement within Republika Srpska, and (2) the current actions of the government of Republika Srpska and Milorad Dodik in 2023, and how it contributes to the dissolution of the Bosnian state. The proposed research shall contribute to the current literature on both broader contemporary political studies, as well as Western Balkans studies, particularly in the study of minority groups and breakaway states in the region, alongside works on secessionist movements across the world.

Such research could then further provide explanation for potential future events transpiring within the region in regards to the potential for secessionist movements. The study of current political manoeuvring within Republika Srpska, alongside the following of on-the-ground and ongoing developments should also provide further grounds for the creation of both a strong body of research and relevant insight into the contemporary political situation within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1.5 Contemporary Setting

The region of the Western Balkans is still undergoing a period of incredible flux, with political actors, national and international policy, and potentially even borders all still in motion or close to.

From a national level, there is still no long-term path to normalisation between Serbia and Kosovo 15 years after Pristina declared independence from Belgrade. Serbia has also made limited political progress under President Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party (SPS), with any real political opposition to his rule being incredibly fragmented and weakened by strict government control over national media, allowing for the government to almost rule by decree across all political aspects of the country (Castaldo, 2020).

Bosnia and Herzegovina has also made only limited political and social progress since the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995 and the ending of hostilities between the three conflicting parties. Although the country was successful in creating a wide range of political institutions post-independence, the national government is now not only incredibly fractured in its grouping of a wide variety of political actors, its remit still remains both mostly unclear and incredibly weak. A lack of certain key centralised powers within the country has left the central Bosnian government financially and politically unable to implement much needed change. Furthermore, there still remains clear political and social divides between not only the ethnic Serbs in Republika Srpska, the entity dominating almost half of the country's landmass, but also between ethnic Bosniaks and Croats living together in the FBiH.

The last relevant nation to be discussed is Croatia. Although politically stable compared to many of its regional neighbours, as well as being internationally linked to its Western partners in the EU via its new membership of both the Eurozone and Schengen Area, the country still remains heavily politically involved in Western Balkan affairs. Croatia still suffers from a lack of coherent decision making regarding how to treat ethnic Croats living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Certain aspects of the population call for outright annexation of the territories, mainly within south-western Bosnia, whilst others push for a more federal approach, allowing for the creation of a third entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing the Croat community (Woehrel, 2013). Furthermore, some political analysts believe instead that Zagreb

should avoid the topic altogether and instead suggest that it should focus on its continued path towards full European integration (Zdeb, 2016).

Other regional actors have also recently been experiencing strong political and social change. After years of social unrest, North Macedonia only recently joined the NATO military alliance alongside finally beginning its path to EU membership, and normalised relations with neighbouring Greece and, for the most part, Bulgaria. Albania, likewise, has experienced political unrest since the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s, and has stalled in its political reforms needed for EU membership. It should be mentioned however that these countries shall not be widely discussed in this thesis due to the researched topics not involving these states.

1.6 Following Chapters

With all this in mind, the forthcoming chapters within this dissertation, detailing its background, research, results, and final analysis, shall be outlined as follows. Firstly, an overview into the broad and extensive current literature available on the issues of secessionism, representation, and foreign actors within Bosnia and Herzegovina, shall be discussed and analysed. A key area of note shall be made to discern where the literature is able to provide both extensive historical context and deeper analysis to the matters discussed within this dissertation. Following this, the methodology adapted throughout this paper's research shall be detailed in full. Furthermore, the exact reasoning behind why certain methods were chosen over others, the ethical process undertaken for this thesis' research, and the formatting of the chosen methodology shall also be discussed.

Once both the relevant literature and methodological approach have been discussed, the full results of this thesis' research shall be provided and analysed. The final results shall be analysed alongside relevant historical context and literature from the discussed topics. Results shall be discussed through comparing and contrasting the gathered data from interviewees from different ethnic groupings, as well between interviewees from the same grouping.

Overall, the results found significant disagreement between various ethnic groups on the realistic possibility of any attempt of Republika Srpska seceding from Bosnia and

Herzegovina, however, such an attempt was seen to be not out of the realm of possibility if given the right circumstances. Furthermore, although interviewees broadly agreed that there was strong political representation for their respective ethnic group within Bosnia and Herzegovina, responses varied between which level of government offered the best representation for each ethnicity. Lastly, although most interviewees agreed on the continuing need to reform to attain EU membership, there was a clear divide between interviewees on the possibility or even need for Bosnia and Herzegovina to accede to NATO, and to what extent certain international actors were seen as interfering within the country's political institutions.

To complete this paper, any necessary recommendations shall be made, with final comments being made in conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to explore the current academic literature available on relevant themes core to this thesis' research. Due to the number of topics and issues discussed throughout this thesis, there are three selected 'themes' in the focus of analysis within this chapter, further broken down within selected sub-sections, to allow for a thorough understanding of literature relevant to this thesis. These being: 'Political Secession from States', 'Political Representation', and 'Key International Actors Within the Western Balkans'. Each theme shall be introduced and analysed separately, within which a broad stretch of relevant literature shall be brought in and discussed.

To begin with, the key works of Bordignon and Brusco on secession shall be introduced. This core literature shall be further backed up through writings by Pavković on the broad agreements on secession's definition, alongside Coggins research on the subject of garnering international support for secession. Following on from this, recent examples of secession directly within the Western Balkans shall be discussed through relevant literature from both regional and outside sources.

Following this, various forms of political representation and relevant literature looking into the matter will be discussed. Pitkin's key definition of political representation as a concept shall be introduced, followed on by various relevant literatures detailing the three most common forms of the concept in practice.

Finally, the role of certain key international actors operating within the Western Balkans, such as the EU, Russia, and Turkey, which have all played historical roles throughout the region's political, social, and economic development, shall be looked at. The works of Stronski and Himes, alongside Secrieru, shall examine the historical and contemporary role of Russia in the region, looking into how the Kremlin seeks to interfere with the political affairs of the Western Balkans through political and cultural ties. Following this, research by Larsen shall be brought in to discuss the growing economic role of Turkey within certain Balkan nations, namely Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Expanding upon this, Turdebar's

research on the Turkish government's 'Neo-Ottoman' foreign policy approach shall also be brought in for discussion. Furthermore, the contemporary political and economic dominance of the EU shall be explored. First, through the work of Grieveson, who examines the current status of European integration across the Western Balkans, highlighting the remaining gaps between the region and its neighbours.

The literature discussed throughout this chapter was gathered through a number of sources. This mainly includes via personal research online and in-person texts collated by the researcher, as well as texts recommended and provided via university sources.

2.2 Political Secession from States

The full political secession of one state from another has often been a profoundly conflicting and challenging topic in international affairs. Many national constitutions outright prohibit secession of a territory from the wider state, and recent cases of secession have typically led to political disruption, widespread violence, breakdown of the state, or even full-scale conflict or civil war.

Throughout world history we can view various forms of secessionist movements, many successful and unsuccessful in achieving their primary objective. Some of the most famous examples of successful secession include Ireland achieving its independence from the UK in 1921, the former Soviet republics voting to leave the collapsing Soviet Union in 1991, and most notable to this thesis, the dissolution of Yugoslavia through the secession of a number of its constituent republics throughout the early 1990s.

On the contrary, there are numerous examples of unsuccessful secessionist movements throughout history. This may be for a number of reasons including a lack of political, economic, military, or international support. Furthermore, certain cases may be successful in seceding for a brief period, before falling back under the control of the original state, such as the case of the Southern states seceding from the US, which ultimately led to the American Civil War from 1861 until 1865.

This section seeks to explore the definition of secession of one state or territory from another, its fraught history, alongside relevant literature that has researched and discussed the topic over recent years. Furthermore, contemporary secession within the Western Balkans shall be explored through examples highlighting cases of both successful and partially successful examples of full internationally recognised secession.

2.2.1 Definitions of Secessionism

Focusing firstly on Bordignon and Brusco's claim that many national constitutions either outright prohibit or do not mention the potential for secession, raises the interesting conundrum of secessionist states working within such boundaries. Their argument believed that through either limiting, or failing to mention such ground rules for secession:

The absence of explicit secession rules can be seen as a commitment device to increase the stability of the federation. By not introducing these rules, the federation raises the exit cost for its members, thus reducing the probability of a break-up in the future. (Bordignon & Brusco, 1999).

Through first looking at the limitations of contemporary secession through direct constitutional means, we can begin to more broadly discuss the general makeup of secessionist movements, and their respective claims to power.

Although work has been conducted on attempting to precisely define secessionism, there still remains disagreement amongst scholars. Pavković discussed how although there is broad discussion on the exact definition of secessionism between different disciplines, "All definitions however agree that secession involves the creation of a new state by the withdrawal of a territory and its populations from an existing state" (Pavković, 2015).

Furthermore, Horowitz's research showed that secessionist movements can appear in all societies, regardless of both the nation's economic status or the social cohesion of its peoples (Horowitz, 1981). This is not to suggest however, that such secessionist movements would not arise from, or be willing to use the arguments of, their region or territory holding either economic supremacy over others, or being home to vast amounts of natural resources (Collier, 2006).

Coggins explored the adverse effects that international support, or lack thereof, can have on secessionist movements, arguing that “statehood is inherently social and that external politics, not only the facts on the ground, determine state birth. Some actors have unequivocal internal sovereignty prior to being accepted as states by the international community” (Coggins, 2011). She continued by discussing the necessity of secessionist states in requiring international support in order to claim to be fully successful in their attempt, most importantly the backing of various great powers “..it is clear that aspiring states need a quorum of the world’s states to consecrate their legitimacy; they need friends in high places”. One of the most important aspects when attempting to gather such international support, stems from having a clearly defined territorial claim, Brilmayer argues: “The mere fact that the secessionist group constitutes a distinct people does not by itself establish a right to secede. To be persuasive a separatist argument must also present a territorial claim” (Brilmayer, 1991).

Even the simple definition of secessionism is often disputed amongst scholars. Regardless, we can still conclude that the most basic principle of secessionism, that being the creation of a new state via the removal of its territory from an already existing one, as the most basic and important convention. Furthermore, several clear themes can be understood and adapted from this paper's work on the topic. Therefore, we can highlight factors such as a clear territorial claim, international support, as well as popular support, as being significant determinators for how successful a secession movement may ultimately be.

2.2.2 Secession in the Western Balkans

On the matter of secessionism within the Western Balkans, there are three prominent contemporary examples that can be analysed. Most notable is the violent dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia and the numerous successful and unsuccessful independence movements that appeared throughout its collapse. Two more contemporary examples that shall be examined are that of Montenegro’s independence from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, and Kosovo’s independence from Serbia in 2008.

2.2.3 Dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia

Due to the growing social, political, and economic divisions between its various republics, Yugoslavia's collapse was almost inevitable by the early 1990s. Although the federal government based in Belgrade attempted at first to hold the country together, often through limiting the political power of its opponents, or through violent intervention, it soon orientated its aims to ensure it held political and territorial control over ethnic Serb majority regions across the collapsing state (Lukic, 1994). Such attempts were seen across areas of eastern and southern Croatia, alongside much of eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Firstly, in the case of Slovenia, the nation held a successful independence referendum in 1991, followed by its declaration of independence shortly thereafter. Iglar discusses how at first the international community was entirely opposed to any territorial changes in Yugoslavia and vehemently stood firm against Slovenia's declaration (Iglar, 1992). However, following a military intervention from Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), Slovenia soon gained widespread support from abroad, and its right to self-determination became paramount. Furthermore, the country was mostly ethnically Slovenian, with Yugoslav forces soon realising that there was little benefit in a drawn-out conflict in the republic that only held a small ethnic-Serb population. Therefore, the Yugoslav military intervention lasted for only 10 days and Slovenia was quickly welcomed into the international community.

Similar to Slovenia, Croatia also declared independence on the 25th June 1991. However, the country was under greater pressure due to its large Serb-majority regions in the east and south of the country which vehemently refused Croatia's independence claim. As a result, Croatian Serbs declared the formation of Serb Autonomous Regions (SAO), taking control over large swathes of recognised Croatian territory. Through this declaration and eventual control, they attempted to eventually unify with the remaining regions of Yugoslavia whilst simultaneously expelling non-Serb communities (Pavkovic, 2000). Although in 1995, the country regained control over all of its claimed territory, alongside international recognition, this was not without significant bloodshed and loss. Sekulic explored the numerous reasons for Croatia's secession, namely its attraction to creating greater ties with the then European Community (later the EU), its stronger economic position compared to other Yugoslav republics, and the nation's fear of remaining in a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia (Sekulic, 1997).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the growing political crisis was further fermented by a number of internal ethnic divisions (Burg & Shoup, 1999). Although ethnic Croats and Bosniaks were in favour of the republic's independence, the ethnic Serb community was strongly opposed. As a result, Serb communities across the republic began the process of claiming select territory, and forming their own breakaway state, the Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was viewed as unconstitutional by the Bosnia and Herzegovina court, and the UN Security Council (Radan, 2002). This process often included forcibly removing non-Serbs from their homes, as well as broader moves towards ethnic cleansing. The following war in the republic resulted in over 100,000 deaths and the displacement of 2.2 million citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stefanovic & Loizides, 2017). War crimes were committed by all groups, however, some of the worst recorded events during the war came at the hands of Bosnian Serb forces, working alongside paramilitary forces from Serbia (Bieber, 2019). Rady discussed the correlation between Republika Srpska's claim to power, and its use of violence, stating that Serb authorities "owed their being to acts of violence and could not therefore be considered legitimate bearers of authority" (Rady, 1996).

Finally, the Republic of Macedonia also held a successful independence referendum in September 1991. However, due to both the republic's miniscule Serbian minority present within the country, alongside its small economy, Belgrade opted to not interfere in the referendum's results and therefore Macedonia became the only peaceful case of secession from Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

2.2.4 Montenegro

In the case of Montenegro's independence, its history and claim is far simpler. Although it too opted to hold a referendum on independence in 1992, alongside other Yugoslav republics, the vote was overwhelmingly in support of maintaining its ties to Belgrade, with over 95% support. Even though the vote was widely boycotted by pro-independence movements, turnout still remained high at 66%.

However, in subsequent years, and following the conclusion of the Yugoslav wars, the political dynamics in Montenegro shifted dramatically. From this, support for independence grew, and the argument for secession, both domestically and internationally, became louder.

Huszka argues that in the late 1990s “The question of independence (re-)appeared on the political agenda under Milo Šević, when Montenegro stepped on the road towards independence, characterised by a rapid decrease in the functional, institutional and economic links between the two republics” (Huszka, 2003), with Bieber backing up this claim, showing that at this period in time, there was a sharp reforming of Montenegrin identity and its relationship with Serbia overall (Bieber, 2003). Such a shift culminated firstly in the disillusionment of Montenegrin society against the wider Serbian military campaign in Kosovo, which sought to brutally repress the Albanian majority living in the region. This was then followed by a reshaping of the national union between the two in the early 2000s, creating the new state of Serbia and Montenegro, through which Podgorica gained vast new political and financial decision making abilities, and especially greater control over its foreign policy orientation.

From this point on, the argument for full Montenegrin secession from the union became increasingly vocal. This eventually culminated in the successful 2006 independence referendum, through which a majority of Montenegrins opted for independence. Although there still remains division within the country, especially between views on relations with Serbia, and of the nation's membership of the NATO military alliance, the country remains mostly united and developing proactively. Furthermore, it has made great strides in its reform efforts in its ultimate aim of achieving membership of the EU in the coming years, and to date, remains the most likely accession candidate in the near future, well ahead of its Western Balkan neighbours.

2.2.5 Kosovo

One of the most divisive contemporary issues within the Western Balkans, is that of the status of Kosovo. Although the nation is de-facto independent, and has received recognition from much of the Western world, it still lacks full international recognition from numerous important actors. This includes the likes of Russia, China, and Serbia, from where Kosovo declared its independence from in 2008.

Although the then autonomous province of Kosovo initially declared independence from Serbia in 1991, alongside the Yugoslav republics that chose to break away, its claim did not receive international recognition, and therefore failed. Following a NATO military

intervention against the Serbian government's forced removal and displacement of ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo in the late 1990s, the region was placed under an international administrative body known as United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Tansey argued that as a result of this international intervention, and the removal of Serbian forces from the region, it was able to fully begin implementing institutional democratic standards in line with European norms: "UNMIK has helped to lay the groundwork for institutions, standards, and practices that are consistent with democracy" (Tansey, 2009). Woehrel agrees that although Kosovo has made significant democratic developments, the country's first local elections held in 2009 showed room for improvement: "the elections 'met many of the international standards for elections,' but noted isolated problems of misconduct and the need for improvement in such areas as the accuracy of voter rolls" (Woehrel, 2011).

One of the most important issues in Kosovo's recent development, or lack thereof, is that of its international recognition. Warbrick's research looked into the complicated and multifaceted approach of the international community towards Kosovo's recognition of independence in 2008 (Warbrick, 2008). He highlighted that, although Kosovo received broad support from much of the West, which had long been preparing for some sort of declaration from Pristina, there remained a number of standout cases rejecting Kosovo's independence within the EU in particular, namely Spain, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania. Furthermore, although Kosovo's declaration was not deemed as being illegal by the International Court of Justice, namely due to the argument that international law does not cover declarations of independence, its status is still disputed by a number of important actors in the international community including Serbia, China, and Russia. Yannis argues that their longstanding opposition to Kosovo independence, especially that of China and Russia, was highlighted before Pristina's declaration, with the two global powers often sought to undermine the authority of UNMIK, especially in regards to the "establishment of a functioning administration" within the territory (Yannis, 2001). This dispute has stalled Kosovo's progress in joining a number of international bodies, including the UN, alongside halting all attempts at pursuing its aim of eventually joining the EU. Although progress has been made at normalising relations between Pristina and Belgrade, alongside Pristina's continuous reform efforts bringing it closer to the European political community, the case of Kosovo independence still remains one of the Western Balkans largest outstanding political disputes to date.

2.3 Political Representation

Political representation is one of the most important concepts to this thesis. Political representation can appear in many different forms, across all nations and societies, often with great variations. This section provides a broad definition of the concept of political representation, with the different ways in which it can be understood and implemented in real-life contexts also discussed. Furthermore, this section also examines how political representation has appeared in the contemporary setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The political structures of the country, and how they allow for various groups to be adequately represented across the country shall be discussed and analysed through selected literature.

2.3.1 Definitions of Political Representation

Before further discussing different forms and adaptations of political representation in specific contexts, it is important to first define it as a concept. One of the earliest definitions of the concept, as well as being the most often prescribed, was created by Pitkin, who viewed the idea of political representation as simply being the ability to “make present again” (Pitkin, 1967). Through this baseline understanding of the concept, political representation can be seen as the idea of providing some form of platform for the voices of a nation’s population to be heard, and in this case, to be “present” in the political process. Rehfeld’s definition of the concept expands upon this when he stated that “Standard accounts of political representation depend upon democratic institutions (like elections) and a certain kind of proper activity (like deliberation and constituent accountability)” (Rehfeld, 2005).

Schwartz, however, takes a different approach to the originally understood definition of the concept of political representation. She perceives representation as more than simply a process of representees views being heard and represented, and of the selected official being granted some degree of political power in order to successfully voice said views. Moreover, Shwartz understands political representation as a process of representatives acting as “caretakers” of their entire community and their interests, along with citizens being made to feel increasingly engaged with the political process, instead of opting to delegate their political decisions to a few selected representatives (Schwartz, 1988). Through this, we see a more active approach to the classic understanding of political representation, with

representatives and citizens working constructively together within political structures in their respective constituencies.

Therefore, we can see that although there is not necessarily a one size fits all definition of the concept of political representation and its uses, there are a number of commonalities that we can draw between the various literature. Most definitions of political representation tend to focus on the ideas of members of society being selected as political members of their respective constituents or areas in order to represent their interests. Furthermore, some scholars understand the concept as the process of better developing and enhancing the overall political engagement between chosen representatives and local citizens.

2.3.2 Forms of Political Representation

As previously discussed, political representation can appear in a number of different forms. In relation to this thesis' broader themes, three specific models shall be discussed in this section: the delegate, trustee, and politico models of political representation. Although the politico model is the most widely practised within the theme of political representation, it still remains important to discuss the former two models in order to gain a stronger understanding of the development of the concept over time.

2.3.3 Delegate

Firstly, in the case of the delegate model, there is a clear focus on the selected member, or delegate, to voice and represent only the views of their constituents. McCrone and Kuklinski expressed this as the delegate model "in short, posits that the representative ought to reflect purposively the preferences of his constituents" (McCrone & Kuklinski, 1979). Bengtsson and Wass argue that "The delegate model thus emphasises a close relation between the representative and the voters, the constituency, the party, interest groups or specific groups of voters – depending on the kind of delegate that is being referred to" (Bengtsson & Wass, 2009).

Therefore, this particular model of political representation focuses purely on the representation of the local community through the elected representative. As Tussman describes: "The essence of representation is the delegation or granting of authority... Within

the limits of the grant of authority one is, in fact, committing himself in advance to the decision or will of another" (Tussman, 1949).

Although this model of representation is not particularly common these days, and can most often be viewed historically through the Soviet-style 'council democracy', it is still important to understand how the model operates in comparison to other models.

2.3.4 Trustee

The second model to be discussed is that of the trustee model. Within this model, the selected trustee is granted a far higher degree of autonomy than in the delegate model, as they are expected to use their personal knowledge and experience within certain fields to make the best decisions on behalf of their constituents. First formulated by Irish member of parliament, Edmund Burke, this model is most widely viewed as being "The more representatives would follow their own judgement when contributing towards the deliberative process, the more they would be developing a trustee style of representation" (Fox & Shotts, 2009).

Furthermore, Cohen argues that the distinct difference between the delegate and trustee models of representative democracies is centred around the relationship between constituent and selected representative: "Delegates are bound to represent the preferences of voters. Trustees are bound to represent the interests of the voters" (Cohen, 2014).

2.3.5 Politico

The final model to be discussed is the politico model. This is the most widely adopted model throughout modern representative democracies, and is seen as combining elements of both the delegate and trustee models. This is largely understood to be the model in which elected representatives act both as delegates and trustees for their constituents, most often through political party structures (Emy, 1974).

Within this understanding, elected representatives are most often elected by their constituents as part of a broader regional or national political party infrastructure, with a predetermined set of policies and ideology. Through this, constituents are able to entrust political power to their selected representative for their local area, whilst also understanding that the

representative will already have their own set of ideals and values, most likely attributed to their party.

As such, this model is the most widely used in representative democracies in the 21st century, including in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, allowing for a broad variety of political parties to appear and contest across local and national elections.

2.3.6 Political Representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina

In accordance with the constitution - Annex 4 of the Dayton Agreement, the political institutions within Bosnia and Herzegovina should allow for adequate political representation of the various groups and communities living in the country today.

In terms of the model of political representation adapted within the country, like most modern representative democracies it has chosen the politico model. In this case, elected officials are typically elected to voice the views and concerns of their local constituency, whilst also using their own personal knowledge or experience to contribute to the respective political institutions they are selected for.

As a representative democracy, Bosnia and Herzegovina holds elections across its four key levels of political representation: presidential, national, entity, and local level institutions. Furthermore, as previously discussed, the three 'constituent peoples' of the country, Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, are constitutionally allocated certain further representation within political institutions, namely, each electing one 'representative' of their community to the three member presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, due to the complex nature of the Bosnia and Herzegovinian political structures, formed following the conclusion of the war, the exact nature of political representation is disputed. Maja Sahadžić argued that as Bosnia and Herzegovina's complex political structure emerged as a series of compromises between warring groups through the Dayton Agreement, and not naturally through a more natural political development, its systems have not become as consolidated, organised, or defined in comparison to other democratic systems (Sahadžić, 2009). This is most linked to the divided, often vague political jurisdictions of each level of government, which often run overlapping ministries with other level institutions.

Furthermore, due to the complex and intricate nature of the modern Bosnian political system, analysts have noticed a clear entrenchment of ethnic groups within certain political institutions across the country. The system, which solidifies the allocation of seats and representation for the three constituent peoples, has been seen to fail to promote compromise between the various groups, with next to no political room for those identifying outside or beyond the three main groups. Robert Belloni argued that although Bosnia and Herzegovina did transition moderately successfully to a democratic system, the complicated structure, alongside the entrenchment of ethnic groupings within the institutions has held the country back from providing full political representation to its people (Belloni, 2004).

Lastly, on the issue of political representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina, the issue of minority groups, or non-constituent peoples, must be mentioned. Although minority groups do hold some political place within Bosnian structures, they are limited due to the allocation of presidential and legislative seats bound to those identifying as one of the three constituent peoples. Hodžić and Mraović argue that although minority groups have been afforded a place within Bosnian political structures, following the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, their role is severely limited if not affiliated with a wider political party infrastructure, as well as being limited in their potential due to being unable to run for the rotating presidency, unless they choose to identify as one of the three constituent peoples (Hodžić & Mraović, 2015).

2.4 Key International Actors within the Western Balkans

Across its volatile history, the Western Balkans has long seen the interference and domination of international actors across the region. From the first major foreign rule over the area via the Roman Empire, to the subjugation of the territory through the rule of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires until their respective collapses, and to the significant role that the region played as a middle-ground between competing camps during the Cold War (Rupnik, 2011).

Even now, in its current iteration, there is a growing list of international actors that recognise the economic, political, as well as cultural potential that the Western Balkans may provide for them. As a result, there has been a remarkable increase in foreign investment and interest into

the region in recent years. However, there are three standout actors that have played a significant role throughout the contemporary history of the region: Russia, Turkey, and the EU. Therefore, this section looks into the literature and previous research exploring the relations between the Western Balkans and these three influential international actors.

2.4.1 Russia

Moscow holds both a long and multifaceted relationship with nations across the Western Balkans. From aiding the nations of the area in their respective independence movements against the Ottoman Empire, to the complicated relationship between the Soviet Union and socialist Yugoslavia throughout the Cold War, to more contemporary political and economical ties that have bound Moscow to the region, the Kremlin's overshadowing footprint is often hard to miss (Stronski & Himes, 2014).

It must be noted however, that although Russia still seeks to play a large and dominating role across the entire region, its political efforts are often far more focused on certain nations over others. Often, this may be as a result of deep historical, cultural, or political ties, such as in the case of Serbia. In other cases, however, such efforts are made as a result of pulling the region away from deeper integration with the EU and NATO, and more towards a pro-Moscow orientation, such as through more recent examples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019). Research that specifically focuses on and highlights the multifaceted contemporary relationship between the region and Russia, alongside discussing Russia's growing attempts at political interference and disruption, shall be discussed throughout this subsection.

Recent research by Stanislav Secrieru, a senior analyst at the Institute for Security Studies, looked into Moscow's contemporary links to the region, and how it has sought to re-establish itself as a key actor through numerous disruptive means. Firstly, his research makes clear that Moscow's role within the region never truly faded during the early 1990s, believing that "post-Soviet Russia never quit the region, but the way it projects power has changed significantly since the early 1990s" (Secrieru, 2019). Although Moscow's sway on international affairs was significantly damaged and undermined throughout the 1990s, especially as the US dominated as the world's unipolar power, it did not entirely fade (Bieri, 2015; Galeotti, 2018). Rather, it was morphing into a new, more adaptable and multifaceted

approach to foreign influence, modernising in its approach to establishing power over regional and global neighbours. Secrieru's research found that Moscow's attempts at creating and maintaining power in the Western Balkans stretch far beyond the historical political, cultural, or economic means that it used in the past, suggesting that:

Today, Russia relies on a much wider array of actors for support than before: intelligence officers, political operatives, oligarchs, ultranationalist organisations, state companies, hackers, Cossacks, illegal private military companies, state-owned media outlets, criminals and internet trolls now all aid Moscow in its objectives (Secrieru, 2019).

Metodieva's research backed up the claim of Russia's multifaceted approach, highlighting that Moscow's reach has often sought to create influence through "simultaneous support for far-left and far-right movements, direct funding of media outlets, and ties with local political and economic actors with opposing views" (Metodieva, 2019).

Furthermore, Secrieru's research found that Moscow's main goal within the Western Balkans today is twofold. Firstly it seeks to "deconstruct step by step what it sees as an unjust unipolar regional order underpinned by Western institutions and to bring back what is deemed in Moscow to be a more natural state of play for the Balkans: multipolarity", and it seeks to achieve this through "deliberately slowing down progress on the settlement of regional conflicts/disputes and trying to hinder NATO and EU enlargement efforts" (Secrieru, 2019). Although it has found success in achieving its goals, it has overall struggled to fully pull the region back into political 'play', instead only being able to slow down the effectiveness of the EU's enlargement and integration policy towards the region as a whole. Furthermore, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the country's interference in the Western Balkans, namely its open support for dangerous actors such as Milorad Dodik, has further strained tensions leading to increasing worry regarding Russia's vision for the region (Anastasakis, 2022).

2.4.2 Turkey

Although not always viewed as a positive attribute to the region, the constant political and economic presence of Turkey is undeniable. For much of the 15th until the late 19th century,

the Ottoman Empire, the predecessor to the modern Turkish state, controlled almost the entire Balkan peninsula, spreading its language, culture, and religion across the region, much of which is still clearly visible in today's Balkan societies.

In a modern aspect, although Turkey continues to play a key role as an international actor across the entire Balkans region, it holds the greatest political and economic influence and ties with the nations of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia. This is most often seen as a result of the close religious and cultural ties that Ankara shares with the three nations, all of which host either majority or plurality Muslim populations (Larsen, 2020).

Ekinci highlighted how in the early 2000s, following the election of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkey became increasingly active in its foreign policy with the Western Balkans (Ekinci, 2014). Owing to an improving Turkish economy and increasing business opportunities at home and abroad, growth of civil society, favourable political climate, as well as AKP's increasingly active role in international politics, Ankara further cemented its place in the region's affairs.

However, some have noted that Turkey's increasing involvement in the region may not simply be a result of friendly relations and healthy economic partnerships. As Turdebar notes, Turkey's outlook towards the Western Balkans, Middle East, and Caucasus, has often been one attempting to place Turkey as the leading regional actor (Turbedar, 2011). Especially under President Erdogan, this informal policy of 'Neo-Ottomanism' has garnered growing concerns from actors both within and outside of the region, seeing the approach as steeped in historical nationalist sentiment, with potentially damaging outcomes for Turkey's smaller neighbours.

In contrast to the likes of Russia, or even actors further afield such as China, Iran, or the Gulf States, Turkey enjoys the advantages of geographical proximity to the entire region, slashing transportation costs of goods and people. Furthermore, the nation's aforementioned historical legacy across the region has created a significant cultural and social connection, with Turkey often being seen as a positive actor by many Muslim populations across the Balkans.

Through this, Turkey has sought to build deeper economic ties to the region and to expand its influence, signing free bilateral trade agreements with countries across the region from the early 2000s to 2010s (Hake & Radzyner, 2019).

2.4.3 The EU and Western Balkan Integration

Since the collapse of Yugoslavia and the independence of states across the Western Balkans, integration into European organisations has stood at the forefront of the region's political scenes. This trend has most often been viewed in correlation with opening negotiations, and gaining membership of the EU and NATO, but is certainly not limited to these organisations. This has not only been a one-sided relationship however, with the EU especially seeking to help reform and integrate the nations of the Western Balkans in attempts to fill in one of the last 'black-holes' of membership in the bloc.

For some Balkan nations, such as Croatia and Slovenia, their integration into the European system is already well advanced, being members of the EU, Schengen border-free zone, Eurozone, and NATO. For the likes of Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, they are currently in the negotiation phase for EU membership, and still remain some time away from gaining formal membership. However, for both Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the road ahead into the European political system is still far away. For Kosovo, a lack of full international recognition and poor relations with neighbouring Serbia has consistently halted Pristina's impressive reform effort. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, a lack of a cohesive and effective central government has led to a slow and pitiful road to European integration, and one of the world's largest brain drains.

Grieverson's research on the current pace of EU membership talks for the region highlighted this clear, and growing, divide. Discussing whether the initially proposed accession date of 2025 for certain candidate countries was still possible, their work examined both the current state of each candidate country's democratic strength, economic stability, infrastructural capabilities, and the role of external financing in each nation (Grieverson et al, 2018).

Ultimately, their research painted a bleak picture for the eventual granting of membership to the remaining candidate nations in the Western Balkans, viewing only Montenegro and North Macedonia as having any realistic chances of joining the political bloc in the coming years. This suggestion came with the expectation that not only would both nations have to continue strictly on their reformist path, but that they would both have to experience a new 'democratisation jump' in standards if they were to have any chance of eventually ascending to the bloc.

Grieveson's research further highlighted the topic of regional political feuds as one of the potential hurdles for European integration (Grieveson et al, 2018). North Macedonia's cultural disputes with Bulgaria has already been shown to be a real and effective impediment to negotiations, and Brussels has made it clear that Serbia and Kosovo would not be able to complete negotiations until a legal basis for good relations was reached and implemented between the two. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, Grieveson predicted that at its current pace, the nation would not reach standards required for EU membership until the early 2040s.

Furthermore, the work of Ker-Lindsay et al, also delved into the integration of the Western Balkans into European organisations from current member states perspectives. Looking into the varying perspectives of six EU members: Cyprus, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Hungary, as well as the UK, on EU enlargement into the Western Balkans, the research found that although all seven nations were broadly in favour of eventually granting membership of the political bloc to the remainder of the region currently outside, there were varying reasons for each nations support (Ker-Lindsay et al, 2017).

For nations such as Germany, the UK, and France, bringing in the Western Balkans to the European club has more often been for political reasons, whereas for nations such as Italy, security and economic ties were always at the forefront.

For Hungary, Greece, and Cyprus, however, domestic policies and their own foreign policy aims respectively have shaped their relationship to enlargement accordingly. Hungary has attempted to expand its political role throughout the region in recent years, most notably through its attempts to 'protect' the cultural heritage of prominent Hungarian minorities across northern Serbia and northwestern Romania. Greece has often used accession negotiations as a tool to gain political benefits for itself, viewing it as a means to force potential member states to settle old political scores under Athen's terms. More recently, this was the case for North Macedonia, with Greece refusing to allow for negotiations to commence until a final deal was reached to change the country's official name from the Republic of Macedonia, a name which Greece believed made claim to historical Greek culture and territory. For Cyprus, its view on enlargement has more often been either transactional, seeking to protect its territorial integrity through securing international support,

or through supporting its historical and cultural ally, Greece, in their political manoeuvrings such as the name-change dispute between Athens and Skopje (Đukanović, 2019).

The literature considered in this section shows that although the EU, as a single body, views potential enlargement with resounding positivity, some of the key national governments presently in the EU may not only hold varying degrees of support for expansion, but also vastly different motives behind their support for such moves.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted for this thesis research. Firstly, an overview of the selected methodology, followed by the research questions that are key to the thesis analysis shall be followed with an outline of the methodological approach that was adopted throughout.

Following this, the recruitment and sample selection process used for this thesis shall be discussed, alongside the ethical considerations that have been taken into account during the research process. To conclude, a look into how the collected data was both fully analysed and stored, alongside the overall validity and reliability of the collected results shall also be examined.

3.2 Selected Methodology

For this thesis, a qualitative methodology was adopted through the use of semi-structured interviews. This method was adopted for a number of reasons, namely to allow for interviews to be open to discussing a broad range of related topics, if interviewees wished to, as well as to allow for more in-depth responses to be gathered throughout the interview process.

3.3 Research Questions

This thesis has sought to research and analyse the views and perspectives of elected officials and representatives of political parties active within select Western Balkan countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. Namely, the research heavily focused on opinions related to the ongoing issue of the potential secession of Republika Srpska, and its possible ramifications to not only Bosnia and Herzegovina, but to the wider Western Balkans region. The conducted interviews also paid a particular focus on representation within the government institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the role of foreign actors within the country, and its membership of international organisations, in relation to the overarching issue of potential Republika Srpska secession.

Much of this thesis' research discussed the interviewees views on the above issues, including their opinions on the potential for an attempt at secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Republika Srpska entity in the near future, as well as the possibility for Bosnia and Herzegovina to enhance its cooperation of international organisations such as future membership of the EU and NATO. Furthermore, interviewees were asked to provide their views on the representation of their respective ethnic group within Bosnia and Herzegovina government institutions, whether they believed it to be adequate, and what more could be done to enhance representation.

Therefore, through the gathered results presented in this thesis, the main objective is to create a better understanding of the contemporary political situation present within Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider political region. Furthermore, it seeks to provide further political clarity and analysis directly from political representatives on the discussed issues, namely the potential for Republika Srpska secession, ethnic representation, and international relations.

With this in mind, the thesis' key research question, as stated earlier, is as follows:

What factors may be contributing to ongoing calls for Republika Srpska secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina?

To better understand the additional topics of political representation and Bosnia and Herzegovina's international relations, two further additional backing questions were created:

'Do the various 'constituent peoples' of Bosnia and Herzegovina feel properly represented within governmental institutions?'

'What is Bosnia and Herzegovina's relationship with the international community, and to what extent do foreign actors interfere in the nation's affairs?'

3.4 Methodological Approach

The qualitative research method used in this thesis aims to establish a stronger political understanding of the examined issues. Particularly, this refers to researching connections between the potential for Republika Srpska secession and influencing factors such as the representation, or lack thereof, of various ethnic groups within Bosnia and Herzegovina political institutions, and the international relations of the nation.

There are a number of benefits in utilising a qualitative approach. Namely, the approach offered a greater degree of flexibility when conducting the interview process (Clark & Jack, 1998). Furthermore, as the research was conducted with a relatively small sample size (N=9), qualitative analysis is more appropriate than a quantitative one, which would have required reaching some form of statistical significant sample size (Bolderston & Palmer, 2006).

However, due to the nature of the work required for developing and processing a qualitative method study of research that fully examines the involved issues, there may be an extensive preparation process (Opsal et al, 2016). As a number of challenges could have arisen through using this method, including time restraints on the conducting and examining of results, as well as the labour intensive process involved (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2001), suitable preparation was undertaken in advance of any research being conducted.

Therefore, in order to avoid challenges that may have arisen during the research process, a number of preparations were made for this thesis. This included carefully planning and scheduling the relevant timing of the organisation, execution, and analysis of interviews, alongside ensuring that all work conducted throughout the research process was carefully spaced out in order to minimise potential burnout. Due to the careful planning put in place, before and during the interview process, no major issues or challenges arose.

In total, a set of nine qualitative interviews were conducted in order to gain a further understanding of the issues relevant to this thesis, as well as to provide a broad analysis of responses from political representatives on related topics. Furthermore, the interviews sought to create a better political understanding and analysis of a number of contemporary matters in Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the threat of potential secession of Republika Srpska. A list

of pre-prepared topics and questions were created in order to guide the interview process, however, the interviews themselves were left semi-structured. This style of interview allowed for both a more personal perception and opinions to be discussed by interviewees. The semi-structured format allowed for a broader range of topics to be discussed when necessary, as well as interviewees being granted a high degree of liberty through constructing their responses. Thus, interviewees were more likely to discuss the issues most important to them alongside providing more honest and personalised responses, leading to a higher quality of responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

3.5 Participant Recruitment and Sample Selection Process

The only key eligibility criteria for participation in this thesis' research was for interviewees to be an active political representative from one of the three Western Balkan nations concerned within this thesis, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, or Serbia. The selected nations involved were chosen not only due to the historical political and cultural ties between these three nations, including all three being signatories to the Dayton Agreement, but also because the issues directly discussed within the interview process would have broader regional and even continental ramifications, affecting Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia most prominently.

Two methods of recruitment were adopted for this thesis' research process. Firstly, representatives were contacted directly via email to gauge potential interest in participating. At least one member of every political party represented within the national and state institutions of the relevant countries were invited to participate. Potential participants were contacted in the following order: national parliament representatives; regional parliament representatives; local parliament representatives. This order was selected due to the topical focus of the research being heavily centred around national policies, as well as regional divides.

Following this, in order to allow for a wider variety of political views/ethnic backgrounds/levels of representation, political party/organisation offices were then telephoned directly in order to inquire about the potential for a party representative/elected

official participating. As specific identifiers were used to select potential interviewees, this thesis adopted a non-probability sampling method.

Initially, interviewees were first contacted with an invitational email to participate in the thesis' research, and to respond if interested. Following a successful response, interviewees were provided with the relevant consent form (Appendix 1), participating information sheet (Appendix 2), and privacy notice (Appendix 3).

At the end of each interview conducted, interviewees were encouraged to provide contact information of colleagues or contacts (elected representatives/national representatives/party representatives) that may be potentially interested in participating. Therefore, this research also adopted a snowballing method of research in order to further collect the greatest number of responses.

In total, a number of nine interviews were conducted throughout this thesis' research (six male and three female). This total number can be broken down further by national groupings: four from Bosnia and Herzegovina, three from Croatia, and two from Serbia. Furthermore, four interviewees can be classed as members of parliament on the national level, two as members of parliament on the regional level, and three representatives of their respective parties on the local level.

3.6 Demographic Data

Interview respondents: A total of nine interviews were conducted between March-May of 2023. 67% of interviewees identified as male, with 33% identifying as female, with an age bracket of 22-63 years old. Interviews were conducted both in person in Banja Luka, Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb, as well as online via video-calling services where necessary. Responses came from three countries in total: four from Bosnia and Herzegovina (two from ethnic Bosniaks, one from ethnic Croats, and one from ethnic Serbs), three from Croatia, and two from Serbia. In total, interviewees represented views across the political spectrum from left-wing to centre to right-wing perspectives.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Due to the research methods adopted for this thesis' research, a stringent and thorough process of ethical review and consideration was completed. This was done to ensure both strict ethically approved conduct and practice was used throughout. Prior to the research process, a full ethical proposal was organised through which research aims and ethical considerations for conducting interviews were provided to the relevant ethical bodies at the University of Glasgow. The ethical proposal went through three total rounds of consideration and editing, following which full ethical approval was granted to the thesis.

All interviewees were recruited on an entirely voluntary basis in order to minimise, if not entirely remove, any potential risk of coercion. All interviewees were first contacted with an initial email which presented a broad overview of the research topics, relevant selection criteria, as well as the next steps relevant to the interview process. Following a positive response from the interviewees, they were provided with the relevant consent form (Appendix 1), participating information sheet (Appendix 2), and privacy notice (Appendix 3). Through these documents, all participants were able to fully engage and understand the issues involved within the thesis prior to any interview taking place, whilst also providing their consent to participating in the research process. Following these initial steps, a suitable time and place for the interview to take place was organised, with six interviews taking place in person, and three interviews taking place on a relevant video-calling platform. In this instance, the video-calling platform Zoom, was used for all online interviews.

Before interviews were undertaken and audibly recorded, all interviewees were asked to first read through and complete the provided consent form (Appendix 1) alongside providing their verbal consent at the beginning of each interview. This was both to ensure that all participants consented to the interview taking place, as well as their name and responses being used throughout the final thesis. Furthermore, interviewees were asked to state basic demographic information to ensure that they met the research criteria. This included statements of their name, age, nationality, ethnicity, and affiliated political party or organisation. Throughout the research process, the safety, security, as well as comfortability of all interviewees was ensured. This was done in order to allow them to openly discuss and detail their opinions on the relevant issues (Hageman, 2008). This is especially important on the subject of sensitive

political matters, namely secession, nationalism, and foreign interference in the Western Balkans

At the end of all interviews, the interviewees were reminded of their right to have any and all responses removed from the final thesis, provided that they inform the lead researcher in a relevant time frame. Finally, the interviewees were then thanked for their time, participation, and for the provided responses.

3.8 Data Analysis and Storage

Through the analysis process, all recorded interviews were transcribed, with relevant quotations from interviewees being selected for use within the research and analysis chapter. Throughout this process gathered results from interviewees were compared and contrasted on a topic-by-topic basis, looking into where different ethnic representatives agreed or varied in their views on the discussed topics. Furthermore, gaining cross-country responses would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the issues discussed, namely the probability and fallout of any potential secessionist movement within Republika Srpska.

Throughout the entire research process, all data gathered was treated with the strictest confidentiality and security. All data was securely stored on a private password-protected laptop, to which only I, the lead researcher, had access to. After the successful submission of this thesis paper and its assessment shortly thereafter, all data collected throughout shall be fully destroyed.

3.9 Validity and Reliability

It is also paramount for this thesis' research project to be able to discuss any potential limitations that could arise, alongside reviewing the gathered result's validity and reliability. As the research process occurred across three separate countries, with a number of interviews, three of nine, being conducted online, there was the potential exclusion of those that had only limited, or no access to the internet (Lee et al. 2008). As a result of this limitation, the potential sample size, as well as the diversity of opinions and responses gathered could be reduced, therefore limiting the overall scope of this thesis' research results

and the final scale of discussion. However, this is not a major concern in itself as all correspondents were provided with the opportunity to hold the interview either in person, or via a suitable video-calling platform of their choosing. Furthermore, due to the final gathered sample size of the interview process (N=9), it must be stated that the results and analysis of this thesis do not claim or make any attempt to be a statistically representative sample of either public or political opinions on the discussed matters, and that the provided results and conclusions provided within this thesis are only in relation to the gathered sample.

Through conducting interviews, the overall validity of the research was enhanced due to interviewees being provided with the freedom and flexibility to discuss a broad range of issues, something that statistical analysis would not have been able to offer within this thesis' timescale. Furthermore, interviewees were able to go into great depth on the issues discussed throughout the research process, allowing for a fuller analysis to be constructed.

There was the risk that interviewee's knowledge of the relevant topics would be potentially limited to a certain degree, as the discussed topics would often ask questions related to political matters outside of their national jurisdiction. However, this was not a major problem as: a) all interviewees were suitably well-informed regarding the topics discussed and; b) even in a case where interviewees were unable to provide full responses to questions, this lack of understanding on certain issues would have been noted and further detailed in the results and analysis chapter.

Furthermore, the potential risk for generalisation, alongside potential issues relating to the adoption of using a snowball sampling method, were analysed. This could have included the potential for the creation of an echo-chamber, with this method gathering responses from a sample that would only represent a small political grouping/set of ideologies and beliefs. As such, it was paramount to this thesis' research that a broad range of political parties, representing a mix of nations, ethnicities, and political ideologies were all given equal opportunity to participate and provide responses.

There are certain limitations when conducting research through the selected methodology. Although the format of one-on-one interviews with elected representatives allows for a clearer understanding of the political dynamic of the relevant issues involved, it is a very limited sample size. For example, it could be suggested that expanding the research to include

members of the general public from across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, would allow for a more representative thesis. Although a number of different alternatives were considered throughout the planning process of this thesis' research, they were dismissed, owing to a high number of logistical matters arising, not least the sample size required from each country to form clear and reliable results would measure in the hundreds, if not thousands of respondents.

Limited, or unreliable results from participants was a potential limitation of this research and its discussed topics. Due to the highly political and sensitive nature of some of the issues involved, there was limited incentive for certain participants involved to give clear or direct responses to the questions regarding such matters, whether it be regarding personal opinion or political policy. Therefore, all interviewees were provided with broadly similar sets of questions which were open to interpretation, and they could therefore decide for themselves how to answer. Furthermore, in cases where initial responses were unclear or required greater explanation/detail, extra time was allowed for the pressing of certain matters or issues. Therefore, by analysing the gathered results alongside prior literature, a more informed discussion regarding the future of secessionist movements within the region and their distinct aims can be undertaken.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This thesis has aimed to build a broader understanding of contemporary political issues present within Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the ongoing potential secession of the Republika Srpska entity and some of its direct causes. Furthermore, it has sought to actively engage and analyse the views and perspectives of those active within political settings across the Western Balkans region. Its main focus has been on the issues of representation, or lack thereof, of the constituent peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the nation's governmental institutions, foreign interference and international relations within Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as how these issues may have helped to push calls for the potential secession of the entity of Republika Srpska.

Within this chapter the results from the interview section shall be presented, being presented through three select 'themes'. The key themes that emerged throughout the research process, and shall be further analysed within interview responses were: 'Secessionism within Bosnia and Herzegovina'; 'Representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina government institutions'; and 'Foreign interference in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its foreign relations'.

Each theme and its relevant results shall first be detailed and analysed, in relation to examples from the gathered literature, previously discussed in chapter 2. This shall allow for a better understanding of the history of the relevant themes discussed, as well as providing clear and informed analysis on the current understanding and discussions of the themes.

Before discussing and analysing the gathered results, a number of initial outcomes shall be detailed in order to create a more solid structure for the forthcoming analysis.

The first important finding of the research was on the broad agreement of the lack of genuine representation within Bosnian government institutions. Most interviewees argued that there was a distinct lack of proper representation for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina on various levels, namely the national level. However some argued that this was more of an issue for certain ethnic groups over others. This lack of representation was often related to a

combination of a corrupt political elite, alongside a confusing and over bloated bureaucratic system that could not function efficiently nor provide adequate representation. However, more positive views were voiced towards influential and proper government representation of the Bosnian population at the local level. Linking on to this, there was broad agreement amongst interviewees for the need for an eventual reform or constitutional restructuring of the Bosnian political system. However, the question of what areas would reform expand to and what any permanent solution would look like, created a broad range of responses from interviewees, as shall be further detailed in this chapter. The issue of the potential secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina was discussed with all interviewees. Once again, there were divisions amongst interviewees regarding the realistic possibility that the current administration, or future administrations, of Republika Srpska would seriously attempt to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina, with ethnic Serbs often believing the threat of secession to be more serious than their Bosniak or Croat counterparts.

Furthermore, the issue of foreign interference within Bosnia and Herzegovina was a widely discussed issue. However, once more there was disagreement between which states were more actively interfering in Bosnia and Herzegovina's affairs. Bosniaks and Croats were more likely to view Russian and Chinese interference as potentially, if not actively, destabilising, whereas Serb interviewees were more likely to voice concerns regarding the role of Turkey. However, the growing economic role of Gulf states, as well as the powerful political influence of the EU and US, were also mentioned. Finally, when it came to the foreign relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its potential membership of international organisations, there was clear division amongst interviewees. Although most viewed EU membership for Bosnia as a positive and necessary step, there was disagreement as to when exactly such a goal would be possible. On the matter of NATO accession, however, there was a sharp divide amongst interviewees. Bosniaks were far more likely to view NATO membership as not only a stabilising factor, but a completely necessary issue for ensuring peace and stability. Croat interviewees were more likely to agree with this stance, but more heavily advocated for EU accession. Serb interviewees often stood completely against any potential accession to the NATO military alliance, seeing it as a destabilising and provocative move.

4.2 Secessionism within Bosnia and Herzegovina

On the matter of the potential secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina, opinions were mixed. Interviewees were asked to discuss not only how likely they felt such an attempt at secession truly was, but also of the possible ramifications and responses of such an event occurring, namely what the response of other groups within the country would be like. One initial starting point of division between interviewees was the belief that such secession was even realistic. Both Croat and Bosniak interviewees overwhelmingly view such an attempt as highly unlikely, with one Croat interviewee arguing that *'The political elite of Republika Srpska do not simply wish to hand over all of their benefits from their current positions to those in Belgrade. It is not in their interest'* (Domagoj Hajdukovic, Socijaldemokrati, Member of the Croatian National Parliament). This view was echoed by a Bosniak counterpart who stated *'I think those are only bluffs, I do not think that something like that can happen. It's not a situation like Kosovo. It's a different agreement'* (Damir Niksic, Naša Stranka, Member of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Furthermore, another Croat interviewee argued that she believed that the issue would eventually be solved through diplomatic reform, putting secession off the table:

I do not think that that will happen, I think that they will come to some sort of different arrangement. Maybe diplomatically, maybe through other means. Serbia is forever in this project of big Serbia. It is always adjusting its territory and changing its situation. But we will see what will happen of course in Belgrade - Marijela Hašimbegović, Demokratska fronta, Member of Sarajevo Canton Parliament

A number of interviews also correlated ongoing threats to secede as little more than political cover to hold onto power by a broad number of interested actors including certain political leaders from all three main ethnic groups, or even that their political power and influence is simply used to cover up for a series of corrupt criminal activities:

[Dragan] Čović would not be able to do that [extreme nationalism] without [Bakir] Izetbegović, and he would not be able to do it without [Milorad] Dodik and Čović. I think the first step towards creating different political movements, to creating common ground for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina is to show that they [3 main

nationalist parties] aren't enemies, that they are just stirring up this conflict, putting it always on the verge of escalating but never really escalating, just because it gives them ground to take everything they want - Sandra Bencic, Možemo!, Member of the Croatian National Parliament

What I think is also the problem is that behind all these issues of secession within Bosnia is criminal activities and corruption. There are many elements and actors across the region that use this nationalist politics to mask their criminal activities or their corruption - Stefan Tasic, Ne Davimo Beograd, spokesperson

One Bosniak interviewee did however believe that international events, namely the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, could potentially spill over into Bosnia and Herzegovina: *'In peace, no. If great powers from the outside have other plans to transfer the war from Ukraine to Bosnia and Herzegovina and to bring it here, then it's possible'* (Šemsudin Mehmedovic, Stranka Demokratske Akcije, Member of the Bosnia and Herzegovinian National Parliament). However, when discussing the possibility with Serb interviewees, most were either outright in favour of Republika Srpska secession, or at least believed that such an attempt was likely in the coming years:

I do believe that the current administration will seek to connect more with Serbia, and I believe that is the right way...In short I do believe that we are going to try and come as close to Serbia as possible. That is what I believe, what my party believes, and what many ethnic Serbs believe is the right way -Kosta Milosevic, Narodna Partija Srpske, party representative

I think that they will try to gain more power for themselves in the following years...it is tough to say what they can and can't do...If I was in their position I would [attempt to secede], or if they renegotiate the Dayton Agreements, then I would be happy to live in Bosnia with all the people I've lived with under a different set of circumstances - Stefan Seratlic, Nova Demokratska Stranka Srbije, Youth President

However, Serb interviewees also spoke about how, realistically, the actual implementation of seceding from Bosnia and Herzegovina would not be a quick process. Indicating their belief that such a change would be a generational shift, and only one applied when the broader

international situation allowed for it: *'However displeased they are with the current disagreements, i'm talking about political representatives, they don't have the backing to make any big moves, any rash moves, to stir the water so to speak, for the West to intervene or to make any big changes'* (Stefan Seratlic). Furthermore, one Bosniak interviewee spoke candidly on the issue, stating that any radical restructuring of the Bosnina political system, especially one that would seek to heavily centralise the country or abolish the current standing of 'constituent peoples', would give minority groups the legal standing they need to consider secession:

The problem is if you abolish the idea of constituent peoples and you make everyone the same, in this case, Bosnians and Herzegovinians, then ethnic Croats have all the right to self-determination. Not now, not when they are constituent peoples and have the same rights and the same responsibilities to the country, but once you take this away from them they have all the right to self-determination, even to secession. The same for ethnic Serbs -Damir Niksic

Furthermore, on the point of potential reactions to any secession attempt, namely by the Croat community across Bosnia and Herzegovina, opinions were divided. One interviewee succinctly showed their belief that Republika Srpska secession would enact an equal or measurable response from the Croat community: *'I would expect that [an equal response from Croat representatives]'* (Stefan Seratlic). Others were not so convinced, believing that the cultural and political bonds between Republika Srpska and Serbia were far stronger and deeper-rooted than the connections between Croatia and Croat communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

I do not believe that Croats would seek closer ties with Zagreb...we are different people, we might be neighbours but we live completely separate lives, with different mindsets...My impression, is that they [Croats] are not going to seek as close ties with Zagreb as we will with Belgrade - Kosta Milosevic

4.3 Representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina Government Institutions

In this section, the topic of representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina government institutions shall be discussed, with gathered results correlating to this examined topic. This was a broadly discussed issue, mentioned thoroughly by all participants across all backgrounds, with many discussing the potential correlation between a lack of representation for certain ethnic groups and direct calls for forms of constitutional change, including potentially looking to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, there was significant divergence surrounding interviewees' views on what levels of government the public was well represented within Bosnian institutions, whether this varied by ethnic group, and to what extent was change required to expand such representation.

Interviewees were asked first whether they believed that their respective ethnic group (Bosniak, Croat, Serb) felt well represented within government institutions across Bosnia and Herzegovina. One immediate conclusion was the broad agreement between interviewees that although representation was not perfect, all ethnic groups were represented within government institutions:

I don't think that's the case, and I don't know who came up with that narrative...we [Bosniaks] are represented like everybody else. This is a country of three fundamental peoples. Doesn't matter if they are Croats at 15%, or Bosniaks at 50%, and Serbs at 30% [minority groups making up the remaining 5%]. It doesn't matter, we are three peoples and we are all equal - Damir Niksic

Of course, there's always room for improvement, there's always something more you can do, I believe that Serbs as a nation should have a bigger say....yes I do believe that to some extent that we are properly politically represented in Bosna, however, I do believe there is still room to improve the political representation of Serbs - Kosta Milosevic

One interviewee made the point that representation is not in itself an issue, but that the political cohesion and decision making of the three constituent groups at a national level remains a sticking point:

I think that the representation [of Serbs] itself is not a problem. There's a lot of problems with the electoral system, that's something else we can discuss, but representation is not a problem. What is an issue is the cohesion of the three groups and of the functionality of this system at the federal level - Stefan Tasic

However, other interviewees discussed the flaws in Bosnia and Herzegovina current political infrastructure, pointing out that such a system actually degrades all constituent people's representation by attempting to provide equal representation for all. One representative in particular focused on the issue of Bosnia's rotating presidency, which is equally shared amongst the three representatives of the constituent peoples, changing hands every 8 months:

In a way, in some regards, all of them [constituent peoples] are misrepresented. All of their rights are technically challenged...as a two-part state, Bosnia and Herzegovina is essentially ineffective to protect anyone's interest...Bosnia has a rotating presidency, and history has shown that that system is unable to, and is still unable to represent anybody's interest - Stefan Seratlic

One Croat interviewee specifically brought up the legitimacy of the currently elected Croatian representative within the Bosnian tri-presidency. Although in theory, only ethnic Croats vote for this representative, there are no legal or electoral barriers to non-Croat ethnicities voting for this position:

We have a legally elected Croat representative. His legality is not disputed, his legitimacy is however, so who elected him, how he represents the Croats in the government...When it comes to local governance, representation is ok. As far as I know there have been neither complaints nor misuses of the existing system. On the federal level, the representation is legal but its legitimacy is questioned - Domagoj Hajdukovic

Alongside this, one Bosniak interviewee discussed the role of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), Christian Schmidt, and his recent controversial constitutional interventions throughout 2022-23, leading to the degradation of representation within Bosnian politics:

The recent interventions by the OHR have led to certain political forces being pushed out of politics in Bosnia...so Bosnians (all groups) are not represented according to the will of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but to the will of the High Representative - Šemsudin Mehmedovic

This sentiment of unbalanced political interventions by the OHR was echoed by a Croat representative, aiming for better cooperation between the three constituent peoples:

There is definitely influence from the High Representative..he needs to either change his perspective, to move away from the influence of the Croat side and work towards the benefit of all citizens of Bosnia. It is confusing why his decisions seek to divide us more than bringing us together - Marijela Hašimbegović

Furthermore, interviewees were also asked whether they believed the democratic and electoral structures created from the Dayton Agreement suitably allowed for adequate participation and representation within government institutions, of their respective ethnic group. Bosniak representatives were overwhelmingly in favour of the political structures created from the Dayton Agreement, believing that such an agreement correlated and upheld the existence of Bosniaks existing to a nation: *'That constitution [Annex 4 of the Dayton Agreement] has its mistakes, but it's better to respect any constitution than none, and in the last 25 years we have succeeded in implementing that constitution'* (Šemsudin Mehmedovic). Furthermore, one made the argument that the current constitution seeks to bring about a balance between the three 'constituent peoples':

Three nations decided to make one country where no one is dominant and no one is responsible for the other two, but everyone is responsible for the country. Like three brothers, and three brothers need to make consensus and decide...The problem is these people never had a chance to decide the fate for their own state - Damir Niksic

Serb and Croat representatives tended to offer more sceptical remarks, however. Firstly, Serbs were more likely to discuss how the agreement allows for the underrepresentation of the smallest ethnicities, in this case, Serbs and Croats:

Although we do have our political representation, we are over-voted. There are things where we should have more weight to our word, we do not. The weight of our word

does not represent us as much as it should or as we would like it to...not just as much as we would like it to, as much as it should, and as much as we need - Kosta Milosevic

The Dayton agreement was imposed on us by the political West...they didn't really take into account the differences between people. There's a lot of things that bind us together, there's a lot of similarities between us [Serbs], Bosniaks, Croats...but those people weren't really given the opportunities to make their own destinies, now it is showing its ugly face - Stefan Seratlic

However, one Serb representative focused more on the foundation of ethnic barriers, created specifically from the Dayton Agreement: *'The Dayton agreement itself has a lot of issues, because it creates sort of barriers by making ethnic barriers within institutions'* (Stefan Tasic). One Croat representative was quick to discuss the flaws created by the Dayton Agreement from their perspective. Namely, the lack of a third political entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina for ethnic Croats:

If we look at the problem from the perspective of the Dayton Agreement, the problem is that it created two entities, and not three...of course if we had three that would be more functioning and logical...From our perspective, of the right of Croats which is an entity living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the decisions allow for the representative to be chosen by Bosniaks, in Bosniak Canton without any Croatian voice - Marija Selak Raspudic, Most, Member of the Croatian National Parliament

While, another Croat interviewee discussed the potential risks involved with setting up a third entity, especially on the voting rights of other Bosnian citizens:

They are trying to make it so that only the Croats can vote for the Croat representatives. What that means is that if I was running for the Croat presidency, my Muslim husband could not vote for me. There is no other situation like that in the world. In that case, for me, that is fascism. I think these changes are very dangerous and are dividing us on the path to EU membership - Marijela Hašimbegović

Furthermore, the ongoing issue of Croat and Bosniak presidential representatives being elected in the same entity, leaving the vote open to potential cross-ethnic voting, was discussed:

Recently, certain forces are beginning to exploit certain loopholes within the law, and basically by being the most numerous group [Bosniaks], they can elect two representatives through the Croatian representative vote, which was not in the spirit of the Dayton Accords. It is not illegal...but when we come to the numbers, then we have a problem. So on the top level, I would not say that Croats are represented as was envisioned - Domagoj Hajdukovic

Following this, interviewees were asked to discuss the current constitutional status of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This included discussing whether change was needed in order to better represent their respective ethnic group, including the option of closer ties to Croatia or Serbia respectively for the two smaller ethnic groups, as well as if they believed that a renewed public discussion on the future constitutional makeup of the country was required. To begin with, one Bosniak representative strongly believed in maintaining the current constitutional arrangement, believing it to offer them the best possible political standing:

The best interest of the Bosniak nation is to keep this [Constitutional agreement] as it is, because this constitution recognises Bosniak nationality. Otherwise you lose that title of your own nation, your principal country, like Croatia is mother country to Croats, Serbia is for Serbs, what will be for Bosniaks? Turkey? Who? - Damir Niksic

Another, however, believed that reform was the only path to eventual EU integration and to normalising the political situation in the country: *'It is best to make reforms. With the Dayton Peace Agreement and with the current constitution, we cannot be a part of the European Union nor a member of the NATO military alliance. That is our main political goal'* (Šemsudin Mehmedovic). This interview continued by discussing the unlikely possibility of such reform, namely due to the unwillingness of various political actors to surrender their current powers:

Within Bosnia and Herzegovina, we do not have agreement between the three parties on reform of the current arrangement, because no one is willing to give up their current achievements. And in Bosnia we have political actors that are satellite movements for Belgrade and Zagreb, and their roles are very active. And through them, Serbia and Croatia are seeking to achieve their war goals

Serb interviewees, however, were far more likely to favour greater constitutional changes for Bosnia and Herzegovina, even advocating for closer ties with Serbia proper:

I firmly believe that closer ties with Serbia are the solution...5 to 10 years is a very short period. It's very easy to say I would love for it to happen in the next year, I would want it to happen in the next month but that's not something that's very likely to happen...I do not believe that it is something that will happen in the next decade, but it is a life-long battle - Kosta Milosevic

Another Serb interview was more tepid, however, viewing any potential change through the lens of international agreement:

I can definitely say that it is not in their [Bosnian Serbs] interest to stay still. It is not in their interest, nor in the interest of Bosniaks, or of Croats...All of their [Bosnian Serbs] ideas right now, in regards to either independence or acquiring more power, would have to be made in agreement with foreign powers - Stefan Seratlic

Croat representatives were more likely to favour the option of seeking out the creation of a third entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina to represent the Croat population:

If Dayton cannot be put in practice in a way that we have legal framework that will be respected, then of course, if they cant have representatives who are chosen by them in the political institutions...if Bosniaks can choose their representatives for them, then of course a consequence of that is that Croats will go and search for their own entity - Marija Selak Raspudic

Maybe the best solution for Croats would be a third entity, we would have a clear-cut situation. Although that may not be the best political message. In my view, and in Croatia's view, it is in our interest to have Bosnia as a fully functioning country with respect of all people's within their country - Domagoj Hajdukovic

However, representatives of all three groups did state that dialogue on a broader national political restructuring was needed:

In terms of constitutional changes, the first step should be dialogue, and there should be no one-way solutions. Also, I think it's important that the first political changes come from the local level. This relates not only to Bosnia, but also to any country - Stefan Tasic

In the next ten years, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina should decide what is the place of ethnic representation compared to citizens representation...they have to decide what is the most important representation for them, and at what level. What is the key representation on the national level, and what is the key representation at the regional, municipal level?...it's up to them to decide, and it's up to us to facilitate that process, as well as respecting that process - Sandra Bencic

4.4 Foreign Interference in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its Foreign Relations

Lastly, the discussion of ongoing foreign interference within Bosnia and Herzegovina, alongside Bosnia and Herzegovina's place in the international community, was brought up with interviewees. First, interviewees were asked to discuss whether they believed that foreign interference was still heavily prominent in Bosnia and Herzegovina politics, as well as which specific international actors did they believe to be most active in this role. From this, all interviewees fully agreed that Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Western Balkans region as a whole, suffer from an outweighed influence and interference from various foreign actors, although responses were mixed in terms of which actors were most at fault: *'It's definitely Serbia for the time being, Russia of course, and I'm not sure of the position of Turkey...definitely I think Western countries are supportive on the reform path but sometimes they are not concrete enough'* (Sandra Bencic). A number of Serb interviewees continued by discussing the long history of foreign intervention within Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Always has been the case, is the case at the moment, and always will be the case...1000 years ago it was the Turkish Empire, 150 years ago it was Austria-Hungary, 80 years ago it was Germany. Today it is France, the United States, its Britain, and Arab nations as well - Kosta Milosevic

The Balkans is the space in which many forces, and many international forces are trying to provide some influence and their reach. Obviously you have the West, China, and Russia. Some countries are trying to maintain a certain level of influence through

political groups which are close to them. For example, easily with the connection between Vladimir Putin and Milorad Dodik...These influences have always been there, but a lot of the orchestration is operated at a local and national level. For example, you have Milorad Dodik in Bosnia, or you have some Bosniak political groups which have close ties with Erdogan - Stefan Tasic

With a Croat interviewee discussing how foreign interference is not only a Bosnian issue, but is apparent across the entire Western Balkans region:

Well this is not only happening in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in the region as a whole. If you look at Montenegro and the foreign influence there, this is a really clear cut case. We can debate which foreign influences are at play here... You have a historical Serbian influence, which is heavily pro-Russian and influenced by Russia. You have a growing Chinese influence across the region, for example you have it in Serbia stemming from the Milosevic era. And in Bosnia, to complicate matters even further, you have the influence of Turkey, and of a number of Middle-Eastern and Gulf States. The Turkish element has at times been a worrying element, as the influence has not always been a stabilising factor - Domagoj Hajdukovic

And a Bosniak interviewee focusing on the volatile nature of international relations across the region:

Of course, our main problem is the influence of Russia through Serbia and through Republika Srpska. We also have this issue of the input of China economically through Republika Srpska...Of course there is also the important historical link that Turkey has, which remains to this day. In my political party, we are looking for new partners due to the insincerity of our Western partners. I am absolutely against that, but people here are feeling insecure in these circumstances, and we can feel the anti-Western campaign - Šemsudin Mehmedovic

Further, one Bosniak interviewee spoke openly about the repercussions of the Dayton Agreement on regional interference. Namely, discussing how under the agreement, both Croatia and Serbia as nation-states are obliged to ensure the best interests of their respective

‘peoples’ living within Bosnia and Herzegovina, even if some may classify this as foreign interference:

They [Serbia and Croatia] are obliged to take care of their peoples, Serbs and Croats, so they are not interfering. The Dayton Agreement was an agreement between three countries, not three groups within Bosnia and Herzegovina, between three countries: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. So they can interfere, it's completely constitutional, and it's completely fair. But who will take care of the Bosniaks? - Damir Niksic

A Serb interviewee discussed this link between the Croat and Serbian administrations, and their relationships with their respective communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even discussing how such a bond could be better realised in legislative terms:

Of course, that's not a secret. I don't think that having a close connection with the ‘community’ is part of this ethnic background. It is not only useful, but necessary. The question is how you translate this relationship into a constitutional and maybe even legislative relationship - Stefan Tasic

When discussing potential membership of the EU for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniak and Croat interviewees were overwhelmingly in favour of pursuing such a path:

I want to be a part of the European Union as soon as possible. As an artist, I want to be able to pack up my stuff and sell it on Ebay, and send it right away. To have the same rights, and the same opportunities, and freedoms, access to markets. It's fair. To sell stuff to them as they do to us, right now it's just one way - Damir Niksic

It's an absolute priority of regional politics that Bosnia and Herzegovina seeks membership of the European Union...such a goal should be realistic by the end of the decade, by 2030. This is ambitious but only if the EU recognises that not all potential countries are the same and will have the same goals in mind - Sandra Bencic

One Croat interviewee discussed the need for regional cooperation in achieving the final goal of full Western Balkan membership of the EU:

One day all of this region will be in the European Union, so why are we wasting so much time fighting each other? There will be no borders, no edges once we are all members. I do not understand why we are not working together to speed up that process...we need to start working together as a region, in one healthy life. In the economy, in education, in healthcare, we need to work together - Marijela Hašimbegović

Another Croat interviewee, however, discussed the challenges of reaching such a goal. Speaking frankly on what he perceived to be a dividing line amongst different communities in their willingness to work towards achieving EU membership:

In terms of EU membership, I may be biased, but I see the Croats as the only real driving force, as the only real people that really want to attain membership. Bosniaks do want it on a declarical [sic] level, but their political actors and elites continue to do everything they can not to achieve it, not all of them mind you, but most. On the Serbian level they are outright hostile to any integration. I think that this mindset could change on the EU issue with changes in Serbia, I think that will come gradually - Domagoj Hajdukovic

Furthermore, Serb interviewees typically tended to be more luke-warm towards the possibility of EU membership for Bosnia and Herzegovina:

It's very hard to say right now. If I had to give an answer right now it would probably be more on the negative side, but so many things can change in a short time ... there are things that are good and there are things that do not sit well with us. I'm speaking for both Republika Srpska, and for the Federation - Kosta Milosevic

Finally on the topic of NATO membership for Bosnia and Herzegovina, opinions were mixed. Although some interviewees voiced overall support for eventual membership of the military alliance, many did not see it as a priority. Furthermore, EU integration was viewed as a higher priority, with some disagreeing entirely with NATO membership for Bosnia and Herzegovina: *'When it comes to NATO, the situation is a little more complicated as you have the Serbian element. Of course, in my view NATO membership is not crucial if you have*

membership in the EU. Basically the effects are the same - Domagoj Hajdukovic. Another Bosniak interviewee, although clearly in favour of NATO membership for Bosnia and Herzegovina, voiced concerns regarding Islamophobia from current member states:

I must say responsibly, that Bosnia is closer to the NATO criteria than to Bulgaria or Romania. But the membership is not our decision, it is a decision for the member states. We want to be on the same path as others like Montenegro. However, it is clear that due to the fears and islamophobia of the West that we are being delayed in that decision - Šemsudin Mehmedovic

Another interviewee also voiced caution on the topic, stating that if membership was to potentially renewed conflict in the wider region, then NATO membership should not be viewed as overall beneficial:

It should have the same goal of membership of the EU which is creating peace and stability in the region. With that being said, if there is any chance that Bosnia and Herzegovina joining NATO could actually stir potential conflict then maybe different dialogues should be put in place - Sandra Bencic

However, there was still support from some interviewees for Bosnia and Herzegovina eventual and full entry into the military alliance:

NATO is absolutely accepted and of course, that is our politics, we want to be a part of NATO too. I think we made steps already concerning that. Hopefully, this government will lead us there but we still do not know their goals yet - Marijela Hašimbegović

4.5 Conclusions

From the gathered results, we can begin to draw some initial answers to this thesis' main research question, as well as its follow-up questions.

On the main question of which factors may be contributing to ongoing calls for Republika Srpska secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina, we can clearly see two that stand out. Firstly,

the influence of foreign actors within the country, and their role in supporting secessionist actors such as Russia and Serbia's open support for Milorad Dodik. We can also see how a feeling of a lack of proper political representation by ethnic groups within Bosnian political bodies has also contributed to calls for secession. Not only do we see this creating schisms between the Bosnian Serb community, mostly living in the Republika Srpska entity, and the Bosniak and Bosnian Croat communities, mostly living in the FBiH, but also between Bosniaks and Bosnian Croat communities as well.

Furthermore, on the first supporting question regarding whether the various 'constituent peoples' of Bosnia and Herzegovina feel properly represented within government institutions, we can also view significant divergence. Although representatives of all three groups did concede that they believed their group to be well-represented in government institutions, this varied between ethnic group and level of government. Bosniak respondents typically identified more with national representation, with Serbs focusing more on representation at the entity (Republika Srpska) level, whereas Croats typically sought better political representation on a cantonal or local level of government.

And lastly, on the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina's relationship with the international community as well as the role of foreign actors interfering in the nation's affairs, there were a broad range of views voiced by interviewees. On the topic of foreign actors interfering within the political affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, nations such as Russia or Turkey were warmly welcomed by some, but seen as bad-faith actors by others. Even the role of the EU was somewhat questioned by some interviewees, judging whether the political bloc was fully in support of Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and its European integration. Although there was broad agreement on the issue of EU membership, how to get there and the proper implementation of necessary reforms was seen as highly unlikely by some interviewees. Furthermore, the issue of potential NATO membership was highly divisive, not only between different ethnic groups, but even with some ethnic groups being split on the issue.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

As we have seen through the gathered research results, there is room for potential agreement on certain topics amongst some, if not all of the represented constituent peoples within Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, we can also view clear lines of division between certain political actors across the various ethnic groups, namely on the future status of the nation, potential secession, and the foreign relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Therefore, within this discussion and analysis section, the gathered interview results shall be assessed alongside the previously gathered literature of the relevant topics, discussed in the previous literature review chapter. This shall follow the three key themes raised within the interviews themselves: ‘Secessionism within Bosnia and Herzegovina’; ‘Representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina’; and ‘Foreign Interference and the Foreign Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina’.

5.2 Secessionism within Bosnia and Herzegovina

Being the central theme of this thesis’ research, it is paramount to discuss the links between the gathered literature on secession, and the interview results. Although secession is not a new concept, especially within the Balkans region, the secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina would be not only unconstitutional, but could have major ramifications for the political stability of the nation and the wider region.

Bordignon and Brusco’s discussion on the issues of a lack of specific rules forbidding or allowing secession within a nation’s political structure, may lead to the stability of the nation, with no secessionist group willing to enter the political unknown of their constitutional makeup (Bordignon & Brusco, 2001). Although Bosnia and Herzegovina specifically prohibits any form of secession within the Dayton Agreement, from which its contemporary political structures are formed, there is also a broad understanding that due to the constituent peoples all enjoying, on paper, equal political power and representation, they cannot be deemed as minority groups, and therefore are not subject to international laws on

self-determination. A point that was highlighted by one interviewee. Furthermore, as Bosnia and Herzegovina is still subject to supervision from the international community, there remains clear obscurity in this sense as to how the wider region and concerned international actors would react to any attempt at secession.

Furthermore, Coggins' discussion on the necessity for successful secessionist movements to enjoy broad international support is also an evident factor within Republika Srpska (Coggins, 2011). As mentioned by a number of interviewees, the present role of Russia, and to a lesser extent, Croatia and Serbia, in advancing the calls for outright secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina, continue to allow for substantial claims that the current Republika Srpska administration may seriously look to secede within the coming years. Without such international backers, Republika Srpska would face outweighed international support in favour of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued territorial and political integrity, namely from the EU and NATO, and nations such as the US, France, Germany, and UK specifically. Although it is clear that Republika Srpska faces significant challenges internationally in regards to garnering support for any potential secessionist attempt, the continued support it enjoys from Moscow and Belgrade will allow it to retain its consistent threat of leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina, until such a point in which it is granted de-facto independence through full entity autonomy, or at such a point when it feels confident that it can successfully navigate the difficult and contentious unconstitutional split from the fragile nation. Brilmayer's argument that a successful secessionist movement must be backed up, not only by a cultural claim to sovereignty, but also by a clear territorial claim, a factor which Republika Srpska has clearly shown it has the capacity and formation to do (Brilmayer, 1991).

As has also been previously looked into, the Western Balkans is no stranger to the notion of secession, and we have seen a number of cases in recent decades, of both legitimate and disputed examples. However, in the case of Republika Srpska, where there is clearly both international and domestic constitutional disputes over both the legitimacy and possibility of any such secessionist attempt, the clearest example that we can draw parallels to would be to that of Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. Even to this day, with Kosovo lacking full international recognition, namely from Russia, China, and Serbia, Republika Srpska has often garnered support from these exact international actors, and shuns those that also have typically sided with Kosovo in its ongoing political dispute, namely the US, UK, and France.

Warbrick's research on the international community's varied approach to Kosovo could also be seen to draw clear parallels to any potential case within Republika Srpska (Warbrick, 2008). Pristina chose what it felt to be a politically optimum time for itself to declare its independence, believing that it had adequate intentional support to do so. Such a precedent could potentially one day be mimicked by the Republika Srpska administration. However, as pointed out by Yannis, attempting such a move without the full support of the international community, especially the actors that remain heavily present and involved within Bosnia and Herzegovina could eventually have catastrophic effects for any future Republika Srpska state (Yannis, 2001). As has been seen in the case of Kosovo, it continues to remain outside of most key international bodies, both political and economic structures that continue to prohibit its full development into a functioning democracy and market economy.

5.3 Representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina

For many interviewees, the issue of gaining effective political representation for their respective ethnic group was paramount. The previously discussed research results showed clear discrepancies between various ethnic groups' feelings towards representation on various levels of the political structures and institutions within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, representatives of the interviewed groups voiced clear differences between their beliefs on whether the current constitutional arrangement within Bosnia and Herzegovina allows for proper and adequate political representation. Therefore, this section will tie together the gathered research results alongside the formerly gathered literature on political representation and its various models, further analysing the topic through the contemporary context of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

5.3.1 Politico Model of Representation

As previously mentioned, the most commonly adopted form of political representation within representative democracies, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, is that of the politico model. This model is widely viewed as being a combination of both the previously discussed delegate model (McCrone & Kuklinski, 1979), and trustee models (Fox & Shotts, 2009) of representation (Emy, 1974).

In this sense, elected officials are chosen to act as representatives of their constituent's political wishes, whilst also using their own respective knowledge and experience to better enhance the political system to which they are elected. Within this model, specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we can see that interviewees were mostly in agreement that all major ethnic groups and 'constituents' are adequately represented through the politico model of representation, however, disagreement emerged on which levels of government best represented certain ethnic groups, which shall be further discussed in the following section.

5.3.2 Political Representation within Bosnia and Herzegovina

Although, as previously mentioned, the governmental structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina should in theory allow for adequate representation of the country's people, this is not often the case in reality. Therefore, as the issue of effective and proper representation remains heavily linked to the potential for Republika Srpska secession, through a feeling of lacking political representation, it was paramount to discuss the issue with interviewees, alongside comparing these results to the gathered literature.

One of the clearest critiques mentioned throughout the gathered interviewees was the lack of proper delineation between different political institutions within the country, and the overlapping role that they play. The necessity for potential constitutional change to allow for a more structured and organised political institutional composition was discussed by many interviewees, with most agreeing to the concept in principle. However, many were clear that finding the political will between all necessary actors, as well as being able to agree upon what the new structure should look like, would prove challenging to say the least at the current moment. Furthermore, the role of the OHR was also brought up and discussed by a number of interviewees, who talked about his most recent interventions directly affecting, and even degrading, the political representation of certain groups within the country. These arguments all align with Sahadžić's analysis that the complex structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political system has actually degraded the representation of its citizens, creating an overly complicated and intertwined set of institutions (Sahadžić, 2009). Instead of allowing for appropriate representation between not only the three constituent people groups, but also of minority and non-identifying groups within the country, the political fallout of the

Dayton Agreement has in fact created an unsustainable and incredibly bureaucratic nightmare.

Although most interviewees did agree that the current political structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina do provide adequate representation to the three main people groups, some argued that this in itself was damaging towards providing proper political representation to Bosnian citizens. For example, the requirement to have a rotating presidency, changing hands between the three constituent peoples elected president every eight months, was pointed out by one interviewee as a clearly unnecessary political structure. This aligned heavily with Belloni's argument that the current political structure of the country, in seeking to provide proper political representation to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been misappropriated, and now has caused the ethnic entrenchment and divide between groups at the nation's political level (Belloni, 2004).

Furthermore, the lack of adequate political spacing given to minority groups, or to those that choose not to identify as part of the three constituent peoples was also mentioned. By not allowing Bosnian citizens who do not identify as one of the three constituent people groups to run for president, there is a clear lack of allowing for full political representation between all citizens. This case was argued by Hodžić and Mraović through their research where they highlighted the clear lacking of political representation provided to minority groups, showing that they are only really able to gain political power through already entrenched political parties on a national level (Hodžić & Mraović, 2015).

5.4 Foreign Interference and the Foreign Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina

As has been previously discussed, the presence of foreign interference is often outweighed within the political structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The gathered results from interviewees highlighted exactly that. However, there was broad discussion on which international actors should be viewed as holding more influence than others, as well as which actors may pose a threat to the political independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, the potential membership of the nation within both the EU and NATO was put under the spotlight, with these issues receiving mixed responses from interviewees. This

section shall therefore seek to combine the gathered results with the previously discussed relevant literature on the topic of foreign interference.

5.4.1 Russia

The role of Russia within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the wider Western Balkans region as a whole, has ebbed and flowed historically, but has always remained to some extent. As Stronski and Himes' research highlighted, the relationship between the Kremlin and the region has often shifted in order to reflect contemporary political and economic situations, with Moscow now once again restructuring its approach to the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-emergence of Russian international power in the early to mid 2000s (Stronski & Himes, 2014). The work of Bieber and Tzifakis on Moscow's attempts at pulling the region away from the EU and NATO, and closer to the Kremlin was also backed up by the gathered research, with interviewees often bringing up Russia's influence across the region, more often in a negative light (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019).

Further, Secieru's writings on Moscow's contemporary links to the region (Secieru, 2019), and how it has attempted to re-establish itself as a main actor, also correlates with results from interviewees. However, although his writing focused exclusively on the negative and often disruptive actions of Moscow within the region, some interviewees, namely ethnic Serbs, were more willing to view Russia as having a positive effect on the region's stability and political standing. His research, which also showed Russia's modern day tools of interference and disruption, namely through the technological sphere, was also widely discussed by interviewees, who often saw Russia as a key reason why the region had not fully developed politically, and why the region, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, had struggled to move on socially from its wartime past. Such negative influence, especially in the political sphere, was also previously seen through the writing's of Metodieva, who looked directly into Moscow's support for fringe political actors across the region. Through this, it was hoped to create not only destabilisation, most importantly within Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also to retain its own political influence within the region and to keep the Balkans outside of the political integration of Western organisations such as the EU and NATO (Metodieva, 2019).

5.4.2 Turkey

Although not as broadly discussed as some other foreign actors within Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is still important to understand and to analyse the contemporary role of Turkey within today's modern Western Balkans. As we have seen from the gathered results, Turkey was most often mentioned by Bosniak interviewees, with some other Croat and Serb interviewees also mentioning its role. Opinions were overall mixed about the overall impact Ankara has within Bosnia and Herzegovina's political stability, however, the most positive views were often voiced by ethnic Bosniaks themselves, which correlates well with Larsen's writings on how the common social and religious history between Bosniaks and Turks allows for dynamic and deep ties between the two peoples (Larsen, 2020).

Furthermore, interviewees often mentioned the political activity of Turkey within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and within the wider Western Balkans region, especially following the realignment of Turkish foreign policy under President Erdogan. Growing economic and political ties between Ankara and Sarajevo especially, was shown through the earlier discussed research of Ekinci (Ekinci, 2014), who discussed Turkey's increasing financial collaboration and investment into Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it sought to once more become a regional economic powerhouse. Turdebar's work highlighted this 'Neo-Ottomanism' approach to the region, with President Erdogan and his ruling AKP Party becoming increasingly involved in the internal affairs of Western Balkan nations, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania (Turbedar, 2011).

5.4.3 European Union

Lastly, the role of both the EU and the NATO military alliance, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina's potential accession to both organisations, continues to be a crucial factor in the nation's contemporary political structures. Although, broadly speaking, the nation's public and political groupings support EU membership, necessary reform efforts continue to lag behind with little substantial political will to enforce needed changes. Grievesson's work on the broader Western Balkans eventual accession to EU membership highlighted exactly this lack of effort, painting a bleak picture for the region's roadmap into the political bloc (Grievesson et al, 2018). Stalled by lagging reform efforts, a lack of political will, enlargement

fatigue within the bloc, and economic instability within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the wider Western Balkans region, it remains highly unlikely that any nation will join the bloc within the coming years, with even 2030 now becoming a more ambitious target.

Furthermore, although there remains broad vocal support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the EU, certain member states may seek to extract certain personal political benefits before eventually allowing the nation to formally enter the bloc. As the work of James Ker-Lindsay previously showed, there are countless examples of current EU member states having individualist goals and reasons for accepting the Western Balkans nations into the bloc (Ker-Lindsay et al, 2017).

However, the matter is more complicated as many Bosniak interviewees voiced concerns about the interference of current EU member state, Croatia, in blocking Bosnia and Herzegovina's potential membership or membership negotiations until it has received substantial, if not impossible, political demands in return. This most certainly would revolve around some form of greater voting rights or autonomy for the Croatian minority within the country. Ker-Lindsay's research has already shown the examples of both Greece and Bulgaria extracting continual domestic political reforms from North Macedonia before they allowed the nation to even begin their formal negotiations for membership. There is little reason to doubt, and clear evidence to show that the current administration in Zagreb is more than willing to operate in a similar fashion with Sarajevo's negotiations.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Project Conclusion

This thesis aimed to further the understanding of the current potential secession of the Republika Srpska entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, it looked into two key factors that are believed to contribute to ongoing calls for the entity's secession: the issue of representation within Bosnian government institutions across various levels, and the role of international actors within the nation's politics.

Prior to this thesis' research being undertaken, there was already a strong body of literature on the topics of the political secession of regions from states, their motives for doing so, as well as their historical successes and failures. Furthermore, the key reasons why these movements may typically fail in their goal, namely a lack of international support or funding, were also delved into. Literature on political representation within government bodies, and the various models of representation, alongside the role of international actors within the Western Balkans, and specifically within contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, were also examined.

However, this thesis sought to fill in a gap within the literature, focusing specifically on the contemporary issue of the potential secession of the Republika Srpska entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as looking into the factors contributing to the movement. Therefore, this thesis undertook a thoroughly planned and ethically approved research project, which developed an interview process discussing relevant issues with political representatives from across three select countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. In total, a set of nine total qualitative interviews were undertaken and transcribed, discussing with all interviewees their thoughts on the ongoing issue of Republika Srpska separatism, representation of various ethnic groups within Bosnian government institutions, and the potential for international actors to be actively interfering in the contemporary politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In order for the principle research question (**What factors may be contributing to ongoing calls for Republika Srpska secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina?**) to be answered, the

first aim of the thesis was to explore political representative's views on the ongoing potential secession of the Republika Srpska entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, their opinions on how feasible or realistic any serious attempt could be in the coming years from the Republika Srpska administration, and what factors may be potentially driving support for such a movement. Therefore, interviewees were asked to discuss and detail their thoughts on whether they believed a serious attempt at secession is possible in the coming years from the Republika Srpska administration, as well as what they believed the potential ramifications could be if any such attempt was undertaken. This focused predominantly on what it could entail for other secessionist/regionalist movements within Bosnia and Herzegovina specifically, but with lighter focus on movements around the Western Balkans. Overall, responses were mixed, with many ethnic Bosniak and Croat interviewees believing that any actual attempt at secession from the Republika Srpska administration would be highly unlikely, whereas ethnic Serb interviewees were more open to its possibility, if not outright in support of such an attempt. Furthermore, those that doubted the claim that such an attempt is possible in the coming years often stated their belief that such threats were little more than a political distraction away from the corrupt and often criminal actions of the Republika Srpska administration. Regardless, even those that signified either outright or tepid support for any movement towards the entity's secession voiced the understanding that such an attempt would take time, and would require a more advantageous international situation for the administration to fully take advantage of. Analysis of these responses was conducted through the examining of previous literature on the discussed topics. This focused mainly on Brilmayer's writings (2019) on the cultural and territorial claims required for any successful secessionist movements as well as the work of Yannis (2001) which focused on the potential ramifications of any Republika Srpska move towards secession, without the agreement of the wider international community.

Furthermore, this thesis explored and analysed the topic of representation within Bosnian governmental institutions. The interviewed political representatives were asked to discuss their views on whether they believed that their respective ethnic group was well represented within Bosnian government institutions, as well as whether or not there was a requirement for constitutional change to allow for stronger political representation of their group. Although most interviewees voiced their approval with the representation of their ethnic group within Bosnia and Herzegovina's political institutions, opinions varied upon which level of government they believed best represented them. Bosniak interviewees were more likely to

voice support for national representation, whereas Serbs often felt best heard at the entity level, with Croats associating themselves most at the local level. A number of interviewees also discussed how, in trying to offer so many diverse groups some form of equal representation, the current Bosnian political system was often becoming entirely dysfunctional in its daily operations. Furthermore, the lack of a third 'Croat' political entity within the country, the political interventions and powers of the OHR, as well as a lack of political agreement on a national level between the various 'constituent peoples' were all brought up as prohibiting political development and efficient representation within the country. Further analysis of the gathered responses was undertaken through looking at the previously discussed literature on the topic of political representation. This predominantly focused on Emy's work (1979) on detailing the politico model of political representation, which has been adopted in some form across most representative democracies.

The final aim of this thesis and its relevant research was to discuss political representatives' views on ongoing international interference within Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the country's place within the international community. Interviewees were asked to detail their views on any potential international actors that were actively trying to interfere or disrupt the political systems and infrastructure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although all interviewees believed that international actors continued to play an active role within Bosnia and Herzegovina, various countries were viewed in different lights by the ethnic communities of the country. Serbs were more open to cooperation from Serbia, as well as viewing Russia as their ally, with Bosniak and Croats often viewing the two to be consistently interfering in the nation's progress. Furthermore, Bosniaks and Croats were also more supportive of the EU and NATO in their efforts within the country. Opinions were also split on the input and role of nations such as China, Turkey, the Gulf states, and the US. Furthermore, interviewees were asked to voice their opinion on whether they believed Bosnia and Herzegovina should seek to join both the EU and NATO in the coming years. Although there was near unanimous support for eventual EU accession from the political representatives interviewed, there was clear disagreement amongst them as to how likely such membership was in the near future, if ever, without large-scale political reform within the country. Furthermore, opinions were clearly divided amongst ethnic lines on the issue of NATO membership, with Bosniaks, and to a lesser extent, Croats, being in favour of Bosnia and Herzegovina's potential membership of the alliance, with Serbs being vehemently against any such membership, believing such potential accession to be provocative to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the wider Western

Balkans region, as well as broadly unnecessary to the country's development. Grieveson et al's writing (2018) on the current road to EU accession for the Western Balkans region was especially useful through analysing the gathered results, with the literature highlighting the true scale of reform and political will required if membership of the bloc is to ever become a viable option. Furthermore, Ker-Lindsay et al's work (2017) on the stalled path to European integration for the region, and specific hurdles that certain nations have had to overcome in recent years, was also fruitful in better analysing the responses.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

When discussing any potential future research on this topic, one could consider adopting an alternative methodology when gathering responses, such as that of a large-scale, quantitative style research process. This could involve researching the views and opinions held on similar topics by members of the general public from across the three researched nations.

Furthermore, one could consider expanding the scope of this project's research, perhaps even considering gaining international viewpoints from concerned actors, namely, those from the EU, Russia, Turkey, etc. Such a project could allow for an even broader discussion and analysis to take place on the concerned issues, as well as creating a greater academic understanding of the topics.

Developing a research process with the use of a quantitative method would allow a research team to potentially gather a substantially larger sample size and number of responses to the approached topics (Savela, 2018). Although the use of a qualitative method approach has granted a number of benefits to this study, including allowing for greater flexibility when interviewing interviewees on certain topics, greater time was taken up due to the initial time allocated for each interview (between 30-60 minutes), as well as the time taken to transcribe all recorded interviews.

A final limitation of this thesis' research was that of the limited sample size (N=9) gathered throughout the interview process. Although the sample size included respective members of the three key ethnic groups relevant to this thesis' topic, as well as including nationals of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, there is room for expanding this sample size in future research; granted greater time availability would be paramount. Such an expansion of

sample size could potentially allow for more opinions to be heard and voiced concerning the discussed topics, allowing for an even greater body of analysis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Consent Form for all Participants

Consent Form

Title of Project:*A Powder Keg Once More?: Contemporary Separatist Movements in Bosnia & Herzegovina and how it may Reshape the Western Balkans*.....

Name of Researcher:Cameron MacBride.....

Please tick as appropriate

- Yes No I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- Yes No I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
- Yes No I consent to interviews being audio-recorded
- Yes No I acknowledge that by selecting (Yes) to this option, I agree for my name to be attached to my provided responses in any publications arising from the research.

I agree that:

- Yes No All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be pseudonymised. (unless otherwise agreed to above)
- Yes No The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- Yes No The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- Yes No I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
- Yes No Other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.
- Yes No I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

Name of Participant Signature

Date

Name of ResearcherSignature

Date

..... End of consent form

Appendix 2 - Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research title: *A Powder Keg Once More?: Contemporary Separatist Movements in Bosnia & Herzegovina and how it may Reshape the Western Balkans*

Lead researcher: Cameron MacBride, Master's student at the University of Glasgow,
2256456M@student.gla.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Participation shall involve taking part in a short one-on-one interview with the lead researcher, discussing the participants views and personal opinions on several issues related to currently active/potential separatist movements, and the current geo-political status of the Western Balkans. Participation is entirely voluntary throughout, and participants are completely free to remove themselves from the process at any point.

- This research project shall seek to provide further clarification to not only the recent history of regionalism and separatism within the Western Balkans, but also to the numerous ongoing situations across the region related to these topics. Discussions directly with elected officials from nations across the Western Balkans shall seek to enhance and further clarify their viewpoints and potential aspirations in these matters.
- Participation is entirely voluntary, and all contacted parties shall have the right to refuse participation if they so wish. No stated reason is required in this matter.
- Participation in this research project shall involve partaking in an interview, lasting between 30-45 minutes.

- Participation in this research shall allow participants to further discuss their involvement and viewpoints on relevant topics, as well as their potential national aspirations and aims in the coming years. No risks are expected to arise from the conducting of this research; however, all necessary steps shall be taken to ensure the full physical and mental health and safety of all participants involved.
- Participants shall have a right to withdraw at any point in the research, and do not have to provide a stated reason as to why.

In the event of a participant choosing to withdraw their information and input from the research process, none of their provided information shall be used within the final research paper, and all gathered information shall be deleted in its entirety, along with all other participants gathered data, upon full completion and submission of the research paper.

All gathered data shall be anonymised using personal attributions. In this instance, participants shall not be referred to directly by name at any point in the research, and only by personal attributes (nationality, age bracket, gender etc).

Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

All data collected shall be used for the sole purpose of the writing of a final master's level thesis paper. All data gathered shall be securely stored on the lead researcher's private laptop device, through which only he shall have access to throughout the research process. After the completion of all necessary analysis, writing, and submission of the thesis paper, all gathered data information shall be destroyed in full.

All data gathered throughout this research process shall be solely used for further analysis and discussion on the research projects focus. Any gathered data shall be used to further explain or enhance discussion and analysis of such topics.

This project has been fully considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow.

To contact the lead researcher regarding any questions, queries or complaints you may have regarding this research project, please contact 2256456M@student.gla.ac.uk. To contact a supervising body regarding this research, please contact valida.repovac.niksic@fpn.unsa.ba

To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Lead for Ethical Review, Dr Gerda Reid: email socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk

_____ End of Participant Information Sheet _____

Appendix 3 - Privacy Notice

Privacy Notice

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project: *A Powder Keg Once More?: Contemporary Separatist Movements in Bosnia & Herzegovina and how it may Reshape the Western Balkans*

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project (*A Powder Keg Once More?: Contemporary Separatist Movements in Bosnia & Herzegovina and how it may Reshape the Western Balkans*). This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to organise a suitable interview time with yourself (the participant).

We only collect data that we need for the research project and any participant's responses shall be de-identified using codes provided by the lead researcher (e.g., nationality + age etc).

Please see accompanying **Participant Information Sheet**,

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research we will be relying upon **Task in the Public Interest** in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is **necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes**

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your **Consent** to take part in the study Please see accompanying **Consent Form**.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by: The lead researcher only. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe: Storage of all personal and research data shall be stored on the lead researcher's locked device, to which only they have access to. Please consult the **Consent form** and **Participant Information Sheet** which accompanies this notice.

Following the full completion and submission of the research paper in its entirety, an electronic copy shall be made available to all participants for viewing.

What are your rights?*

GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see [UofG Research with personal and special categories of data](#).

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the [webform](#) or contact dp@ gla.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee or relevant School Ethics Forum in the College.

How long do we keep it for?

Your **personal** data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval (31/08/2023). After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data will be retained for a period of ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice _____