



Bosnia's political structures

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Bosnia's complex political structures were set up by the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war of 1992-95.

Dayton retained Bosnia's international boundaries but created two entities within it: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, principally comprising the Bosniak (Muslim) and Croat-majority areas, and Republika Srpska, principally comprising the Serb-majority area. Each entity has its own president, government, parliament, police and other bodies.

But there are also central institutions – a parliament, government and a three-member rotating presidency – each of which is designed to prevent the majority from imposing decisions on other groups.

Above these entity and central institutions are the multi-national Peace Implementation Council and the UN-mandated High Representative whose extensive powers include the ability to dismiss elected officials and to impose or revoke legislation.

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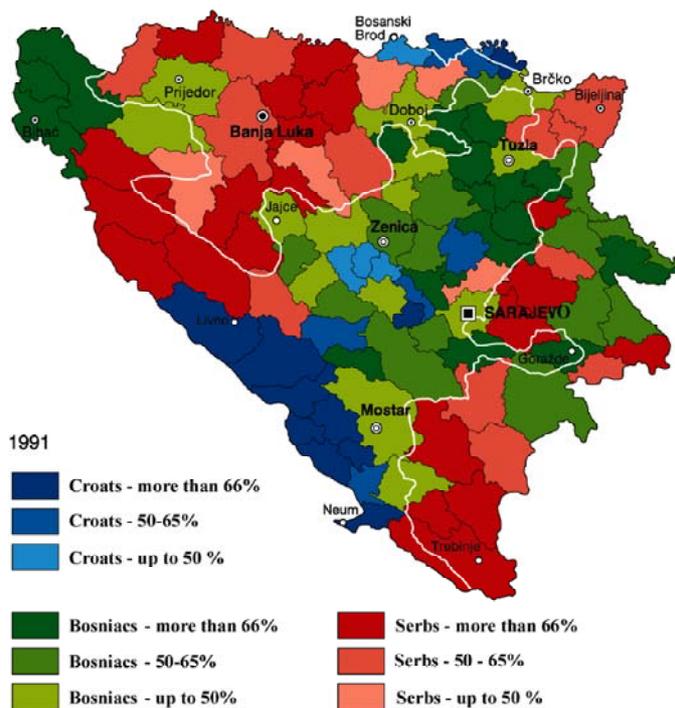
1 The Dayton Peace Agreement

The Dayton Proximity Talks which ended the Bosnian war culminated in the 'General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina' signed in Paris in December 1995 by BiH, the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and witnessed by the Contact Group nations (the US, UK, France, Germany, and Russia) and the EU. Usually known as the [Dayton Peace Agreement](#), it retained Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)'s international boundaries but created two entities within it. A Peace Implementation Council (PIC) and an UN-mandated High Representative were established in accordance with the Agreement.

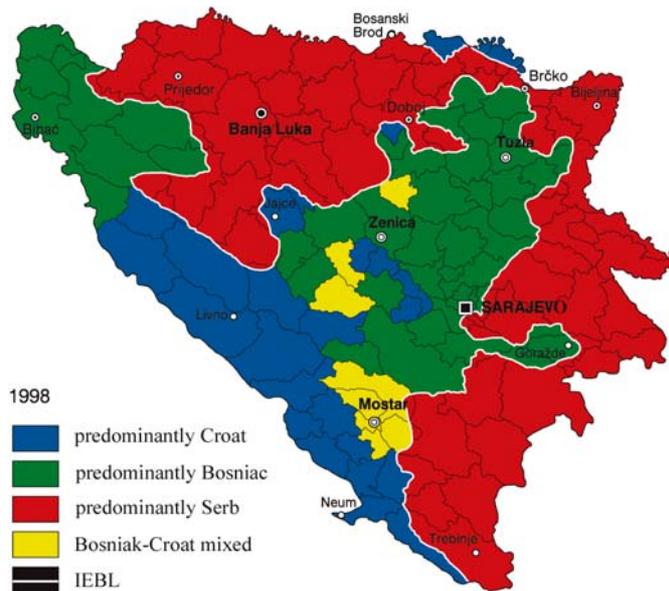
Critics of Dayton said the two entities come too close to being states in their own right, and that the arrangement reinforced separatism and nationalism at the expense of integration. There have since been negotiations to amend the constitution established by Dayton, in order to centralise functions and transform the country into a multi-ethnic parliamentary democracy.

2 Ethnic composition before and after the war

Ethnic composition before the war in BiH (1991)



Ethnic composition in 1998



3 The entity structure

Under Dayton, BiH is a single state consisting of two separate entities roughly equal in size: the **Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina** (the Federation), principally comprising the Bosniak (Muslim) and Croat-majority areas, and **Republika Srpska** (RS), principally comprising the Serb-majority area. Dayton included a new Constitution for BiH which specified that each entity should have its own president, government, parliament, police and other bodies. In addition, there is the ethnically mixed district of **Brčko**, which sits at the crossroads of BiH where the narrowest portion of Republika Srpska meets the Federation; it is self-governing but formally part of both the Federation and the Republika Srpska (its status was confirmed under a constitutional amendment adopted in March 2009).

3.1 Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The **Prime Minister** of the Federation has a greater executive role than the Federation **President**. These two posts rotate between the Federation's two main ethnic groups, Bosniaks and Croats. There are also two Vice-Presidents. The Federation legislature is bicameral, comprising a 98-member **Predstavnički Dom Federacije** (Federation House of Representatives), which is directly elected for a four-year term, and a **Dom Naroda Federacije** (Federation House of Peoples), comprising 17 Bosniak, 17 Croat, 10 Serb and seven other deputies, who are elected by the cantonal assemblies.

For administrative purposes, the Federation is divided into 10 **cantons**, with substantial authority delegated to each cantonal government. Each canton has an elected assembly. The President of each canton nominates a Government and judges to the cantonal courts. At the time of their formation, five of the 10 cantons were designated as predominately Bosniak (Bosna-Podrinje, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Una-Sana and Zenica-Doboj), three as predominately Croat (Posavina, West Herzegovina and Canton 10), while two were mixed Bosniak and Croat (Central Bosnia and Herzegovina-Neretva).

Local Government in the Federation is exercised at the level of the 80 **municipalities**. Of these, three (Bihać, Mostar and Sarajevo) are designated as urban municipalities.

3.2 Republika Srpska

The Constitution of Republika Srpska (RS) provides for an executive **President** with two Vice-Presidents, a Government headed by a **Prime Minister**, and the **Narodna Skupština Republike Srpske** (National Assembly of RS). The National Assembly has 83 members elected for a four-year term, with around three quarters elected in multi-seat constituencies and one quarter through compensatory lists. A 28-member **Vijeće Naroda** (Council of Peoples), comprising eight Bosniak, eight Croat, eight Serb and four other delegates, also exists; its members are elected by the deputies of the National Assembly of RS and are responsible for, amongst other things, electing the entity's representatives to the upper chamber of the state legislature.

RS is divided into 63 **municipalities**, of which two—the *de facto* capital, Banja Luka, and East Sarajevo—are designated as urban municipalities. On 22 September 2004 the state Constitutional Court imposed provisional names (including East Sarajevo, in place of 'Srpsko Sarajevo', or 'Serb Sarajevo') on 13 municipalities, removing prefixes or names introduced by RS authorities that were deemed to be ethnically exclusive. There are no cantons in RS.

4 Central structures

Overarching the entities are a central BiH parliament, government and three-member rotating Presidency.

4.1 Central Parliament

BiH has a bicameral state legislature, the **Parlamentarna Skupština Bosne i Hercegovine** (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Its directly-elected lower chamber, the **Predstavnički Dom** (House of Representatives) consists of 42 Members, of whom two-thirds are directly elected from the territory of the Federation and one-third from the territory of Republika Srpska. Deputies are elected for a term of four years.

The indirectly-elected upper chamber, the **Dom Naroda** (House of Peoples) comprises 15 Members, five each from the Bosniaks, the Croats and the Serbs, who are elected for a term of four years. The Bosniak and Croat Delegates are selected by, respectively, the Bosniak and Croat Delegates to the Predstavnički dom Federacije, and the Serb Delegates are selected by the Vijeće naroda.

Each chamber rotates its chairmanship between three members.

4.2 Central Government

The BiH Presidency nominates a **Chairman of the Council of Ministers** (subject to the approval of the BiH legislature), who in turn appoints the other ministers. Other Ministers and Deputy Ministers are nominated by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and approved by the BiH Predstavnički Dom. No more than two thirds of Ministers are to be from the territory of the Federation, and Deputy Ministers are to be from a different constituent people from their Minister.

4.3 Central Presidency

The Presidency consists of one Bosniak and one Croat each directly elected from the Federation, and one Serb directly elected from RS. Members of the Presidency are elected for a term of four years and are restricted to two consecutive terms. Chairmanship of the Presidency changes every eight months.¹

The Presidency has responsibility for foreign, diplomatic, and fiscal policy as well as law enforcement. Dayton also provided for a central bank and monetary system.

Presidency decisions, if declared to be destructive of a vital interest of an Entity, can be vetoed by a two-thirds majority in the relevant entity legislature: the Narodna skupština Republike Srpske if the declaration was made by the Serb Member; or the Bosniak or Croat Delegates in the Dom Naroda Federacije respectively if the declaration was made by the Bosniak Member or the Croat Member.

5 Office of the High Representative

Dayton also established the Office of the High Representative (OHR). The current High Representative is Dr Valentin Inzko (since 26 March 2009). The OHR is BiH's ultimate civilian authority, responsible for implementation of Dayton and with the power to "compel the entity governments to comply with the terms of the peace agreement and the state constitution". This includes powers to dismiss elected officials and to impose or revoke legislation (the 'Bonn powers').

BiH's progress toward the establishment of a multi-ethnic and democratic country has been slow. Nationalist parties continue to dominate politics. At least in the past, the international administration certainly helped maintain the peace. Its efforts to increase centralisation in BiH have been heeded by at least some of the political elites, with successes often related to financial imperatives and a desire for international respectability. For example, since 2005, there has been one state judicial system, a single customs services, a single intelligence service and a single defence structure with a state Minister of Defence. There has also been progress on repatriation of refugees and an apology (in December 2004) by the Serbian President Boris Tadić, during a visit to BiH, to all those who had suffered crimes committed in the name of the Serbian People.² But for many Bosnians the authority and perceived legitimacy of the OHR have diminished significantly.

Over the past few years, outright supervision by the OHR has gradually been replaced by conditionality tied to the prospect of eventual EU accession. The OHR was supposed to have been shut by 2008, with a reinforced EU Special Representative taking the lead co-ordinating role for the international community, but not enough progress has been made (Bosnia's EU accession bid appears to have come to a complete halt) so the closure has been delayed.

There are however some indications that the OHR could close in 2011 or 2012. In March 2011 EU foreign ministers decided to separate the position of EU Special Representative from that of international High Representative, and later announced the appointment of a new ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Peter Sørensen, a Dane. He is now expected

¹ Chairman of the Presidency: [Prof. Dr Haris Silajdžić \(Bosniak\) \(March–October 2008\)](#); Member of the Presidency: [Željko Komšić \(Croat\)](#); Member of the Presidency: [Prof. Dr Nebojša Radmanović \(Serb\)](#).

² ['Serb leader apologises in Bosnia'](#) *BBC news online* 6 December 2004

to be appointed EU Special Representative in Bosnia. The re-arrangement is apparently intended to upgrade the EU's presence in Bosnia.³

³ Toby Vogel, "[Sørensen named EU ambassador to Bosnia](#)", *European Voice*, 30 May 2011