Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology

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Bachelor's Degree Dissertation

Executive Summary

Consociationalism, Ethnicity and Democracy in the Western Balkans:

A comparative analysis on Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of North Macedonia

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The emergence of nation-states plays a central role in the reshaping of the international system. Through secessionist movements, some national identities achieve the status of nation-states, allowing the protection of the rights of a previously marginalised national minority, and the full cultivation of the national identity within a defined territory, with an equitable system of governance. The Balkan Wars are a highly intricate and destructive chapter in 20th-century European history. They were driven by a desire for national liberation from the declining Ottoman Empire and had far-reaching consequences, including the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. After years marked by ethnic tensions and political turmoil, the Balkan Wars ultimately led to the formation of modern states in the region: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Croatia and Slovenia. While the achievement of national sovereignty was a remarkable outcome, the region continues to grapple with enduring challenges making it a complex and evolving part of Europe. After years of ethnic conflict, what happens when national sovereignty is achieved? Do ethnic tensions remain a significant obstacle to the full development of democracy?

This paper emerges from a quest to understand the implications of transitioning into democracy, with a specific focus on a contemporary region marked by ethnic tensions and political instability rooted in ethnic representation within the political system. Following an extensive exploration of ethnic minority dynamics in Europe, the Western Balkans have appeared as a particularly intriguing area for analysis concerning political stability, ethnic coexistence, and its trajectory of democracy. There is a need to deepen and widen the study of the region, as it presents dilemmas that are in the centre of the International Relations academic agenda.

The paper conducts a comparative analysis through qualitative methods between two deeply divided societies, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of North Macedonia, on their implementation of a consociationalist arrangement and how this model, translates into the fostering (or not) of a solid democracy and the well-functioning of their governments. This research navigates among the different perspectives on consociationalism, an institutional design for deeply divided societies based on power-sharing between ethnic groups to promote consensus and inter-ethnic cooperation. The variables that interfere with such stability are political culture, social structure and the behaviour of political elites (Lijphart, 1969). The paper discusses its advantages and disadvantages analysing them through their implementation in the selected cases. The paper mainly focuses on the display of the four main features, i.e. grand coalition, proportionality, mutual veto and segmental autonomy, that are implemented in both states and how they impact on the government functioning and democratic outcomes. After more than twenty years have passed since the signing of their Peace Agreements, is the

consociational model effective or, on the contrary, does it promote inefficiency and tendencies towards political gridlock? Moreover, to understand the sociopolitical context of both cases, the paper examines the political sphere and the ethnic composition and geographic distribution. Once the analysis has been displayed, the paper is able to question the effectiveness of consociationalism and whether it is a good institutional design to promote. The central concepts that the paper delves into are consociationalism, ethnic power-sharing, democracy, and governance, among others.

Even though the Peace Agreements and the implementation of the consociacionalist model was a success in terms of ending active ethnic confrontation, in a long-term perspective, governance has led into democratic immobilism and governmental inefficiency (Zupzevic, Causevic, 2009). In the Western Balkan region ethnicity and identity are still in the centre of the political agenda. In both Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of North Macedonia there are several issues regarding inter-ethnic conflict, governmental instability and lack of transparency. Besides North Macedonia presenting a more desirable functionality, both cases grapple with the misbehaviour of power elites and bureaucratic burden due to the misuse of the consociationalist tools (Ambarkov, 2021). Both states of the Western Balkans are quite modern; the lack of past democratic culture and very convulsant active conflict have configurated a unique and complex system of political and social values that may deviate from Western values tied to liberal democracy. They still need more years to fully endorse an effective political governance to accomplish solid democracy. Although the social fabric is favourable for the adequate development of consensus democracy, the elite's behaviour through the misuse of veto powers, the underrepresentation of minority groups, and lack of will for cooperation of the grand coalitions has endangered ethnic consensus. Moreover, it has created a major cleavage between the political sphere and the public, resulting into a legitimacy crisis and governmental lethargy. In the consociationalist regimes of the Western Balkans, the instrumentalization of ethnicity makes it very difficult to balance ethnic cooperation, stable governance and sustainable democracy.

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